

A Women's Ministry of Purpose **Supporting Your Church Mission Statement**

A women's ministry is first and foremost under the authority of God, and act as representatives of their home church to the body & the community. Every event, bible study, program, or action we take should be centered on God's redemptive message to his people. The Great Commission commands us to go forth and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 2:16-20) You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.(Acts 1:8)

In order to answer the call that God has put upon as witnesses to the world, women's ministry must be centered on God. In the book “Word-filled Women's Ministry”, Kathleen Neilson addresses it this way:

“Women's ministry must be first and foremost grounded in the Word. We must not start with the needs of women – although we must get to those needs. As in the case of any church ministry, in the women's ministry we must start with the Word of God at the heart.”

God's word has a purpose: Isaiah 55:11 reads: “so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

In our previous topic, regarding obstacles in ministry, one of the first points that we addressed was the women's ministry had shifted from spiritual to relational. Kathleen continues, in her book, to say:

“Many may be noticing a growing general tendency these days to focus on our own personal experience in our thinking and our speaking – even in our Bible study.”

She points out that part of the problem may be that our feelings toward the Bible are that it is a textbook in theology that we have to learn, dry and academic; and that we'd rather do something warm and personal. This has created two distinct groups.

- Those who are warm, welcoming and personal.
- Those who are academic and want to study the text.

Not only have I seen this distinction, I'm ashamed to say I have even perpetrated it unknowingly. Years ago, sitting in a women's ministry meeting, we were discussing some upcoming conferences. I can recall the words coming out of my mouth, as I suggested that we should offer two conferences. I stated that one was more worship & inspiration, and the other was much more academic and cerebral. I suggested that the latter option wouldn't appeal to the majority of our women. But those who would be interested, would greatly benefit from it.

How foolish was I! I was underestimating the women in my church. I think back on that error often, and wonder why I wasn't willing to encourage and challenge them? If we don't think women are capable of deeper study and understanding, how would anyone else? And, if we don't challenge them, they will never have cause to rise to the occasion. When we challenge our women, we inspire them to learn more, know more, be more and do more.

This is the purpose of women's ministry: to engage, encourage and equip women to do the good work God has called of them. We do them a disservice when we underestimate their capability or even interest. There may be a woman sitting in your church right now, God has put the fire in her heart, but she lacks the confidence. She is waiting for someone to say: I see this in you. I know you can. I'll

help you get there.

When we understand this Godly purpose of teaching women the Word, equipping them to teach others, and helping them identify and use their spiritual gifts.... we are ready then to look at how to do so through the mission and vision of our home churches. Our women's ministry becomes a tool of the greater church vision, which is part of God's purpose for His people.

Most churches have some sort of vision or mission statement, that is know by the congregation. There is usually a short sentence or two, or a piece of scripture. We use the vision or mission statement as a a tool to measure and refine our church message, budget, community involvement, missions, and activities. These vision or mission statements are then generally broken down into some action points, and these points are generally well known by the church body.

For the purpose of this course, I am going to reference the vision and mission statement of a church in my community.

Our Mission Statement:

Our mission is to connect people to the life changing power of Jesus Christ.

Our Action Points:

- *Connect People to Christ*
- *Connect People to the Church*
- *Connect People to the Community*

We see these action points as a circle, one leading into the next.

If you knew only the Mission Statement, if you knew only these action points, you could say that the women's ministry of this church would have free reign to do just about anything. Yet, for a time period, there was quite a bit of tension between the church leadership and the women's ministry. The women's ministry had a lot of great ideas, but they felt the church leadership wasn't supporting them.

What wasn't realized at the time, was that the women's ministry had become siloed. Siloed ministries are ones that are compartmentalized, doing their own things vs. being part of a larger vision. The women's ministry team had great ideas, very kingdom worthy ideas. However, they were not inline with the greater vision of the church..

What was lacking was clear communication between the ministry team, and the church leadership about the Pastor's over all vision for the church, a vision that God had entrusted him with. The Pastor and other leadership of the church were aware of this vision in a more detailed way than the church body was. They knew the practical, every day, details on how they were going to accomplish those action steps. So, each time a ministry presented ideas to the church leadership, they evaluated those ideas against the overall vision of the church. If it didn't fit, it wasn't approved.

Initially there were a lot of assumptions about why things were not approved and hurt feelings. The lack of communication between the ministry team and the church leadership, regarding the overall vision of the church, kept them isolated from each other. When the Pastor finally explained the more detailed vision of the church to the women's ministry team, everything changed. At that point the women's ministry team began to take a new posture of, "how can we help."

