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Biblical Thinking for Building Healthy Churches

pastoring women
Understanding and Honoring Distinctness



Contents

Editor's Note

Jonathan Leeman

PASTORING WOMEN: UNDERSTANDING AND HONORING DISTINCTNESS

Why Complementarianism Is Crucial to Discipleship

If God created men and women differently, discipleship should not be one-size-fits-all. It should cultivate their differences.

By Jonathan Leeman

Page 6

Discipling Men vs. Discipling Women

Practically speaking, how should a pastor disciple men and women differently? What kind of strategies and structures should he put in place?

By Deepak Reju

Page 10

How Pastors Can Equip Women for Ministry

A seasoned pastor provides practical, down-to-earth counsel on training women for ministry.

By Bob Johnson

Page 15

The Genesis of Gender and Ecclesial Womanhood

Strachan digs into the foundational texts on the differences between men and women in order to present a vision for ecclesial womanhood.

By Owen Strachan

Page 18

WOMEN'S MINISTRY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Wanted: More Older Women Discipling Younger Women

Titus 2 commands it. Younger women are hungry for it. The church as a whole will benefit from it. So where are the older women who will disciple younger women?

By Susan Hunt

Page 24

For the Young Mother: Ministry, Guilt, and Seasons of Life

Young mothers face enormous demands that consume all the energy they have. Here's why they shouldn't feel guilty for focusing on the home rather than outside ministry.

By Jani Ortlund

Page 29

May Women Serve as Pastors?

A trusted New Testament scholar takes on this contentious but crucial topic.

By Thomas R. Schreiner

Page 32

RESOURCES FOR TODAY'S BIBLICAL WOMEN

Book Review: *Radical Womanhood*

By Carolyn McCulley

Reviewed by Kristin Jamieson

Page 36

Book Review: *Womanly Dominion: More Than a Gentle and Quiet Spirit*

By Mark Chanski

Reviewed by Owen Strachan

Page 40

MISCELLANEOUS BOOK REVIEWS

Book Review: *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church*

By Timothy Witmer

Reviewed by Phil Newton

Page 43

Book Review: *The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches*

By Rodney M. Woo

Reviewed by Juan Sanchez

Page 46

Audio – Leadership Interviews

What is the Gospel? with Greg Gilbert and C.J. Mahaney

The gospel. The cross. The kingdom. The church. Greg Gilbert and C.J. Mahaney discuss all this and more. * [Listen online Now »](#)

Posted on July 1, 2010

Biblical Theology in the Local Church with Michael Lawrence

Why is biblical theology essential for pastoral ministry? How do you do it? Find out in this roundtable discussion with Michael Lawrence, Tom Schreiner, and Jonathan Leeman. * [Listen online Now »](#)

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Jonathan Leeman

Editor's note:

There's safety in homogenization. If you treat men and women as the same, you don't risk offending anyone. Or limiting anyone. Or hindering anyone.

But what if God created men and women differently? What if it's not a question of limitations but a matter of distinct divine purposes for different parts of the body? I guess you *could* say that the eye is limited because it cannot hear. Or that the ear is limited because it cannot see. But that would be missing the point, wouldn't it?

The egalitarianism of Western culture, for all its good purposes, leads to the homogenization of men and women. To unisex clothes, colognes, roles, and lifestyles. The lovely and distinct color palettes of men and women mush together into a gray-brown muck.

You can have that if you want it. But we think God intends something better. That's why this issue of the 9Marks Journal is dedicated to how to distinctly pastor *women*. We want to reflect on what he uniquely and wonderfully intends for women in the life of the church, and how to specially pastor them.



By Jonathan Leeman

Why Complementarianism Is Crucial to Discipleship

Complementarianism is crucial for Christian discipleship because pastors and churches need to hold up different pictures of Christian maturity for the man and for the woman.

Complementarianism teaches that God has created men and women equal in worth and dignity, according to Genesis 1; but that he has also tasked them with different roles in respect to one another, according to Genesis 2. This balance between equality and difference means that some aspects of discipleship will be unisex while other aspects will be gender-specific. So the apostle Paul can say that there is neither male nor female in Christ in regard to our salvation, while also saying that he does not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man in regard to a local church (Gal. 3:28; 1 Tim. 2:12).

It's easy to err in one direction or the other either by homogenizing our conceptions of discipleship or by over-emphasizing the differences. To be faithful both to Genesis 1 *and* 2 as well as to different kinds of statements from the apostle Paul, a right conception of Christian maturity will put forward models of male and female maturity that are both the same and different.

So every Christian—male and female—needs to live a life of repentance and faith. Every Christian needs to grow in the knowledge of God and in conformity to Christ. Every Christian needs to be united to the fellowship of believers. But if that's all a church's children's Sunday School classrooms, home Bible studies, and weekly sermons teach about Christian maturity, it will have implicitly smothered the God-intended differences between men and women, and thus misrepresented "maturity."

Three things are necessary to help move discipleship in a complementarian (and, I believe, biblical) direction: (i) a theological vision of how the mature Christian man looks different than the mature Christian woman; (ii) examples of godly manhood and womanhood in our churches; (iii) and pastoral strategies for moving the church in this direction. I'm not going to take the time here to carefully color in these lines. I hope others will be inspired to do the more substantive work necessary. But here are a few thoughts to get the ball rolling.

THEOLOGICAL VISION AND DISTINCTIVES OF DIFFERENT DOMAINS

It all begins with a complementarian theological vision for discipleship.

In the domain of marriage, here's what the elders of my church tell couples in pre-marital counseling: According to Genesis 1, the man and woman should both focus on bringing God's Lordship and dominion to the earth. But according

to Genesis 2, they have different ways of doing that. The man is oriented to the Garden, while the woman is oriented to the man and being a suitable helper to him. She's to employ her entire resume of gifts and talents to promote the work of his administration. He, in turn, is to steward her gifts to maximal effect and not bury them in the ground, like the unfaithful steward.

Now, it's comparatively easy to see what this means in a marriage, where there is one man and one woman in an authoritatively structured relationship. But what does it mean for a single woman in a church, who is not called to submit to every man as a wife does with her husband? What does it mean for a married woman at work? What does it mean for a married man with other women at home, church, work, or in the public square?

Well, these are the kinds of questions a mature Christian man helps a younger man answer, and a mature Christian woman helps a younger woman answer. These are the types of questions that might be addressed in Sunday school, small groups, or inductive church Bible studies.

To fill out a "theological vision" of masculinity and femininity, we would need to consider how Genesis 2 might relate to other Scriptures and the peculiar distinctives of the home domain and the work domain and the church domain and the public square domain. Then, we need to help our fellow believers live *masculine* and *feminine* Christian lives in those different domains—and not just generically Christian lives.

EXAMPLE OF ONE DOMAIN: THE LOCAL CHURCH

In the local church, for instance, masculinity seems to be tied to teaching the Word. Every Christian man should therefore be taught to take a special interest in learning the Word and promoting its ministry. Not every man has the gift of teaching in the church, but every man should equip himself to teach it somewhere (like in the home). And every man has some gift, such as a gift of administration or a gift of relationship building, that he can use to promote the ministry of the Word in the church.

Instead of a church filled with passive men, who quickly rush their families to the car when the service ends, imagine a church full of men charging ahead to promote the ministry of the Word. Imagine the men doing this in the pulpit work, in the music ministry, in the children's ministry, in after-church events, in evangelistic work, in caring for outsiders. I dare say, *that* would be a church in which it would be easier for a godly woman to be a godly woman.

“ Discipling young believers to engage with the local church, therefore, should not be unisex. ”

In other words, women are often stuck having to take initiative and leadership in churches because the men fail to do so. But to the extent that men work hard in the garden of the church, sowing the seed and tilling the dirt, to that extent Christian women have good work to do by helping those men. With faithful Christian men in place, Christian women can more easily adopt a posture of helping, assisting, and facilitating the work of the Word in the church. They do this by following the leadership of worthy men. They do this by extending the Word's work into areas in which it can be more difficult for men to travel, as in the lives of children or younger women.

Notice, I've provided one example of how biblical masculinity and femininity look different in one domain—the local church. (See Richard Philips' book *The Masculine Mandate* for a fuller discussion of what should characterize Christian men at work, at home, in parenting, in friendship, and in the church. In the church, for instance, he helpfully says that all

men should be “worker-builders” and “keeper-protectors.”) Discipling young believers to engage with the local church, therefore, should not be unisex. Yes, there are points of commonality: everyone should be interested in promoting the work of the Word. But there are points of difference: men should be taught to take initiative and leadership, while women can be taught to facilitate, encourage, and help.

To get real practical for a moment, I appreciate C. J. and Carolyn Mahaney’s example of teaching their son to always be the first to volunteer to pray. They are teaching him not just to be a Christian, but to be a biblically masculine Christian.

In every domain—I think it’s safe to generalize—women will better be able to pursue godly femininity when they are surrounded by men who pursue godly masculinity. When women don’t, men often only have themselves to blame.

PASTORAL STRATEGY

Moving from a theological vision to a pastoral strategy for discipleship, church leaders should teach these different pictures of maturity in the children’s and youth programs, men’s and women’s ministries, and the regular pulpit ministry of the church. Teaching occurs in a number of places in the church’s life, and it’s worth reviewing them one by one. Is the instruction in each area uniformly unisex, or are biblical differences promoted?

In addition to teaching, church leaders should promote good examples of biblical masculinity and femininity in the flock. What kinds of men recognized as elders? What women are publicly recognized in pastoral prayers? What men and women are placed in front of the youth group?

Too often, the discussion about complementarianism gets stuck at the borders. For instance, people get marooned on matters like whether it’s appropriate for adult women to teach high school men. Where’s the line, they ask. But focusing on the borders of what’s licit is a bit like the dating couple who asks, “How much can we do with each other physically? Hold hands? Kiss?”

There is a place for such questions, but what’s needed first is a positive statement about how to promote biblical masculinity and femininity among young men and women. The dating couple, instead of asking, “How far can we go?” should instead ask, “How can we serve one another and best prepare the other for marriage?” In the church, likewise, we should ask, “How can we best help these high school women become mature women, and these high school men become mature men?” But that’s a question a church will never think to ask if it doesn’t have a positive vision for Christian masculinity and Christian femininity in the first place.

So let’s try again: Is it okay to have adult women teaching high school men? Well, frankly, I’m not entirely sure if it’s licit or not, but I do know I want those high school men to learn what it means for men to take initiative and biblical leadership in the church. And I do want the women to learn what it means to love, affirm, and support male leadership in the church. Therefore, I’m going to be very careful about what models I place before them. In most circumstances, I’m going to have Bible-loving, initiative-taking adult men teach the group as a whole, while having mature women support and assist that ministry.

COMPLEMENTARIANISM AND THE GOAL OF DISCIPLESHIP

In general, complementarian is crucial to Christian discipleship because it gives discipleship a goal. As a man, I want to help the other men I spend time with know what it means to be a leader and initiator, to have courage, to be protectors, to make sacrifices for those weaker than myself, and so on. My wife, on the other hand, wants to help the women she spends time with know what it means to be a supporter, a helper, a facilitator, a counselor, a fan, occasionally a rebuker, and so on.

