

## **Building A Women's Ministry** **~ Where Do We Begin ~**

At this point you might be thinking: *“Wow, this is a lot of information for a women's ministry team to use. But, we don't even have one yet! How do I get one started?”* This, is the information you have been waiting for. For this portion of the course, we are going to assume that you do not have a formal women's ministry in place, although you might have some bible studies or small groups. A formal women's ministry encompasses more than just study groups, because it serves a purpose of ministering to women. Women are uniquely different, and their needs are going to be different. We won't minister to every woman in the same way. Thus, a women's ministry becomes the overseeing administration of multiple avenues to minister to women, in different ways, as the occasion fits.

To begin the process of starting the ministry from scratch, you are going to need to come up with a plan, meet with your Pastor, and define your ministry vision. The order that you do these first steps in, will largely be dependent on where you are at in the process already. If you have been thinking about women's ministry for quite some time, you may already have the vision for the ministry. Perhaps you know your Pastor well enough to know that you should discuss it with him, before you even start to plan anything. It's possible that you may even want to build your team and have their input on the vision and purpose of the ministry, instead of deciding it all on your own. You might have already been talking with a group of women about starting a women's ministry. In which case you practically have your leadership team in place, before you even got approval to start the ministry.

While the order may vary, from church to church, the points are pretty universal. You need to create an action plan, get the approval of your Pastor, and have clear vision of the ministry purpose.

### Create an Action Plan:

*[] Pray about the ministry – Is this right for the church? Are you called to lead it, or just get it started? What is God laying on your heart as the overall vision for the ministry?*

*[] Approach Your Pastor – you will want your Pastor's support for the ministry, especially if you are hoping to get a budget.*

### *Helpful Tips:*

- *Men are performance based beings, their job is to provide for their family. In fact, when a man's performance is compromised (due to age, injury, etc) and he can't provide; it impacts his view of himself in a negative way. This also plays into how men will view projects and ministries, they want to understand that the ministry is going to perform and has a purpose; it has a goal... there is an expected result. Therefore, when meeting with your pastor, it is good to have an idea of what you expect the performance and the result of the ministry to be. And, if you are unsure, ask for his input.*
  - *The Women's Ministry will be supporting small groups, developing new leaders.*
  - *The Women's Ministry will be an outreach to the community, to bring women and families into the church.*
- *Men need respect. The Pastor is the leader of the church, and therefore you should always approach him with the respect he is due. Schedule a meeting with him, share your desire to start a women's ministry, listen and respond to his questions (without interrupting), and be willing to compromise. You can't walk into the Pastor's office and*

*demand a ministry with budget. I have spoken with Pastors, who have experienced church members who treat them as their paid employee, because they give financially to the church. Therefore, it is best to set yourself apart from that mindset from the very beginning. There is a difference between requesting and demanding.*

- *Men want to know that their vision and work is supported. Acknowledge his headship of the church, share your calling, and incorporate how you feel this ministry will support the overall vision of the church. Let him know that the Women's Ministry would be a tool to support the vision God gave him for the church.*
- *Pastors are accountable to God for how they shepherd His church, steward His money, and move forward His vision for church. Therefore, Pastors are going to be more concerned about how the individual ministries fit into that larger scope. All things are permissible, but not all things are beneficial. (1 Cor 10:23) If your Pastor is not on board, it is acceptable to ask why, but not to argue. You can also ask him if it would be permissible to discuss the topic again in a few months. What you might find is that once you understand why he turned down the idea, after a few months have passed, you may be able to re-present it with some changes that then fit the scope of the church.*

One thing that most of us can agree on, is that women and men communicate very differently. I was working along with a ministry where there were a lot of communication failures. The women were not clearly defining their ministry vision. The Pastor was turning down their requests. However, they never took the time to sit down and discuss it. The women felt like they had no support from the Pastor. The Pastor felt the women were not supporting the vision of the church, and just wanted fun activities. The women wanted to hear “YES!” to their great ideas, and they couldn't understand why there would be such a problem with it. No, after no, after no.... and you ended up with a group of women who were hurt. They felt like their ministry was just being tolerated, not supported. This created a lot of tension in the group and towards the Pastor. The ministry was on the cusp of being shut down completely... when the light bulb went off. 1) Another woman from whom they sought counsel reminded them that the women's ministry was there to support the church, not the other way around. 2) The Pastor's wife helped him realize that he couldn't assume they understood his reasoning behind the declined requests. When both parties realized this, it shifted the communication into a more positive route and the ministry is being repaired. I have witnessed multiple situations where entire ministries were almost shut down due to poor communication.

