

Significant Women In Scripture **The Word on Women Teaching:**

What the word reveals to us, in these examples from the Old and New Testament, is that there are times when God steps outside of the normal, established hierarchy for leadership.. but this is always for HIS own purposes.

When we look into the scriptures about leadership structure within the church 1 Timothy 2:12 is pretty clear when he says: do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. It is, therefore, important to understand what those requirements are before we can comprehend the scenarios where God would elect to step outside of them.

First, a leader is called into that position by God. How do we know if we are being called by God to fulfill a role? In the book *Leading and Loving It*, the authors begin by pointing out what a calling is NOT. It is not mimicry of someone we esteem. It is an easy trap to fall into, we see someone that we hold in high regard and we want to be just like them. We can not copy someone else's calling in our own lives. A calling is not motivated by guilt or conviction into leadership. Others can try to instill their opinions in us or make us feel guilty if we turn down a leadership position. If we are motivated by others, not God, then stepping into leadership is not part of His calling on our lives. This can be really tricky when you are a person who has a servants heart, when others speak into your life about what you SHOULD do, and try to guide you by how they THINK God is trying to move you. We can find ourselves listening to others versus listening to God. And, generally speaking, God's calling is not going to be easy or comfortable. God wants us, as leaders, to rely on HIS strength, provision, and direction. It is a leap of faith. A calling will take you out of your comfort zone. (*Leading and Loving It*, by Lori Wilhite & Brandi Wilson)

For women, we are not exempt from the calling. In Titus 2, the scriptures charge women with teaching younger women, children, etc.; but our calling is what specifies that charge. Different women are going to have different spiritual gifts, the calling is what directs those gifts.

Second, the scriptures reference character traits of those who are in leadership. In some instances these are leaders who may have had a much different past, but through the life changing power of Jesus Christ, they have been made into a new creation. In 1 Timothy 3:1-7 Paul points out that leadership is a noble task, those called into leadership should be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

I'd like to take a moment to point out how these attributes parallel to the Proverbs 31 woman. Paul says that leadership is a noble position, the Proverbs 31 woman is considered a noble woman who can be hard to find. Paul points out that in order to care for God's church, there is an expectation that a leader will successfully manage their own household first. Part of what qualified the Proverbs 31 as noble woman is that she was noted as being a good steward and manager of the home. A woman called into leadership, is going to embrace these same qualities.

Third, God equips those who are called into His service to do the jobs required of them. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same

God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11) And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. (1 Corinthians 12:28-31)

One of the things I have learned over the years is that women have some really extraordinary gifts, unique to being women. The level of compassion and empathy that some women have, is mind blowing to me. It's not a gift I have, not in that capacity, and I am truly inspired by it. I admire their gift, but I don't forsake my own in an attempt to acquire something similar. I am uniquely and wonderfully made, knitted in the womb of my mother, by a God who knows the very number of hairs on my head.

Fourth, God gifts these leaders & teachers to the body to equip others to do Kingdom work. Teachers and leaders are not above others, but servants of others. We are commissioned to share the word of God, to lead his people... not to rule over them. Ephesians 4:11-16 reminds us of this goal: And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.

To recap that:

- Leaders and teachers are called into their position by God.
- Leaders and teachers display distinct characteristics that identify them as leaders.
- Leaders and teachers are given gifts by God to use in His work.
- Leaders and teachers are given as a gift to the body of believers to serve and train.

Paul tells us in 1 Timothy that women are not to be teachers of men, but Titus 2:3-5 specifically instructs the older women to teach the younger ones. That teaching goes beyond just years of age, but also into years of experience. We are called to teach not just from wisdom, but also by setting a good, solid example for others to follow. Women are even noted to be able to influence their husbands simply through their gentle and quiet spirit!

How, then, do we reconcile women in teaching roles historically and within the church today? When and how does God bend or break those guidelines established from the beginning of Genesis when God created man, and then woman to be his helpmeet?