I want to help men know how to do this at church, at home, and elsewhere as is appropriate. She wants to help women know how to do this at church, at home, and elsewhere as is appropriate.

“The harder question is, what do biblical masculinity and femininity look like in the many other domains of life?”

Not too long ago, a young man asked me for counsel with a woman he was courting. He and I have spent a lot of time together. He trusts me. And so I was able to speak very forthrightly: “Brother, it’s time for you to step up and be a man.” Then I described what such manliness might look like in his circumstances.

Again, this was easy to do, because we were dealing in the domain of courtship, and many Christians these days are happy to acknowledge male leadership and initiative-taking in courtship, from Promise Keepers, to James Dobson, to Josh Harris. The harder question is, what do biblical masculinity and femininity look like in the many other domains of life? Also, what are we doing to promote these models through discipleship?

COMPLEMENTARIANISM AND THE GOSPEL

Is emphasizing these differences really *that* important? Yes. God hard-wired these distinctions into creation in Genesis chapter 2. Why? So that all creation would have a picture of the gospel, which Paul later says that husbands and wives picture in their love for one another (Eph. 5). When a church holds up models of biblical masculinity and femininity, therefore, it makes the gospel easier to comprehend.

Without such models, the gospel is simply harder to explain, almost like the Bible translator who wants to describe Jesus as the “lamb” of God in a jungle culture that’s never heard of a lamb or a sacrifice. Is it any surprise that the devil, who hates the gospel, would want to homogenize men and women as well, thereby blurring one set of images for picturing the gospel?

A complementarian conception of discipleship is not essential to the gospel, but it surely helps it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jonathan Leeman is the director of communications for 9Marks and the author of the forthcoming *Reverberation: How God’s Word Gives Light, Freedom, and Action to His People* (Moody, Feb. 2011).



By Deepak Reju

Discipling Men vs. Discipling Women

Debbie called me on Friday because she's having a hard time in her marriage. Like many pastors, I regularly put out fires like this one. I talked and prayed with her, and then I called her husband to talk over the situation.

“At a more basic level, how should the Bible’s teaching about men and women inform my pastoral work?”

There are a thousand questions that I have to sort through as I shepherd John and Debbie (not their real names). Do I invest more in John and send Debbie to a godly woman? Do I meet both of them for marital counseling? Do I meet up with Debbie, and, if so, what is my pastoral responsibility to her?

But it's not just practical questions that I need to wrestle through in a situation like this. At a more basic level, how should the Bible's teaching about men and women inform my pastoral work?

“Complementarianism” is a term for the biblical teaching that calls men to self-sacrificial leadership in both the home and the church, and calls women to be joyfully submit to that leadership. This short article thinks through how complementarianism affects the practical nuts and bolts of counseling and discipleship. Two questions will define our discussion: 1) What does a pastor need to think about in discipling and counseling a man? 2) What does a pastor need to think about in discipling or counseling a woman?

THOUGHTS FOR THE PASTOR DISCIPLING MEN

What does a pastor need to keep in mind when he disciples and counsels men?

A Biblical Vision for Discipling Men

Let's start with a biblical vision for discipling men: we must encourage Christ-likeness through one-on-one discipleship. Older Christian men are to deliberately invest in younger Christian men, encouraging their spiritual growth (Tit. 2:1).

Our biblical vision can be expanded in two specific ways: 1) we should encourage men to love God's Word (Ps. 1:2; Josh. 1:8) and his people (Eph 4:11-16); 2) we should encourage men to strong, self-sacrificial, servant leadership in the home and the church. Men are called to look like Christ, imitating his life-giving, sacrificial service (Eph 5:21-33).

Practical Strategy for Discipling Men

Moving from vision to strategy, it's worth noting that pastors often neglect developing strong male leaders in the congregation because pastors use their time and energy defensively. The tyranny of the urgent rules their schedules. They allow their time to be spent reacting to various crises, or they spend it preparing lessons, sermons, and events for the upcoming Sunday. As a result, many pastors have no long-term strategy to cultivate male leadership in the church and the home. How do we accomplish such a strategy?

Start small. Pick a few men who have the potential to be good leaders and set up regular lunches with them. Be proactive about building into these men. And, if you have a leadership team, encourage them to do the same.

Discipling men is extremely important. As the pastor, you should set the example for others in this. But if you want to get more bang for your buck, you might consider developing a men's discipleship group that helps men to think theologically about all of life. Pick good theological resources that help men apply theology to issues like marriage, communication, finances, sex, parenting, working for a secular employer, and so on. You can find a good example of this type of leadership development in pastor Mike McKinley's book [Church Planting is for Wimps](#) (see chapter seven).

THOUGHTS FOR THE PASTOR DISCIPLING WOMEN

If pastors should disciple men to be leaders in the home and in the church, how does this differ from discipling women?

Biblical Vision for Discipling Women

Let's start again with a biblical vision. As with men, pastors should seek to encourage greater Christ-likeness through one-on-one discipling, only in this case, women should do the vast majority of that discipling. In the normal course of relationships in the church, men should disciple men and women should disciple women. So encourage older Christian women to invest in younger Christian women, helping them to grow spiritually, which is precisely what Paul tells Titus to instruct the women in his church to do (Tit. 2:3-5).

How then should a (male) pastor think about knowing, caring for, and shepherding the women in his congregation?

If we think of discipling as long-term, deliberate mentoring, it doesn't seem wise for a pastor to disciple a woman (for example, by meeting with her weekly over the course of a year). We should reserve that type of intense spiritual mentoring for gender-specific relationships. That leaves us with counseling, which is a more time-limited activity.

While some argue that pastors should *never* counsel a woman, that doesn't seem to fit with what Scripture says about the shepherd knowing *all* of his sheep (Acts 20:28; cf. John 10:12, 16), and the specific example that Jesus sets for us. In John 4, Christ has a very personal, one-on-one conversation with a Samaritan woman. Male pastors do need to personally shepherd the women in their congregations.

What are some of the specific things pastors should encourage women in? Pastors should encourage their love for the Word and the church, their respect for authority, their desire to make the home primary (even if they are working outside the home), and their growth in personal evangelism. For married women, pastors should encourage their responsiveness to their husband's leadership. For single women, pastors should encourage them to follow godly authority in the church, especially when their fathers are not spiritually involved in their lives.

Yet pastors should primarily seek to shepherd women in these ways *through* equipping women in the congregation to disciple other women. How can pastors facilitate and build this culture of women discipling women?

Practical Strategy for Discipling Women

In order to build a church culture that encourages discipleship among women, pastors should teach about the importance of discipleship whenever it naturally comes up in Scripture during a Sunday morning sermon series. The goal in this is to encourage the older women of the church to disciple the younger women.

We can also teach about discipleship in other venues. For example, at my church we regularly offer a Saturday seminar on discipleship to help new members think about how to be discipled and how to disciple others. We also offer a three month long Sunday school class on discipleship every year. The last time we taught the class, I contacted several older women in the church and encouraged them to attend. *Teaching* and *modeling* help build a church culture that takes discipleship seriously.

Those are some ways to build an overall culture of discipleship, but how does the pastor personally shepherd female members? Obviously, there will be plenty of opportunities to do one-off counseling meetings, where the pastor provides general advice and biblical counsel for life's daily problems.

If the problem requires more than one meeting, the pastor has to judge when *time-limited* counseling crosses over into *extended* discipleship. But before things even reach this point, many pastors stop meeting out of necessity because of the pressures of their busy schedules. Instead of meeting with the woman themselves, they wisely connect the female member with someone else in the church (such as a female staff member, the pastor's wife, or an older woman in the congregation) or someone on the outside who might help (such as a local female counselor or a parachurch organization that specializes in issues like domestic violence).

In order to wisely counsel women, pastors need to create a number of boundaries:

1. Limit the number of appointments you have with any particular woman. You want to be careful not to foster an emotional dependence on the pastor. Especially in the case of women in bad marriages, you don't want to be an emotional or spiritual replacement for their husbands.
2. Be very, very wary of emotionally dependent women. Very needy women hunger to find a man to pay attention to them, and pastors often have a sympathetic, listening ear. While you do want to offer kind and godly counsel, you don't want to foster a wrong emotional intimacy or dependence.
3. As much as possible—and depending on your family situation— include your wife.
4. Be sure to do your counseling in an office where you are always highly visible. Put your chair in the line of sight of those outside of the office. If your office door does not have a window in it, then replace the door with one that does.
5. Do your counseling with women only during work hours, so that the church secretary or other staff will be present in the church office complex. Never be alone with a woman in the church so that you can always be above reproach (1 Tim 3:2).
6. If possible, situate the secretary's desk just outside of your office.
7. Some pastors actually prefer to keep the door slightly propped open (or completely open), making sure that if the secretary hears anything she keeps it in confidence.

8. Don't do counseling in a secluded part of the church, but somewhere where there is a good bit of traffic, with people constantly buzzing around.
9. Make sure that at least one other staff member knows (or at least has access to) your schedule. If no one else knows what you are doing, there is more potential for you to hide things.
10. Make sure you have regular accountability with another pastor or leader in your church, which will include talking about your most difficult counseling situations.

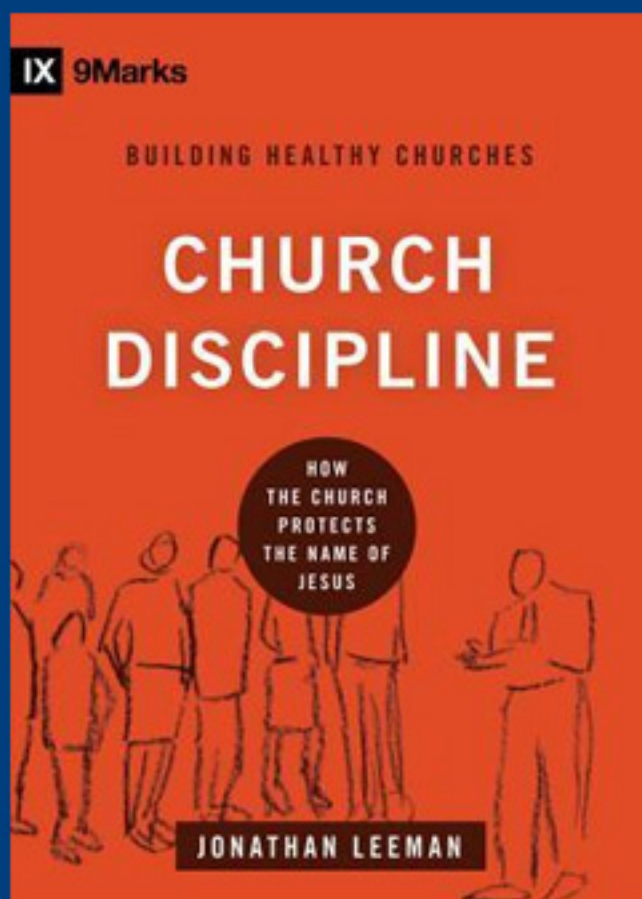
THE PRIVILEGE OF SHEPHERDING JESUS' FLOCK

What an immense privilege it is to be an undershepherd of Jesus. Whether it is men or women, we hope to care well for the sheep entrusted to our care. Pastors, learn from Christ's example: "I am the good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" (John 10:11).