It is very important that Pastors and church staff/leadership convey to the sub-ministries the overall vision of the church. Not just the mission statement and action points, but the deeper overall call. What is this vision, what is the long term plan for the church, and what is the plan to get there.

All ministries within the church should be working together to forward the mission of the church, and the churches work together to forward the purpose of God.

Satan wants ministry to fail, he wants discord, division and miscommunication. Sioled ministries are a perfect opportunity to cause havoc within the body of believers. Each is working from their own ministry vision, instead of a unified vision for the body as a whole.

When we are united in purpose, our goals are the same. Instead of competing against each other for calendar time or use of the building, or demanding what we think we need our ministry to be doing... we are instead working together for the common cause. We put the church vision, ahead of our own. We work as a team of ministries, instead of sioled ones.

You may be thinking at this point, if we are working as one united ministry in the first place... why do we even need a women's ministry?

In previous presentations in this course, we have addressed the biblical support of women in ministry. Women have been used historically by God in the advancement of his people and in the advancement of the gospel. Scriptures support that women are to teach other women. Women sat at the feet of Jesus to hear and learn. Sure, we can do these things without a formal women's ministry program, but there are valid reasons to minister to women in this capacity. More so now than in the past.

There is a great book on women's ministry by Sharon Jaynes, "Building an Effective Women's Ministry", in which Jaynes get right to the heart of the matter.

First, she points out that women in modern times are disconnected from community. They no longer live in the same towns as their relatives and generations before them. As the population became more transient, we traveled further from home for jobs or even just a change in scenery. We lack the support of family that previous generations benefited from. We are not as connected and dependent on our community, our relationships with our neighbors has changed. We may wave and say hello, but we are rarely inviting them over for coffee or dinner. Welcome mats have been replaced by stickers with warnings to not approach because we have an alarm system.

In a time, where we are connected by technology, women are feeling more and more... alone. We want to be known, but we fear rejection, authenticity, and frankly we are pulled in so many directions that we may not even have the time to invest in relationship building.

Women have had a cultural pull put upon them to be everything and do everything. Balance a job while being super mom, being a good wife, and a good friend. Perfectly detailed birthday parties, hand made gifts, and children involved in numerous activities and sports. Women are folding under the pressure of stress, as depression and anxiety are on the rise. We are failing to retreat and rest.

Jaynes points out, *"Throughout scripture we see how God placed women together in relationships to encourage one another and provide a place of retreat. Just as God sent Mary to Elizabeth and Ruth to Naomi, He continues to place women together for mutual support, accountability and friendship. That's why we need women's ministry in our churches today. Women are the very heartbeat of the*

home, community and church, and many are in desperate need of resuscitation.”

This is why an effective women's ministry, of purpose, is needed.... community. But, that community must be grounded in the word of God. We start there, and through God we are compelled into relationship with each other. God hears the cries of the hearts of his daughters, His word will answer those cries. We need to bring the hurting to the foot of the cross, starting in Genesis 1:1... in the beginning.

Pastor John Stittema wrote to this about his church women's ministry:

“Women's ministry in any Bible-believing church is increasingly important in today's world.. That's true not only to provide connection points, bible studies and service opportunities, but especially because ministry by women to women is one of the most critical ways in which the Lord's church can break into lives of unsaved people in our culture. My own recent history as a senior pastor convinced me that a dynamic, outward looking, and fresh women's ministry is absolutely essential to the broader kingdom impact of the church's life. Those years of my experience also convinced me, to my shame, that I had spent far too little time encouraging and empowering women for just that sort of ministry. “

He shared examples of how many women, who had various life experiences, were hesitant to speak to male leadership because their experience has caused a large distrust of men. He continued:

“Fact is, we had a women's ministry. But it was the ministry model that had been developed many decades earlier in the denomination in which I was then serving, a model that presupposed healthy families and stay at home moms. And that model of ministry was really unprepared, as well, for the needs of the women God was bringing into our church. Almost all of them worked full time,. Most of them came from broken homes or had been raised in broken families. A large percentage of them had a history of some sort of abuse in their backgrounds.”

He was a wise man who realized that women have specific needs that are best understood and addressed by other women.

The good news for women's ministry is the reciprocal relationship that will build in the church. When the women's ministry is supporting the church's vision, the church will support the women's ministry in the unique needs of reaching of women in relation to that vision. It is also important to check in with the church leadership often on the status of that vision. Each year may present a new need or a little course correction as God refines the vision; ministry must stand firm in the destination of God's calling, but flexible enough to adjust to the process of getting there.