We can't approach our Pastors demanding to be heard, demanding explanations, or to get our own way. What we can do is approach them from a place of humble sincerity. Sometimes, simply rewording our questions is just enough. Instead of a demanding “why can't we?”... a softer question is “if not this, then what would you like to see the women's ministry offering?”. Through our softer questions, where we are expressing a desire to understand better... you may find the answers you are looking for. You might also find the areas where compromise can be established. If the Pastor is uncertain about your greater women's ministry plans, perhaps you can find a smaller starting point.

Also a great way to make headway with your Pastor is to covet his opinions, not just about the types of activities the ministry will offer... but ask if there are any women in the church he would suggest for the leadership team. Ask what results he would like to see from the ministry. I would also strongly address, once you get approval, have a meeting to discuss the ministry boundaries. We shouldn't assume that we are given full approval to do whatever we want. Find out if he has anything he wants included in the ministry (or the main focus of), if he has any conditions for fundraising, if there will be a budget and if not what would need to happen in order to get one. Ask him about how often you can offer fellowship events, if he has concerns about hiring in speakers, or if there are any study materials

he does (or does not) want you to be using. Finally, get clarification on who is overseeing the ministry. Is it the Pastor? An associate Pastor? An Elder? It might even be a Pastor or Elder's wife.

*[] Define your vision or purpose for the ministry: What is your mission statement or scripture? You may wish to do this once you have your leadership team in place. However, that is a choice you (and possibly your Pastor) will have to make. There are occasions, in order to properly align the vision of the ministry to the church, where it is important for the vision to be established with the Pastor. In fact, it might be the only way you get the ministry approved. This can aid in building your leadership team, because it will help you identify which leadership positions you will need to facilitate that vision. Additionally, it can help women you are approaching for leadership positions have a clear impression of the ministry before they sign on to be apart of it.*

There may be a few additional steps required of you in this process, that may not be required of others. A friend of mine attended a church where the Pastor didn't make any of the decisions about sub-ministries in the church. They had a "committee" and if you wanted to start a new ministry, you would have to attend a business meeting. Once there you would pitch your ministry idea, they may vote on it right then or vote at the next business meeting. I attended a church when I was younger, where we voted on everything as a church body. If someone wanted to start a ministry in the church, it would be mentioned in the Sunday Bulletin, then the next Sunday you'd find your ballot to vote. In cases like these, be prepared to wait. You may get a chance to address the decision makers, or you may not. If you are going to speak, be well prepared. If you won't get a chance to publicly address it at the business meeting, put your thoughts into an email and send it to the committee in advance. If the church is going to vote, make sure you know when it will happen and talk with influential people in the church to garner their support.

If you have a Pastor who is generally not inclined toward sub-ministries, female leadership, or you attend a church that has had a bad history in regards to women's ministry, equip yourself with knowledge. Pray that God will soften his (or their) hearts towards women's ministry. Understand what the bible say about women in leadership. (We're going to address that very specifically toward the end of this course). Grab a book or two on women's ministry, ministering to women, women in leadership, etc. and do some research. Have a well thought out plan, that has an overview of your vision for the ministry that doesn't go into overwhelming detail. Talk to other women's ministry leaders and learn from them, get examples of the benefits of women's ministry. Gently encourage him to search the scriptures and prayerfully consider the possibility of the ministry.

Ultimately, if you are praying throughout this process, and if this is what God is calling you to lead in the church, it will happen. However, it may take time. Use that time to regroup, rethink and prepare yourself for future discussions.

Do NOT gripe and mumble about not getting your way, speak ill about your pastor to others in the church, or complain to his wife trying to get her to change his mind. Do NOT get demanding, threaten to leave the church, actually leave the church, or rally up a group of people to gang up against your Pastor in order to get your way. Do NOT give up hope. Do NOT stop praying. Do NOT stop preparing. Wait upon the Lord! (Ps. 27:14)