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Church discipline ain't easy.



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By Bob Johnson

How pastors can equip women for ministry

I wish you could meet Lorie. Lorie's life is complicated by the ongoing difficulties that come with multiple sclerosis.

But that doesn't keep her from counseling several women on a weekly basis. Her unrelenting joy in the promises of God helps her to bring about gospel growth in other women. Lorie pours into others what others have helped pour into her: the practice of bringing the Scriptures to bear on all aspects of life.

This is just one example of the kind of ministry that a well-equipped woman can have. It's a ministry which is a necessary piece in the puzzle that is the local church.

In order to help pastors equip the women in their churches for ministry, this article will speak to three issues: 1) Why is equipping women for ministry important? 2) What kind of a church will best equip women for ministry? 3) And how do you equip women for ministry?

WHY IS EQUIPPING WOMEN FOR MINISTRY IMPORTANT?

First, why is equipping women for ministry important?

1. It is part of your calling (Colossians 1:28).

As pastors, we are right to insist on the biblical guidelines that reserve the office of elder for men, and we should therefore be concerned about the character and theological acumen of our men. However, we must also intentionally minister to women so they can mature and provide gospel help to the body in order to present every man and woman complete in Christ.

2. It promotes the reputation of Christ (Titus 2:3-5).

The reason Paul instructs Titus to exhort older women to minister to younger women is so "that the word of God may not be reviled." The reputation of Christ is jeopardized when our roles and relationships in the home do not reflect the gospel that we preach. Therefore, women must be taught to apply the gospel to their situations and then help other women do the same.

3. Women are desperately needed for ministry.

The ministry of our churches is woefully incomplete without women. Our churches need women who love gutsy theology, gritty service, and the rigors of gospel counseling. This is especially so because there are some situations, particularly in ministering to other women, in which women will generally be far more effective than men.

WHAT KIND OF A CHURCH WILL BEST EQUIP WOMEN FOR MINISTRY?

The second question I want to address is, what kind of a church will best equip women for ministry?

“Women who are skilled in the word benefit the health of their families and the whole church.”

Effective ministry of any kind starts with honoring the Scriptures through faithful expositional preaching. Women who regularly experience the powerful effect of the Word and who are fed and invigorated by a diet of solid food (Heb. 5:13-14) are not only skilled in handling the “word of righteousness,” but their appetite is trained for more and more substantive material. As a result, they will have the discernment to expose the instability of an experientially based life (and books). They will also resonate with biblically based counsel.

Women who are skilled in the word benefit the health of their families and the whole church. However, if you are not equipping men, these women will grow frustrated. Women want to be passionate about the gospel, and they thrive when they are surrounded by men who set the pace.

Finally, the church should honor and champion women who labor side by side in the gospel (Phil. 4.3). Part of the reason Paul wrote Philippians was his desire to see Euodia and Syntyche back into fellowship with each other and in the trenches of ministry.

To summarize, the kind of church that will best equip women for ministry is a church that feeds on expositional preaching, that equips *men* for ministry, and that honors and champions women who labor for the sake of the gospel.

HOW DO YOU EQUIP WOMEN FOR MINISTRY?

Finally, how do you equip women for ministry? Here are some practical encouragements for pastors.

1. Pray for the women in your church.

Our necessary personal focus on training men may unintentionally lead us to overlook our women. God uses our prayers to bring about growth and keep opportunities and concerns before us.

2. Identify women of good character and train them to minister to other women.

One way to train women for ministry is to offer Bible studies for women with the expectation that each attendee be willing to take another woman through the study after the class is completed. As other women in the congregation need counsel and encouragement, you will have a team of women ready to help.

While similar struggles will naturally bind women together, many will want to go beyond sharing similar experiences to mutually drawing refreshment from the waters of the Word.

More intentional training can be done through studies that are specifically designed for this purpose such as *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* by Paul Tripp. Other training is provided through the annual conference on biblical counseling sponsored by the National Association of Nouthetic Counseling, and Peacemaker Ministries offers excellent seminars on conflict resolution.

3. Use women in counseling.

I am a much better marriage counselor when my wife is involved. She picks up on so many things that I tend to overlook. Our teamwork in this area is an opportunity for her to use her gifts to build up the body.

There are many other women in our church who are skilled in counseling and have helped to create a culture in which it is expected that all women will grow in understanding and applying the gospel to their lives.

4. Commend women who embody gutsy theology and effective ministry.

Your church probably has a Phoebe who sets the pace for others (Rom. 16:1-2). So, as Paul does to the Romans, commend such women to your church. Flavor your sermons with illustrations of women in your church family and in church history. Find good books written by women that address issues for other women and point out good books written by women that are beneficial for the church at large. Nancy Pearcy's work *Total Truth* is great example of this.

5. Champion godly women at funerals.

Services for saints are an opportunity to praise evidences of grace, but services for scoundrels can serve this purpose as well. One woman in my church was married to a miserable and hateful man for many years. He finally died. At his funeral, I did not even attempt to say anything good about him, but rather held up the character of his wife whose faithfulness and care reflected the gospel under some of the most adverse conditions.

Women who are growing in the gospel through effective ministry get a front row seat to what God is doing in the church. Their encouragement and persistence helps a ministry flourish. If you're a pastor, you should prayerfully and carefully consider how you can equip women for ministry in the local church.

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By Owen Strachan

The Genesis of Gender and Ecclesial Womanhood

Men and women are different.

To some readers, this is obvious. To an increasing number of people, however, these are fighting words. The idea that men and women are basically, essentially different is *passé*.¹ To argue further that these differences carve out different roles for men and women which include the “submission” word—let’s just say that won’t win you many friends at a dinner party.²

CREATION AND DESIGN

Yet when we turn to Scripture, we find right from the start that God’s own hand fashions men and women differently and for complementary purposes. Both men and women are made in God’s image and likeness, and both receive the dominion mandate (Gen 1:26-28).³ Yet God made the man first, and he gives Adam a leadership role by asking him to exercise authority over the animals by naming them (Gen. 2:19). Adam has much to do, and the Lord notes his need for a “helper” (Gen. 2:18). The Lord takes Eve from Adam, forming her from his rib (Gen. 2:21). Her substance proceeds from his, an elegant reality which underscores that Eve’s physical safety derives from Adam’s masculine strength.⁴

Adam fills the role slated for men by taking Eve as his wife (Gen. 2:24). The one who gives his flesh to Eve in a sense recovers his physical wholeness through one-flesh union with her. Adam is in every respect the initiator, the leader, the one who bears the weight of responsibility for himself and others before God (Gen. 2:24-25). All this God pronounces “very good” (Gen. 1:31).

“Don’t miss the point here: gender is front and center in creation, the fall, and the curse.”

Everything falls apart in the fall. Adam fails to lead and protect Eve. Eve is deceived by the serpent and assumes the role of leader (Gen 3:1-13). In short, the fall itself involves an inversion of God’s plans for men and women.

The curse, in turn, is a gendered curse. Everyone draws a stiff sentence, one related directly to their role in life. Eve's "childbearing" will be marked by "pain" (Gen. 3:16). She will desire her husband's role, which means he will have to fight to "rule over" her (Gen. 3:17). And God certainly doesn't let Adam off the hook. Since Adam abdicated his God-granted responsibility to lead, the ground which he must work is "cursed," and the body which labors will "sweat" until the end of the age (Gen. 3:17, 19).⁵

Don't miss the point here: gender is front and center in creation, the fall, and the curse.⁶

These first three chapters of Genesis provide the fundamental shape of biblical gender roles, what many Christians call complementarianism—meaning that the sexes are equal in dignity and value yet distinct and complementary in their roles.⁷ For the purpose of this article, it's important to note that women have a complementary role in relation to men. God created Adam first, and created Eve to be his complement.

In the wise and gracious design of God, women are "helpers." They are to be wives and mothers, the bearers of children. While men lead, protect, and provide, women come alongside and support them. Sadly, after the fall the two vie for each other's roles, men either becoming abusive or seeking to divest themselves of leadership, while women elbow for the primary role and threaten dissension.

These different roles depend, we should note, both on divine fiat and on the different constitutional and physiological realities which this creative force brought into being.⁸ Generally speaking, God made men physically stronger, analytically inclined, and the initiator of the childbearing process. Women are often physically weaker and more emotionally and linguistically attuned than men, and they require physical initiation to bear children. The very bodies of women show that they are designed to nurture children, even if our culture wants to overlook these basic bodily realities. The wisdom of God's will is embodied by the men and women who bear his image. What God has called women to be in spirit he has made them to be in body.

THE STRENGTH OF SUPPORT: WOMEN'S ROLES IN SCRIPTURE

These roles, with all their complexity and drama, play out over the whole of Scripture. We see throughout Scripture that:

- Men take the leadership positions in the Israelite theocracy, with precious few exceptions. Consider the patriarchs of Genesis, the prophets of Israel, and the Levitical priesthood (Lev. 6 ff.).
- Men fight the wars of Israel; women in most cases do not. The failure of men to lead Israel in battle in Judges 4 is considered deeply shameful.
- Women like Moses' mother, Ruth, and Esther work in a spirit of submission within patriarchal settings to accomplish good for themselves and others.
- Women attend to the affairs of the home, as in the preeminent example of the Proverbs 31 woman, a chapter which shows homemaking to be a holistic and many-sided calling.
- Jesus evinces a special gentleness and care in many of his interactions with women, and women respond in many cases with strong faith and trust in him (e.g., Luke 7:11-15; 13:10-17; John 8:33-39).
- Men fill the roles of the twelve apostles, as well as being the pastors and elders of local churches (see Matt. 10:2-4; Acts 1; 1 Tim. 2:11-12).
- In the New Testament, women fill all kinds of serving and helping functions, such as financially supporting the apostles, hosting the church's assemblies, and providing hospitality (see more on this below).
- Wives are called to submit to their husbands as an image of the relationship between the church and Christ, showing the beauty of complementarity and submission (Eph. 5:21-31; Col. 3:18).

- The New Testament straightforwardly prohibits women from teaching and holding authority over men in the local church (1 Tim. 2:11-12).
- Women are called to “work at home,” a New Testament reaffirmation of the Proverbs 31 calling of godly women (Titus 2:5).
- Women are called to submit to and richly esteem their husbands even as Sarah “obeyed” Abraham and called him “lord” (1 Peter 3:6).

How can we synthesize these scriptural realities in order to define the essence of biblical femininity? Pastor-theologian John Piper has done important work on this point. “At the heart of mature femininity,” Piper writes, “is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman’s differing relationships.”⁹

As we have seen from our brief survey of Genesis and the sweep of Scripture, women are called by God’s design and direction to serve under men for the promotion of his gospel in the family, the church, and society.