God created women as image bearers, equal in importance to God, but different in the role they would play in furthering his Kingdom. Men, in authority, have a broader influence. They are held in esteem, respected, and listened to. Women, however gain their authority in smaller relational groups. It is

within the community of women, friendship, that we have our greater influence. We are an instrument of God in those relationships when we reveal Christ through our thoughts, actions and words.

To begin to understand why God would bend his rules, we have to recognize a few things.

- 1) We recognize that God is God, He can and will do what ever pleases Himself and forwards his plan.
- 2) We recognize that before we are WOMAN, we are God's CREATION. We are a direct image bearer of God, first and foremost. I am not a woman, who also is a Christian. I am a Christian, who is also a woman. My allegiance to God supersedes my gender. Therefore, it is entirely within the nature of God to call a woman into a leadership position, at HIS WILL.
- 3) We recognize that women called into leadership or teaching will have the same character expectations as a man would.
- 4) We recognize that God has a very specific calling for women in leadership, and that will be the primary destination, which is to lead other women.
- 5) We recognize that when God has called a woman into leadership over men, it was for a very specific purpose and for a very specific time.

There may be occasions where there is a woman in your church that has more experience or education on a particular subject than any of the men do. If God needs for that subject to be addressed, God will call her to that role as teacher, albeit temporarily.

If you live in a community that is just being reached by the gospel, it may be women who are currently finding salvation in the Lord. In this case, God will use these women to continue the spreading of the Good News until such a time that God appoints a man to lead the community.

- 6) We recognize that when women have been called into leadership, they have and are doing so under the authority of God, their husband if they are married, and their pastor if they are not married.

A very popular women's speaker, Beth Moore, spoke to this point recently at one of her women's events. She noted that it was her Pastor that affirmed her calling to teach, everything she writes is under the direction of God, read and approved of by her Pastor and her husband. Before each speaking event, her husband prays over her and the event. Her speaking schedule is balanced with her home life, because she respects his role as the leader of their marriage & follows his guidance. She shared that while God has gifted her with teaching, it is something she does with the support and approval of her husband, and while she may be the voice, they are serving together as a committed team and she submits to his leadership. Perhaps this is the type of relationship Priscilla had with her husband?

Interestingly, when you see a Beth Moore event or bible study being promoted, it is usually within the scope of Women's Ministry programs or marketed toward women. Yet, there will be men found amongst the audience or sitting in studies. In fact, every time we offer anything from Beth Moore at my home church, inevitably there will be a man that asks if he can attend. This brings me to my last point,

- 7) We recognize in those occasions where men are present for the teaching of a woman, it is done by their choice. The men have elected to listen to this teacher, it has not been forced upon them.

In the Old Testament, when Deborah was raised as a judge, the scriptures reveal that Deborah was considered wise, a good steward and a good leader. There was no opposition to her in this role. There will be times, where men may recognize that God has presented them with a woman who is worthy of listening to. The scriptures are full of wise women, worth listening to. That hasn't stopped, God still imparts His wisdom on men women alike... as you will see as this course progresses.

There is a church in my local community, and every year on Mother's Day it is the Pastor's wife who delivers the service message. The Pastor, her husband, recognizes that in the realm of motherhood, she has greater understanding of her fellow sisters in Christ than he does. She knows what is like to be a mother, the beauty and difficulty that can accompany that role. She has been through the trenches, counseled and loved. She has compassion for those who have lost a child, because she has an understanding of that loss that is unique to womanhood. She can speak to their heart in a way he can't.

As we continue through this course on women's ministry, be encouraged by the calling God has put on the heart of women to minister to other women. Make no mistake, God is calling and equipping women for this role of teacher and leader. In recent conferences I have attended, you can sense it... women desire a deeper understanding of the Word of God, and God is calling women to meet that desire.

The most encouraging part about women ministering to other women, is that God can use us in a multitude of ways. Teaching and leading is not confined to standing before a podium in front of a room full of people. In the next segment of this course, we are going to look at organized "Women's Ministry" and how it is evolving and the call that God is putting in the heart of the women He created.