GENDERED DISCIPLESHIP

Biblical womanhood clashes with prevailing notions of femininity. The Bible insists that women will find freedom, joy and liberation not in casting off God’s design, but in embracing it. Of course, this is true not just with gender roles, but in our whole lives as Christians: we find all that our hearts seek not in rejecting biblical wisdom, but in allowing it to reshape us.

The gospel leads directly away from libertarian notions of freedom and identity and offers better ones.¹⁰ In dying to self and trusting Christ as Savior and Lord, we live. Here there is “no male or female,” as Paul puts it (Gal. 3:28). But once freed from the shackles of sin, men and women both are free to fulfill what God distinctly intended for them in creation. After all, biology does not change upon conversion. The gospel is at the center of biblical womanhood (and manhood) and, in saving women from sin and hell, it empowers them to live in the fullness of God’s good plan for them.¹¹

When we turn to the pages of the New Testament, we find many examples of women freed in the gospel. Women served the church and its leaders in diverse and creative ways. Here are a few of the most significant:

- Joanna, “the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza,” likely contributed generous sums to Christ and his band of disciples (Luke 8:3).
- Prisca helped her husband Aquila disciple Apollos, a learned and eloquent preacher (Acts 18:26).
- Timothy had both a godly mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 3:15).
- Tabitha was “full of good works and acts of charity” (Acts 9:36).
- In a climate hostile to Christianity and thus dependent on home fellowships, Lydia and Mary each hosted gatherings of Christians (Acts 12:12; 16:13-15, 40).
- Phoebe was a “servant of the church at Cenchrae,” a “patron of many and of myself as well,” Paul noted in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 16:1-2).
- Junia (Rom. 16:7) and Appia (Philemon 2) seem to have partnered with their husbands in gospel ministry, whether through evangelism in the case of Junia or hosting a church in the case of Appia.
- In the examples of Mary, Anna and others, we find women of persistent, reverential, bold, effectual prayer (Luke 1:46-55; 2:36-38).

What can we take from these portraits for women in our churches? In other words, what should we say the ministry of a woman who has been transformed by the gospel looks like *on the ground*?

Most fundamentally, godly women should serve the local church by supporting, helping, encouraging, and affirming the ministry of the elders as the elders promote the gospel in the church and the world. For many women, this is accomplished under the leadership of a husband. However, women may fill this “supporting” role whether married or not. All women of God may contribute in major ways to the ministry of God’s church.

Biblical womanhood in the local church is fundamentally oriented to service, support, and strengthening. Men have been created and commanded to lead the church’s mission, expose Scripture, shepherd, and give oversight. Women have been created and commanded to submit to the church’s mission and to buttress the ministry produced by the male leaders. At the most basic level, this involves encouraging and affirming their elders, embracing “support” ministries, and modeling a spirit of affirmation and encouragement wherever possible.

This sort of ministry is nothing less than essential. Just as a family is incomplete without a wife and mother, so the church is incomplete without the ministry of women. Most of us have heard countless anecdotes of how women have “filled the gaps” in our churches. Offering counsel to struggling people, teaching the next generation, taking meals to new mothers, writing encouraging notes to the elders, organizing special events—in these and many other ways, women show themselves to be the buttress of the church. We’ll look now at a few hands-on practices of the “ecclesial woman.”

THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL WAYS WOMEN SERVE THE CHURCH

Modeling Godliness

First, women have the opportunity to serve the Lord and his church by embracing the gospel and living according to it in every sphere of life, including the life of the local church. That might sound like a virtue for all Christians, and it is. But women have been specially gifted to model for all believers what pastor Mark Chanski calls being a “submissive learner.”¹²

Discipling the Next Generation of Godly Women

Most churches are in great need of more older women who will disciple younger women for service in the local church.

One woman I am aware of devotes herself to just such a role. In a given day, she meets with a lonely single woman, takes a gift to a young couple cherishing their first child, and teaches a class on biblical femininity. Through her work, her church is more vibrant and healthy, like a garden cared for by a diligent gardener.

Praying

Women contribute hugely to the gospel ministry of God’s assembly by praying for it. “Prayer warriors” may sound like a cliché, but it is not. When we reach heaven, it is doubtless true that many faithful prayers whose names we do not know will be honored for their faithfulness in prayer.

Missions

For centuries, women have been a major part of the evangelical missions movement, with figures such as Lottie Moon and Amy Carmichael inspiring many to sacrifice for the spread of the gospel.¹³

Hospitality

Another major way women spread blessing to their fellow church members is to host meals, wedding showers, teas, and birthday parties as part of a loving ministry of hospitality.¹⁴ More significantly, married women should work with their husbands to make their homes available to struggling or weary souls. Single women can make their homes available to other single women.

It's not without reason that both the elders of the church and older women are recognized for their hospitality (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:10). Hospitality presents a small picture of a gracious God who gives life to a people who were strangers to him. It shows how practical acts give tangible shape to love among the members of the body.

Teaching

Some people think that complementarians do not believe that women can teach in the church. But that's not right. Women are very much needed to teach other women and to teach children.¹⁵

Giving

Women can participate in the life of the church by giving generously to it.

Visiting a Christian institution a few years ago, I encountered an older woman who was quiet and humble. I was awed when I learned later that she was worth billions of dollars and had in large part supported the work of the institution, which struggled to keep a gospel witness solvent in its spiritually dark context.

THE DISTINCT DUTY—AND GLORY—OF WOMEN

As Christians, we believe in the distinct but complementary roles of the Trinity as the Son submits to the Father. And as Christians, we believe in the marriage between Christ and his church, a marriage of two distinct partners that each treasure the other. So as Christians, we understand that the uniqueness and distinctiveness of women and men displays the glory and wisdom of God.¹⁶ Whatever criticism the culture offers on this point must be considered in the light of these foundational biblical and theological truths.

“ Perhaps there is more strength, more glory, in ‘support’ ministry carried out by women than one might initially think. If modernity misses this irony, we must not. ”

To be a woman is to support, to nurture, and to strengthen men in order that they would flourish and fulfill their God-given role as leaders. Men may well veer into sin from their own weakness. But they gain a considerable buttress when supported by godly women in the church. Women enable men to flourish and to lead others to do the same.

Perhaps there is more strength, more glory, in “support” ministry carried out by women than one might initially think. If modernity misses this irony, we must not.

[1] See Jennifer Finney Boylan, "Is My Marriage Gay?," *New York Times*, May 11, 2009; Ilene Leichuk, "When Is It OK for Boys to Be Girls, and Girls to Be Boys?," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 27, 2006; Karin Venable Morin, "Caveat Parens," *National Review*, May 4, 2009; Al Mohler, "Gender Confusion in the Kindergarten," albertmohler.com, published October 18, 2006.

[2] Mary Kassian has suggested that the drive to redefine gender roles will extend even to conceptions of God. Historically, Kassian writes, "Feminists believed that women would find themselves through the destruction of sex roles and stereotypes. They would become transcendent when they discovered "God" as a personal experience of wholeness and meaning....In order to unleash their power, feminists argued that women need to perceive it as residing in themselves. Then they will be able to channel and release it purposefully in order to change reality." (*The Feminist Mistake: The Radical Impact of Feminism on Church and Culture* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2005], pp. 178, 190).

[3] For a definitive treatment of man, woman, and the image of God, see Bruce A. Ware, "Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God" in Wayne Grudem, ed., *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 71-92.

[4] Ware suggests that "there is a priority given to the male as the image of God, for she is created as the glory of the man who is himself the image and glory of God." (88)

[5] For elaboration on the roles laid out here, see Wayne Grudem, "The Key Issues in the Manhood-Womanhood Controversy, and the Way Forward" in Grudem, *Biblical Foundations*, 40-41.

[6] For helpful exegetical commentary on the roles laid out here, see Grudem, "The Key Issues," 25-36.

[7] John Piper offers a succinct articulation of the meaning of the term in "Chapter 1: A Vision of Biblical Complementarity," in Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1993), 52-53.

[8] Those who would argue against this point should pore over the stimulating chapter by Gregg Johnson, "The Biological Basis for Gender-Specific Behavior" in Piper and Grudem, 280-293. To give a few examples: "At age eighteen, girls have almost twice the body fat (about 33 percent) of boys. Boys at age eighteen have about 50 percent more muscle mass than girls, particularly in the upper body" (283). And: "Because [women's] nerves interact with more neighboring nerves, they are able to integrate more sensory and stored memory information to derive more complete analysis and assessment of a particular circumstance." (289) Johnson is professor of biology at Bethel College. See also George Alan Rekers, "Psychological Foundations for Rearing Masculine Boys and Feminine Girls" in Piper and Grudem, 294-311.

[9] Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity," 36. The entire chapter is a must-read on this topic.

[10] For more on the modern conception of the individual and its own limitations, see chapter one, "The Idolatry of Love," in Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 39-74.]

[11] Piper has said this well: "What we have seen so far in those three texts (and there are many others that could be used to supplement them), what we have seen so far is this: masculinity and femininity, manhood and womanhood, belong at the center of God's ultimate purpose. Manhood and womanhood are not an afterthought of creation. They're not an afterthought of the cross. They're not peripheral to the design of what is being said when Jesus dies to magnify the grace of God. They're right there at the center at Calvary." From his address at the 2008 True Woman conference, accessible at <http://www.truewoman.com/?id=336>.

[12] Mark Chanski, *Womanly Dominion: More Than a Gentle and Quiet Spirit* (Birmingham: Calvary Press, 2008), 194.

[13] New Testament scholar Tom Schreiner notes that "Women have advanced the gospel in missions, are advancing it, and will continue to advance it". See "The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching" in Piper and Grudem, 223. Schreiner's chapter will repay reading on the subject of women's ministry.

[14] See J. Ligon Duncan and Susan Hunt, *Women's Ministry in the Local Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 110-12 in particular.

[15] Beyond the local church, the people of God need godly women to follow in the line of extra-congregational teachers such as Elisabeth Elliott, Nancy Leigh DeMoss, Carolyn Mahaney, Mary Kassian, and Susan Hunt. This is to say nothing of countless other ways that women can edify and have edified their brothers and sisters. See William Weinrich's chapter on "Women in the History of the Church: Learned and Holy, But Not Pastors" in Piper and Grudem, 263-79. I enjoyed the section on women hymn-writers, especially page 269. That's merely one example of many that show that women have creatively served their churches and fellow Christians for millennia.

[16] See Bruce A. Ware, "Tampering with the Trinity: Does the Son Submit to His Father?" in Grudem, *Biblical Foundations*, 233-53.

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By Susan Hunt

Wanted: More Older Women Discipling Younger Women

I had spoken on the topic of biblical womanhood and a college-age woman asked me a thoughtful question: How can I think biblically about my womanhood when I am constantly told that independence is power and that I should seek my own fulfillment and determine my own destiny?

My answer: “Go to godly women in your church and ask them to speak the truth of biblical womanhood into your life. Ask them to show you how to live for God’s glory as a woman.” But then I wondered, “Is this young woman’s church preparing its women to answer her question?” Someone is teaching women and girls what it means to be a woman. Is it the church or the world?

Older women discipling younger women is not just a nifty idea someone concocted, and it is not optional. It’s a gospel imperative. The apostle Paul writes,

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. (Titus 2:3-5)

“The mandate of Titus 2:3-5 is that older women are to disciple younger women, teaching them how to grow in godliness in their distinct relationships and calling.”

In light of this passage, let’s consider some questions that will help the church sound the call for women to invest themselves in younger women. I pray that this brief article would challenge women to respond to this high and holy calling.

THE TITUS 2 MANDATE

The mandate of Titus 2:3-5 is that older women are to disciple younger women, teaching them how to grow in godliness in their distinct relationships and calling.

Some of the principles of discipleship embedded in this amazing chapter will help us to understand the specific directive to women in verses 3 to 5.

Principle #1: The church is responsible to encourage and equip women to disciple each other

In verse 1 Paul addresses his instructions on discipleship to Titus, the pastor. Since women training women is an integral part of the church's ministry, Titus must equip the women in his church to do so. Therefore, it is the responsibility of every church leader to see that women are equipped for this calling.

Principle #2: The church should teach sound doctrine

In verse 1 Paul tells Titus to teach sound doctrine, doctrine that is healthy or whole. This shows us that women discipling women should flow out of and be consistent with the regular preaching ministry of the church. This discipleship should help women apply sound doctrine to daily life and relationships.

Principle #3: The communion of the saints

Yet verses 3 through 5 also tell us that discipleship is not just the responsibility of church leaders (see also Ephesians 4:11-16). As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* states: "All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head... and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man."

Biblical discipleship is relational. The content of the gospel should be taught in the context of relationships that validate the gospel. Our relationship with God is personal, but that relationship also brings us into community with his other adopted children.

Older men and women have the generational responsibility to share their gifts and graces with younger men and women. They are to tell the stories of their victories as well as their failures and show how their stories are part of God's grand story of redemption.

The Titus 2 mandate is life-on-life discipleship that guides and nurtures to mature Christian womanhood. It is a mothering ministry. This mothering spirit is evident in Paul's description of his own ministry to the Thessalonians:

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. (1 Thess. 2:7-8)

Principle #4: The gospel is our motivation

There are costly challenges in this chapter. Investing in the lives of others costs energy and time. It means taking relational risks. Why should we live so sacrificially?

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (vv. 11-13).

Christ came and he is coming back. He appeared in grace as a babe and he will come in glory as the King. While we wait for that glorious appearing we are to make disciples. Unless we are motivated by the gospel we will become discouraged and weary.

Principle #5: The gospel is powerful

Paul concludes with an electrifying reminder of the power of the gospel.

[Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (v. 14).

Some discipleship is age and gender specific but all discipleship is to be gospel-focused. It is Jesus who redeems and purifies us. For a fallen sinner to become eager to do what is good is the radical work of the gospel. The result of our investment in the lives of others is not dependent upon our own power or experience. It is only the power of the gospel that can transform self-centered sinners into Christ-centered disciples. And one of the wonders of gospel-driven discipleship is that even if we do not see this transformation take place in the disciple, it will take place in us as we disciple others.

WHO ARE THE OLDER WOMEN?

The passage does not give a specific age for the “older women” who are to disciple the younger women. Given the content of what they are to teach, their main qualifications would seem to center on spiritual maturity. Of course chronological age provides life experiences and perspective that are valuable, but the reality is that every Christian woman and girl should consider herself an older *and* a younger woman. We should seek out women who can encourage and equip us to live for God’s glory even as we seek to disciple other women in biblical womanhood.

HOW CAN A LOCAL CHURCH FACILITATE THIS MINISTRY?

Spiritual mothering relationships come in all shapes and sizes. There is no formula. A Titus 2 relationship may be regular or intermittent, consist in two people or a group, occur between older women or young girls, but every Titus 2 relationship will be purposeful. It will be an intentional effort to encourage and equip another woman or girl to live for God’s glory by living under the authority of God’s Word, and it will train her in biblical principles of womanhood.

This ministry is not a program, it’s a lifestyle. However, it sometimes takes more programmatic efforts to jumpstart these relationships. A women’s ministry is one vehicle that a church can use to challenge and equip women for this calling. If a church already has a women’s ministry, they can begin by asking some strategic questions:

- How is the women’s ministry enabling our church to obey Titus 2:3–5?
- How does our discipleship ministry reflect the principles of discipleship in Titus 2?
- How are women being equipped to train younger women in biblical principles of womanhood?
- What opportunities do we provide to develop nurturing relationships between older and younger women?

Whether a church takes a more formal, programmatic approach or seeks to encourage Titus 2 relationships more informally and organically is up to each church to decide. Here are a few resources that could be useful for encouraging such a ministry, whatever form it takes:

- *Biblical Foundations for Womanhood*, a series of books that teach principles of biblical womanhood. There is a leader's guide for each book. For more information, go to the [PCA Christian Education and Publications web site](#) and click on [Women's Ministries](#), or call 1-800-283-1357.
- A [Titus 2 Small Group Discipleship Model](#), including a suggested strategy for implementing this model.
- [TRUE](#), a 3-year discipleship curriculum on biblical womanhood for teen girls.

WHERE ARE THE OLDER WOMEN?

Where are the older women? I believe they are sitting in the pews of our churches waiting to be captivated by this biblical calling and equipped to fulfill it.

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By Jani Ortlund

For the Young Mother: Ministry, Guilt, and Seasons of Life

Guilt is a young mother's habitual shadow. It has a nasty way of soaking through many of her efforts at nurturing, serving and loving others. "Am I doing enough for my children? For others? What do they think of me? What does God think of me?"

“Dear young mother, *don't waste your guilt!*”

As a young mother everyone wants something from you—your family, your church, your boss, your neighbor. And most likely, you give way more than you ever thought you could. But along the way guilt nibbles at your soul, eating away your inner peace and joy. And it often lingers through the years, even after your children are grown and gone.

Dear young mother, *don't waste your guilt!*

DON'T WASTE YOUR GUILT

Don't waste your guilt, but instead listen to it and evaluate it. Take it out of the shadows and examine it in the light of Scripture. Lay out your feelings before Christ. Is this guilt legitimate conviction of sin? Then confess your sin, receive his forgiveness and ask him where and how he wants you to change.

But maybe your guilt is a nagging, self-focused fear that if you were just a bit better or worked just a little harder, then you would be noticed and admired enough to feel okay about yourself. That is false guilt, rooted in pride. It will hurt your family and hinder your relationship with your grace-giving Father. If this describes your guilt, then remind yourself that through Christ's death and resurrection, you're accepted by God. The solution to false guilt, as to true guilt, is the gospel.

Paul speaks of these two kinds of guilt in 2 Corinthians 7:10. There is a godly grief that produces repentance, and a worldly grief that produces death. Ask yourself this question: is what I give my time and energies to driven by life-giving repentance or life-depleting pride?

A YOUNG MOTHER'S PRIMARY MISSION FIELD

One reason a young mother can feel wrongly guilty is that she forgets that her first and primary mission field must be her children.

God values children. He places great importance on our teaching our children to love and serve him (Deut. 6:7-9). Jesus became indignant when the disciples didn't value the worth of children in God's expanding kingdom (Mark 10:13-16). And God tells us that children are his blessing to us (Psalm 127:3).

Mothering calls for the best in us as women. As mothers, we shape the souls of our children and ultimately influence the world. Children are our gift to the future. So accept your calling from God to serve your family. It is not godly guilt that would call you away from a wholehearted investment in your little ones for his sake. Don't feel guilty over making your children your primary ministry investment when they are young. You are teaching the younger generation to form intimate emotional bonds with others. Your sensitivity, availability, devotion, affection, and unhurried attention are irreplaceable.

MOTHERING: PLAIN HARD WORK

On the other hand, Paul's word to me as an older woman is to "train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled" (Tit. 2:4-5).

Why does the apostle have to tell us older women to teach these things to the younger women? Because it can be hard to love your husband and children. In fact, it can be easier to minister outside the home. Why is it more rewarding for us to plan a ladies' retreat for two hundred women than it is to plan an indoor picnic with our preschoolers on a rainy afternoon? I think it's because the rewards are more immediate and the demands are not so steady.

Being a young mother is plain hard work. At times it feels like slave labor! Young moms can identify with the cartoon of a toddler looking at a wedding album with his daddy and saying, "So that's the day Mommy came to work for us!"

But God has called you to this ministry. He knows there are no neutral moments in a young child's life, whose experience is one of continuous need and development. Your children will bear the imprint of your mothering throughout their lives because much of human behavior springs from imitation.

You are the only mother your children have. Your ministry to them is the deepest expression of your love for them. Raising your children has to be done right the first time around. It is one of the few places in life where you can *not* say, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

You have received this commission from God. As a mother your privilege is to teach them how to respect their daddy and be kind to their siblings, how to choose good nutrition and wholesome entertainment, why they should value courtesy and orderliness, and which causes are worthy of their efforts, their reputations, and even their very blood.

Are you discouraged as you spend day after day immersed in the mundane tasks of mothering? Then think of the honor of guiding the spiritual and intellectual and social development of young minds and hearts. Think of the thrill of teaching them eternal truths from God's Word. Think of the importance of teaching your young children how to live under

authority, and of preparing them for future relationships by teaching them about love and trust. Think of the delight of sending one more godly, vibrant, strong, secure, loving young person into this needy world with the courage to live well for Christ's sake. What a worthy investment!

WHAT YOUNG MOTHERS NEED: A HEART FOR THE HOME

Another challenge for a young mother is cultivating a love for the home.

God has called us to love our children from home base (Tit. 2:4-5). We can't improve upon God's design! This means more than staying at home. It means fixing your heart on your home. Women can leave their homes through more avenues than work or outside ministry. Cell phones, emails, and chat rooms can take a mother away from her primary ministry, too.

Ministry means being "all there." It means rejoicing that you get to show your children how to peddle a tricycle, make their bed, build good memories, and share their toys with others. You serve your family, and ultimately your heavenly Father, by helping your child do that puzzle for the seventeenth time, by washing those sticky fingers, by planting a little garden, by acting out Bible stories and praying together, and by preparing for their daddy's return as the highlight of your day!

What is the alternative? "A child left to himself disgraces his mother" (Prov. 29:15).

Remember this: you have the privilege of passing on to young hearts a sense of God! Should you feel guilty for that? As you let your children experience intimacy, nearness, and availability in their earliest years with you, you can point them to find those soul-necessities in Christ, their Savior, as they mature. And then you have the delight of sending them out with a light in their souls to bless this darkened world.

Someone is going to be influencing your children, inculcating values and imprinting standards on their impressionable young minds. Let it be you!

THIS SEASON IS JUST A SEASON

Does this mean you will never invest in others outside your family? Goodness, no. But if you are a young mother, use your primary ministry of mothering to guide your choices about where to serve Christ now. Don't let anything woo you away from your unique role as a wife and mother.

This season in your life is just that—a season. And each season is a divine calling from our Creator and King. Organizing a new church event is important. Teaching your little boy to be kind to his sister is also important. But which one can best be done by you during this season? Serve God well by ministering to your children first. Very soon they will be grown and gone and all those uniquely teachable moments will be gone. And you will have ample opportunity to serve Christ outside your home in the seasons ahead.

"But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded" (2 Chronicles 15:7).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jani Ortlund is a former schoolteacher and holds a master's degree in education. She is the author two books, *Fearlessly Feminine* and *His Loving Law, Our Lasting Legacy*. Jani is the wife of Dr. Raymond Ortlund, Jr.



By Thomas R. Schreiner

May Women Serve as Pastors?

Someone will occasionally ask me whether women may serve in ministry. My answer is always, “Yes, of course! All believers are called upon to serve and minister to one another.”

But I would answer differently if the question were posed more precisely: “Are there any ministry roles in which women may not serve?” I would argue that the New Testament plainly teaches that women should not serve as pastors (which the New Testament also calls overseers or elders). It is clear in the New Testament that the terms pastor, overseer, and elder refer to the same office (cf. Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2), and for the remainder of this essay I will use the terms “elder” and “pastor” interchangeably to designate this office.

PAUL’S PROHIBITION IN 1 TIMOTHY 2:12

The fundamental text which establishes that women should not serve as elders is 1 Timothy 2:11-15. We read in verse 12, “I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man.” In this passage, Paul forbids women from engaging in two activities that characterize the elders’ ministry: teaching and exercising authority. We see this in the qualifications for the office, among other places: elders must have the ability to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Tit. 1:9; cf. Acts 20:17-34) and to lead the church (1 Tim. 3:4-5; 5:17). Women are prohibited from teaching men and from exercising authority over them, and therefore it follows that they must not serve as elders.

Is this prohibition still in force today?

But is the command that women must not teach men or exercise authority over them intended to be in force today? Many today contend that Paul prohibited women from serving as elders because women in Paul’s day were uneducated and therefore they lacked the ability to teach men well. It is also argued that women were responsible for the false teaching that was troubling the congregation to which Paul wrote in 1 Timothy (1 Tim. 1:3; 6:3). According to this reading, Paul would support women serving as pastors after they are properly educated and if they teach sound doctrine.

The prohibition is grounded in creation, not circumstances

These attempts to relativize Paul’s prohibition must be judged to be unsuccessful. Paul could have easily written, “I don’t want women to teach or exercise authority over men because they are uneducated,” or, “I don’t want women to teach or exercise authority over men because they are spreading false teaching.” Yet what reason does Paul actually give for his command in verse 12? Paul’s rationale for the command follows in the next verse: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (v. 13). Paul says nothing about lack of education or about women promulgating the false teaching. Instead, he appeals to the created order, to God’s good and perfect intention when he formed human beings. It is imperative to see

that the reference to creation indicates that the command for women not to teach or exercise authority over men is a transcultural word, a prohibition that is binding on the church at all times and in all places. In giving this command, Paul does not appeal to fallen creation, to the consequences that pertain to human life as a result of sin. Rather, he grounds the prohibition in the wholly good creation that existed before sin entered into the world.

The fundamental reason that women should not serve as pastors is communicated here, and so the argument from creation cannot be dismissed as culturally limited. Moreover, the New Testament contains many similar appeals to the created order. For instance, homosexuality is not in accord with the will of God because it is “contrary to nature” (Rom. 1:26); that is, it violates what God intended when he made human beings as male and female (Gen. 1:26-27). Similarly, Jesus teaches that divorce is not the divine ideal since at creation God made one man and one woman, signifying that one man should be married to one woman “till death do us part” (Matt. 19:3-12). So, too, all food is to be received gratefully since it is a gift from God’s creative hand (1 Tim. 4:3-5).

In 1 Timothy 2:11-15, Paul specifically grounds his prohibition of women teaching and exercising authority in the order of creation, namely, that Adam was made first and then Eve (Gen. 2:4-25). The narrative in Genesis is carefully constructed, and Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, helps us see the significance of Eve being created after Adam. Critics occasionally object that the argument fails to persuade since animals were created before human beings, but this misses Paul’s point. Only human beings are created in God’s image (Gen. 1:26-27), and therefore Paul communicates the significance of God creating man prior to the woman, namely, that the man is responsible to lead.

Paul gives a second reason why women should not teach or exercise authority over men in 1 Timothy 2:14: “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” Paul’s point here is probably not that women are more prone to be deceived than men, because elsewhere he commends women as teachers of women and children (Titus 2:3; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15), which he would not recommend if women by nature were apt to be deceived. It is likely that Paul is thinking again of the creation account, for the serpent subverted the created order by deceiving Eve rather than Adam (thereby subverting male headship), even though there is evidence that Adam was with Eve when the temptation occurred (Gen. 3:6). Verse 14 does not teach that women were uneducated, for deceit is a moral category, whereas lack of education is remedied with instruction.

Eve’s deception cannot be attributed to intellectual weakness, but was due to her rebellion, her desire to be independent of God. In addition, the reference to deceit here does not indicate that the women of Ephesus played a primary role in spreading false teaching, for the false teachers named in 1 Timothy are men (1 Tim. 1:20). Indeed, if the women were banned from teaching because they were advocates of the false teaching, we have the strange and very unlikely situation where all the Christian women in Ephesus were deceived by the false teaching. Rather, Paul’s point is that Satan’s temptation of Eve instead of Adam subverted male leadership, for he deceived and tempted the woman even though Adam was present with Eve when the temptation occurred. Indeed, even though Eve was deceived first by the serpent, the primary responsibility for sin fell on Adam’s shoulders. This is evident in Genesis 3, for the Lord speaks to Adam first about the sin of the first couple, and this is confirmed by Romans 5:12-19 where the sinfulness of the human race is traced to Adam and not Eve.

In summary, 1 Timothy 2:12 forbids women from teaching or exercising authority over men in the church. This command is grounded in the order of creation and is confirmed by the reversal of roles that occurred at the fall. It is not a culturally or contextually limited prohibition that no longer applies to churches today.

CORROBORATING TESTIMONY FROM THE REST OF SCRIPTURE

What we learn about men and women’s roles from God’s creation of them

What we see of men and women’s roles in the rest of Scripture confirms this reading of 1 Timothy 2:11-15. The book of Genesis gives us six pieces of evidence that husbands have the primary responsibility of leadership in marriage: 1) God

created Adam first and then Eve; 2) God gave the command not to eat of the tree to Adam rather than Eve; 3) Adam named the “woman” just as he named the animals, signifying his authority (Gen. 2:19-23); 4) Eve is designated as Adam’s “helper” (Gen. 2:18); 5) The serpent deceived Eve rather than Adam, thereby subverting male headship (Gen. 3:1-6); and 6) God came to Adam first, even though Eve sinned first (Gen. 3:9; cf. Rom. 5:12-19).

What we learn from the Bible’s teaching on marriage

Such a reading of Genesis fits with what we discover about marriage in the New Testament. Husbands have the primary responsibility of leadership, and wives are called upon to submit to the leadership of their husbands (Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Pet. 3:1-7). The call to submission for the wife is not grounded on mere cultural norms, for a wife is called upon to submit to her husband just as the church is called upon to submit to Christ (Eph. 5:22-24). Paul designates marriage as a “mystery” (Eph. 5:32), and the mystery is that marriage mirrors Christ’s relationship to the church. The mandate for men rather than women to serve as pastors, then, fits with the biblical pattern of male leadership and authority within marriage.

It is crucial to observe that a different role for women does not signify the inferiority of women. Women and men are equally created in God’s image (Gen. 1:26-27). They have equal access to salvation in Christ (Gal. 3:28), and they are heirs together of the great salvation which is ours in Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 3:7). The biblical writers do not cast aspersions on the dignity, intelligence, and personhood of women. We see this even more clearly when we recognize that just as Christ submits to the Father (1 Cor. 15:28), so wives are to submit to their husbands. Christ is of equal dignity and value with the Father, and so his submission cannot be understood as signaling his inferiority.

What we learn from other passages about women in the church

Nor is 1 Timothy 2:11-15 the only text that requires a different role for men and women in the church. In 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 Paul teaches that women must not speak in church. This passage does not forbid women from speaking in the assembly absolutely, for Paul encourages women to pray and prophesy in church (1 Cor. 11:5). The principle of 1 Cor. 14:33b-36 is that women should not speak in such a way that they rebel against male headship or take upon themselves unwarranted authority, and this principle accords with the notion in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 that women should not teach and exercise authority over men.

“ The Lord has not given his commands to punish women, but so that they can joyfully serve him according to his will. ”

Another text that points us in the same direction is 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. We have already seen in this passage that Paul allows women to pray and prophesy in the assembly. It is imperative to see that prophecy is not the same gift as teaching, for the gifts are distinguished in the New Testament (1 Cor. 12:28). Women served as prophets in the OT but never as priests. Similarly, they served as prophets in the New Testament but never as elders. Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 makes it clear that as women prophesied they were to adorn themselves in such a way that they were submissive to male headship and leadership (1 Cor. 11:3). This fits with what we have seen in 1 Tim. 2:11-15. Women are not the recognized leaders of the congregation, and therefore they must not function as teachers and leaders of the congregation. The fundamental issue in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is not the adornment of women. Scholars are not sure, in any case, whether the adornment described represents a veil or wearing one’s hair up on one’s head. Such adornment was required in Paul’s day because it signified that women were submissive to male leadership. Today how a woman wears her hair or whether she wears a veil does not signify whether or not she is submissive to male

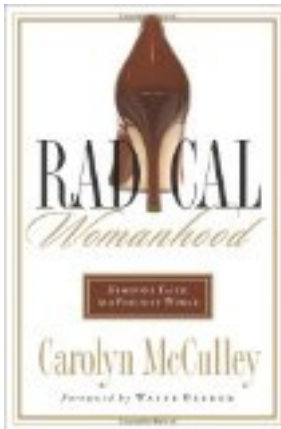
leaders. Thus, we should apply the principle (though not the specific cultural practice) to today's world: women should be submissive to male leadership, which manifests itself in not serving as pastors and teachers of men.

CONCLUSION

The scriptures clearly teach about the unique roles of women in the church and in the home. They are equal with men in dignity and value, but they have a different role during this earthly sojourn. God has given them many different gifts by which they can minister to the church and to the world, but they are not to serve as pastors. The Lord has not given his commands to punish women, but so that they can joyfully serve him according to his will.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Thomas R. Schreiner is James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and the author, most recently, of *Run to Win the Prize: Perseverance in the New Testament* (Crossway, 2010).



BOOK REVIEW:

Radical Womanhood, by Carolyn McCulley

Reviewed by Kristin Jamieson

Carolyn McCulley, *Radical Womanhood: Feminine Faith in a Feminist World*. Moody, 2008. 224 pages. \$14.99

Before I was a Christian, I was an angry feminist.

I railed against the injustices I saw in the world and wrote impassioned papers about how women needed to free ourselves from oppression, but I didn't understand true freedom or how we obtain it.

Then, through a long series of events, the Lord graciously brought me to himself through the gospel. I understood myself to be a sinner saved by grace and I believed that the Bible is true. But other than that I wasn't sure what to do with my now-upended feminism. I didn't understand how the culture had influenced the paths I'd taken, and I needed to learn what the Bible had to say about my life as a woman.

Carolyn McCulley wrote *Radical Womanhood* for women like me. Published in 2008, it came out a few years after I became a Christian and answers all the questions I had at that crucial turning point in my life.

RADICAL WOMANHOOD: A BIBLICAL DIAGNOSIS AND CRITIQUE OF FEMINISM

At its heart, *Radical Womanhood* is a biblical diagnosis and critique of feminism. In response to feminism's claims about the problems women face, McCulley writes that biblical passages such as Genesis 3:16 teach us

that women do have a problem. But it's not men. It's *sin*. Sin warps everything, including the good that God has designed in being a man or a woman. Women sin against men and men sin against women, and everyone sins against God and falls short of His standard of holiness and perfection. Sin is the reason men have oppressed women and women have usurped men. Sin is the reason for the jealousy, selfish ambition, disorder and every vile practice that characterizes false wisdom. Sin is the reason we need a savior. (46-47)

McCulley goes on to explain that because sin is the root problem that feminists are both responding to and perpetuating, the gospel is the only solution:

As a movement, feminism arose because women were being sinned against. I think that is a fair argument. But feminism also arose because women were sinning in response. That's a classic human problem: Sinners tend to sin in response to being sinned against. The glorious hope we have is that Christ came to rescue us from this spiral of sin and sinful response. Only the gospel can accurately diagnose the issues on both sides and offer both the good news of forgiveness for our sins and the restoration of our relationship first with God and then with each other. This is true liberation for women...and for men. (47)

AN EMPATHETIC VOICE

In *Radical Womanhood*, Carolyn McCulley has written the book that she wishes someone had given her when she first became a Christian. She too was saved after being a vocal feminist for all of her adult life. She experienced intense culture shock as she found herself in a church culture that was far different from the culture she had lived in for most of her life.

Not surprisingly, McCulley brings a uniquely empathetic voice to her book. She is a woman who's experienced feminism and its effects personally. But because she also knows even more deeply the grace and mercy of God, she does the difficult work of understanding how feminism has become a dominant cultural force and how that affects us today. Not only that, McCulley capably offers a faithful biblical response.

VALUABLE HISTORICAL WORK AND MODERN TESTIMONIES

Radical Womanhood is a short yet comprehensive survey of feminism in America, going all the way back to its roots in the American Revolution. Her historical work is superb: she takes up the challenge of understanding the different streams of feminism of different eras from Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Betty Freidan and Gloria Steinem to the women embracing the sexually forward "raunch culture" of today. In the course of this study, McCulley traces how feminism has affected our views of sexuality, the home, motherhood, men and women's roles in marriage, and more.

“Many mothers in the church may wonder why they feel ashamed when they tell people they're 'just' stay-at-home moms. These women need to understand the prevailing cultural currents and learn to respond to them biblically.”

Throughout the book McCulley fairly, clearly, and non-combatively assesses key feminist arguments, presenting a positive picture of the Bible's teaching about men and women's roles and relationships. Each chapter ends with a

testimony of a woman who has struggled in the area discussed by the chapter (for example, motherhood, marriage, or sexuality) and explains how God's grace in the gospel transformed these areas of their lives.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS? BASICALLY EVERYONE

Who should read this book? First, any young Christian woman who's never grappled with our culture's dominant assumptions about marriage, motherhood, sexuality, and what it means to be a woman. As McCulley points out, that's actually most young Christian women!

Many women in the church may not have thought through why they were trained to be professionals but not mothers. Many mothers in the church may wonder why they feel ashamed when they tell people they're "just" stay-at-home moms. These women need to understand the prevailing cultural currents and learn to respond to them biblically. This is exactly what McCulley's book equips us to do.

Pastors who want to better understand and shepherd the women in their flock should also read this book, as should male church members who want to better encourage their sisters. Finally, even women who've not been immersed in feminism would benefit from McCulley's careful biblical and historical work. Feminism is the air we breathe, so every Christian, male or female, can benefit from engaging it biblically.

That's why I, like many other women, am deeply grateful for this book. It has helped me understand feminism and respond to it biblically. As a result, it has spurred my growth in biblical womanhood, which truly is a radical way to live.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Kristin Jamieson is a full-time homemaker. She lives on Capitol Hill with her husband, 9Marks assistant editor Bobby Jamieson, and their daughter Rose.



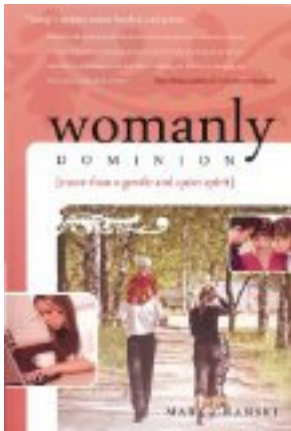
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BOOK REVIEW:

Womanly Dominion: More Than a Gentle and Quiet Spirit

Reviewed by Owen Strachan

Mark Chanski, *Womanly Dominion: More Than a Gentle and Quiet Spirit*. Calvary Press, 2008. 200 pages. \$18.99.

Maureen Dowd, an influential columnist for the *New York Times*, recently suggested that feminism is not working for women. In a piece entitled “Blue Is the New Black,” published in September 2009, she wrote

In the early '70s, breaking out of the domestic cocoon, leaving their mothers' circumscribed lives behind, young women felt exhilarated and bold. But the more women have achieved, the more they seem aggrieved....According to the General Social Survey, which has tracked Americans' mood since 1972, and five other major studies around the world, women are getting gloomier and men are getting happier.

“Is there a calling in which women can find lasting happiness?”

This piece—and the growing body of studies and literature like it—honestly poses the question, Do women in a modern world, faced with complex choices previous generations could not imagine, have to be unhappy? Is there a calling in which women can find lasting happiness?

Mark Chanski, a Reformed Baptist pastor in Holland, Michigan, thinks there is. The author of the excellent *Manly Dominion* (Calvary, 2007), Chanski has recently published *Womanly Dominion*, a companion text to his treatise on

biblical manhood. In 200 crisp, scripturally saturated pages, Chanski charts an engaging course for Christian womanhood in a feminist age.

WOMANLY DOMINION: CHRISTIAN WOMANHOOD IN A FEMINIST AGE

The text's central metaphor is a soccer game. A *futbol* enthusiast, Chanski exhorts women to "play your position" in a cultural climate that encourages rebellion against biblical gender roles.

Chanski grounds his argument in the dominion texts of Genesis 1:27-28, and this dominion-based approach shapes his perspective on biblical womanhood at every turn. Early on, he urges that

Godly women, made in the image of God, must daily tell themselves: "*Win it!*" to the glory of God. [Women] must for the long haul, for the entire game, contest after contest, resolve to put forth maximum effort to *rule* and *subdue* their daily challenges, so help them God. (21)

From the stories he shares, Chanski's own wife seems to fit this mold. At one point, he recounts her constant activity devoted to the welfare of her family:

My bride of 25 years strikingly imitates her subduing God. I constantly stand in appreciative awe of her extensive and detailed calendars and to-do lists. Dianne diligently plots out her week with calculated premeditation. She synchronizes her short term goals with the annual and monthly calendar appointments. Out of this she forges to-do lists for each day of the week. Then she relentlessly crosses out those task challenges one by one....With this vigorous spirit, my wife *subdues* the chaos and overcomes the obstacles before her, creating order and stability in our family's otherwise disheveled world. (29)

I can testify to a similar experience in my own home. As Dianne Chanski and so many other Christian women do, my wife works quietly at a number of thankless tasks, honoring the Lord, refuting by her daily life false stereotypes and straw (wo)men.¹

There is much to chew on in the book, which will be highly useful for parents training daughters, men seeking to learn more about biblical womanhood, and more. Here are a few of the subjects it tackles:

- The inspiring effect of unknown mothers of famous men (42)
- The struggles of single mothers (127)
- Training girls to develop their minds without acquiescing to the vocational expectations of the culture (148)
- A balanced but honest approach to appearance, including Chanski's exhortation to women to take care of their bodies without obsessing over looks (173)
- Helpful words for single women who want to be married (186)
- Commentary on girls and athletics (213)

MATTERS TO THINK OVER

I would point out just a few quibbles. *Womanly Dominion*, in my opinion, would benefit from increased reference to modern commentators who share Chanski's perspective (there are many). Also, while Chanski's sports metaphors may play well with some women, others will struggle to comprehend them.

There is a more significant matter to mention regarding the text. The book needs a stronger grounding in the gospel as the means to achieve the life of womanly dominion. This is not to say that Chanski does not comprehend the importance of the gospel in his writing and ministry. It is also not to say that the book does not reference in numerous places the importance of the gospel, the gracious providence of God, and the role of the Holy Spirit in supernaturally creating a spirit of dominion in women (see, for example, 120-21, 150-51, 182-84, 190-91). The gospel is in this text; the power of God is regularly referenced in this text.

But this already helpful book would grow considerably stronger by weaving a gospel perspective throughout the book, rather than just mentioning it in passing late in the book. It's not enough to preach Genesis 1:27-28. Rather, it needs to be preached from the very beginning through a gospel grid. Maybe something like this: "Let's confess that we haven't fulfilled our dominion. But Christ has, which is great news! You no longer have to justify yourself by being the perfect Proverbs 31 woman. Now, resting entirely in his grace and freedom, let's win it!" Only the gospel creates a spirit of dominion and empowers women to triumph over their sin and discouragement in living to the glory of God. Without such a mini-biblical theology, it is regrettably possible that some women might be intimidated or even feel condemned by Chanski's bold style and frequent imperatives.

I have no doubt that Chanski believes this gospel and grounds his life and ministry in it. And one need not—must not—sacrifice exhortation on the altar of encouragement. But the gospel needs to occupy the center of this text, in terms of both content and hermeneutics.

THE LIFE OF WOMANLY DOMINION: NOT EASY BUT WORTH IT

Chanski nowhere suggests that the life of womanly dominion is easy. He makes it clear that women who are called to marriage, homemaking, and motherhood will face challenges, sometimes significant ones. Raising children is hard. Running a home is difficult, especially with a busy husband. Stresses from a hundred directions can swallow up joy and contentment.

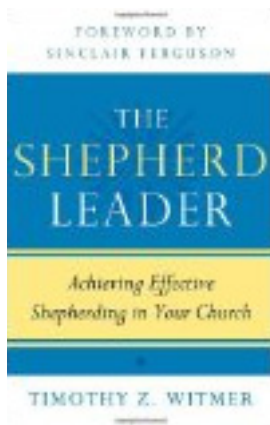
Faced with these realities, Chanski does not mince words. Neither does he sidestep difficult issues such as sports, daycare, and working outside of the home, which Christians sometimes avoid, yet which faithfulness to Scripture calls us to think through. Indeed, the weight of these realities makes it all the more necessary that women constantly remember the vivifying power of the gospel and apply it to their circumstances, their challenges, their temptations.

With the caveats noted above, *Womanly Dominion* is a useful book. It may bless the church most by showing us that it is not choice for its own sake that will bless women and bring them happiness. Only making the right choice—living according to passages such as Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, and Titus 2—can satisfy these ends. If that seems rather simple, perhaps it is because the Lord made it so, in order that women of varied backgrounds, gifts, and times might experience the joy of living for Christ as a woman of dominion through the power of the indwelling Spirit.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Owen Strachan is Instructor of Christian Theology at Boyce College. He is the author of the five-volume *Essential Edwards Collection* (with Doug Sweeney; Moody, 2010).

[1] In fact, this review was developed in close consultation with Mrs. Strachan.



BOOK REVIEW:

The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church

Reviewed by Phil Newton

Timothy Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church*. P&R, 2010. 240 pages. \$17.99.

Do you dream of developing a leadership team that actually shepherds the church yet struggle to know what it looks like and how to do it? If you're a pastor, this dream needs to become a reality!

Timothy Witmer helps turn this dream into reality by offering practical guidance for implementing a shepherding ministry. At the book's outset he gets straight to the point: "The fundamental responsibility of church leaders is to shepherd God's flock" (2-3). In order to help elders fulfill this task, Witmer recommends a comprehensive framework for shepherding and provides help in getting it started. Witmer divides his book into three sections that answer the questions why, what, and how.

WHY HAVE A SHEPHERDING MINISTRY?

In section 1, "Biblical and Historical Foundations," Witmer considers Old and New Testament models that exemplify shepherding. Jesus is "the consummate shepherd" who "provides for the comprehensive care of his sheep," (30) demonstrated in his sending the disciples to "the lost sheep of 'the house of Israel'" (Matt. 10:6). Witmer argues that the New Testament pattern of plurality and parity in church leadership grew out of Jesus' compassion for and mission to his sheep (39, 41).

Historical implications loom large in Witmer’s perspective on church leadership. Chapter 3 surveys the early practice of apostles appointing bishops (presbyters) and deacons (46-47) to serve the church. Yet, Witmer notes, seeds of hierarchy were planted in the second century that came to fruition in the third century through the work of Cyprian that shifted church leadership from plurality to monarchy. Much later, John Wycliffe called for the church to return to the two offices of presbyter (elder) and deacon. Then, during the Reformation, John Calvin divided presbyters into doctors, pastors, and elders. Following on Calvin’s heels, John Knox codified the distinction between ruling and teaching elders, which became the standard Presbyterian position.

As I see it, the one weakness in the book is found at just this juncture. Instead of returning to the simplicity of a plurality of elders (who both teach and rule) and the diaconate, Witmer upholds the distinction of ruling and teaching elders, making some aspects of his approach unpalatable to those who do not see a hard distinction between teaching and ruling elders, especially those who hold to congregational polity. However, this hardly diminishes the book’s value since Witmer emphasizes that the church’s spiritual leaders, by whatever title they are called, “have both the *right* and *responsibility* to exercise shepherding care” (75).

WHAT DOES SHEPHERDING MINISTRY INVOLVE?

Section 2 (chapters 5-8) introduces the main focus of the book: a matrix for establishing what is involved in ministry in both public/corporate (macro) and personal/relational (micro) settings. Witmer explains that shepherding involves knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting. To practically facilitate *knowing* the sheep, Witmer recommends that elders contact the members under their charge monthly.

The macro-level responsibility of *feeding* involves overseeing the public ministry of the Word, which is best implemented through “systematic expository preaching of the Scriptures” (142). Micro-feeding is personal equipping ministry, which runs the gamut from “small groups to personal discipleship,” while focusing on fathers (146-149). Macro-*leading* involves worship, education, fellowship, and evangelism, while micro-leading includes modeling godliness in personally walking with the Lord, leading one’s family, and ministering in the church (160-166). Macro-*protecting* the flock is “built on the foundation of public warnings from the Word of God” (171), while micro-protecting seeks to guard the church’s back door by addressing issues that could prompt people to leave. Micro-protecting also involves monitoring church attendance in order to care for the flock one by one.

HOW DO YOU PUT IT ALL TOGETHER?

The closing three chapters (9-11) offer practical guidance. First, Witmer identifies seven “essential elements of an effective shepherding ministry”: it must be biblical, systematic, comprehensive, relational, functional, accountable, and prayerful.

“This book is a must-read for pastors and elders.”

Second, leaders must be developed and trained. He argues against a rotating system of elders, adding John Murray’s “Arguments Against Term Eldership” as an appendix. Witmer also rightly explains that plural eldership provides “a natural means of developing new churches,” with elders and members who live in the same neighborhood forming the core of a church plant (238).

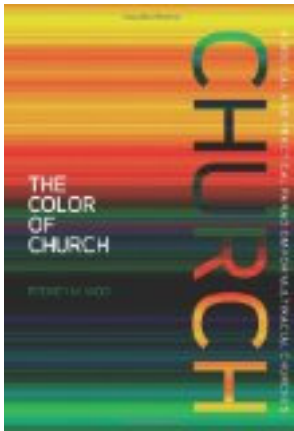
Third, the final chapter reviews the book's contents as an implementation guide while offering helpful steps in preparing a congregation for a shepherding ministry. An appendix provides charts and report sheets to facilitate shepherding.

REQUIRED READING FOR ELDERS

I found *The Shepherd Leader* so helpful that I'm asking all of our elders and pastoral interns to read it. Even churches without a plurality of elders will find guidance for implementing an effective shepherding strategy within their polity. More importantly, church leaders who follow Witmer's thoughtful guidance will care better for the flock entrusted to them. This book is a must-read for pastors and elders.

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BOOK REVIEW:

The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches

Reviewed by Juan Sanchez

Rodney M. Woo, *The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches*. B&H Academic, 2009. 304 pages. \$24.99

“**H**ow did you do it?”

That is the question first time visitors to High Pointe Baptist Church often ask after observing the ethnic diversity present in our worship gatherings.

The question assumes both the rarity of multi-ethnic churches and the reality that as sinful humans, we do not naturally gravitate toward people different from ourselves. In our “can do” culture, the question also assumes that there must be some method or program that would enable a church to transition toward ethnic diversity. In our case we can only point to the grace of a sovereign and gracious Lord. Yet what is sometimes lost on our members is that our Lord works through various means to accomplish his will.

In his recent book *The Color of Church* Rodney Woo serves the church well by arguing that God’s vision all along has been to gather to himself a multi-ethnic assembly and that our earthly assemblies should reflect the diverse heavenly assembly of Revelation 7 (section 1). As he makes his case, Woo warns of the impending obstacles in the transition toward multi-ethnic ministry (section 2). He also exposes some of the means which the Lord used to transition Wilcrest Baptist Church in Alief (Southwest Houston), Texas from an all white congregation to a diverse multi-ethnic congregation whose membership represents over 44 nations (section 3).

A NUMBER OF KEY STRENGTHS

This book has a number of key strengths. The first I'll mention is that Rodney Woo reminds us just how much our flesh fights against God's vision for humanity, which is why the move toward multi-ethnic ministry has to be intentional. Woo also grounds his entire vision and approach to multi-ethnic ministry in Scripture as his sole authority, providing a biblical grounding for God's vision for unity within diversity. This biblical vision allows us to look into God's work at Wilcrest Baptist Church in order to understand better not only how difficult it is to bring together all peoples around Christ and his gospel, but also how glorious it is to reflect God's image by gathering a multi-ethnic, multicultural assembly.

Woo also rightly asserts that leadership and worship are key issues in a multi-ethnic church. Since church leadership should reflect the makeup of the congregation, some churches may be tempted to select leaders based on ethnicity rather than the biblical qualifications. Woo guards against this by explicitly grounding the qualifications for leadership in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 (chapter 11). Likewise with worship: instead of allowing felt needs and preferences to rule the day, Woo provides a biblical and theological understanding of worship within which multicultural worship must be practiced (chapter 10). When you have a clear, biblical basis for worship, as Woo does, then the secondary issues are placed in proper perspective.

Woo guides the reader step by step on a lifelong journey toward racial reconciliation and preparation for the ultimate worship assembly portrayed in Revelation 7. What I appreciate about Woo as our guide is that he is willing to receive anyone wherever they are and exhort them to progress forward at their own pace (12). Woo wisely and humbly warns that in some churches, the pursuit of a multicultural, multi-ethnic ministry may actually be more destructive than beneficial (262). However, Woo encourages members of those churches to educate themselves through reading about other cultures and ethnicities and building friendships with people from other cultures and ethnicities. Finally, Woo admits that the process will not be easy, so one must endure (263-64).

A FEW WEAKNESSES

This first weakness must be qualified. It reflects more on the publisher and does not in any way diminish Woo's helpful work. The only reason I mention it is because *The Color of Church* is published by B&H Academic. Since the book is an academic monograph, one may expect thorough exegetical and theological development of the biblical basis for multi-ethnic ministry. Yet while Woo's biblical foundation was correct, the exegetical theology behind it was assumed rather than developed. Instead of an academic monograph B&H has produced a very helpful and practical guide toward multi-ethnic ministry.

“ If our churches should reflect the make up of our community and our community is ethnically diverse, then ‘What are we doing to cast the vision for multi-ethnic ministry?’ ”

As for the book itself, I was uncomfortable with Woo allegorizing Israel's Exodus from Egypt to the journey out of the bondage of racism and into the Promised Land of racial reconciliation. The Red Sea and Jordan crossings were redemptive historical events with salvific implications which displayed the saving grace of God among his people. These redemptive historical events pointed forward to new covenant realities in Christ. To apply these crossings to the real but difficult problems a church may face, such as the crossing of racial barriers, misdirects and clouds what the redemptive historical events foreshadowed.

A BIBLICAL PUSH OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONES

Nevertheless, Rodney Woo has served us well by providing a biblical basis for multi-ethnic ministry and in chronicling for us the unfolding story of how the vision for multi-ethnic ministry unfolded at Wilcrest Baptist Church. Woo unapologetically grounds his proposal in Scripture and the Lord has honored that foundation at Wilcrest.

Also, Woo has served us well by pushing us out of our comfort zones. This book should be read by all pastors and lay leaders, particularly those who find themselves in diverse communities. Woo forces us to ask difficult questions: “Does our church reflect the ethnic make up of our community? If not, then why not?” “Is the multi-ethnic ministry approach just another model among others like ‘Purpose-Driven’ or is it God’s desire?” If our churches should reflect the make up of our community and our community is ethnically diverse, then “What are we doing to cast the vision for multi-ethnic ministry?”

May the Lord grant us his vision for his church and the courage to pursue it.

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