

THE VALUE OF WOMEN IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Jace Hudson

Lead Pastor, Covenant of Grace Church (Copley, OH)

While Scripture clearly teaches that God has given men the responsibility to lead in the home and church (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Tim. 2:12; 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9), this does not mean that in all other matters men and women are interchangeable. They are not. To assume so is a very egalitarian idea.

The project of egalitarianism has been to file down the uniqueness of the sexes. Equality *for* all has become equality *of* all. Our culture argues that men and women are equal in worth and in every other way. Women can go off to war while men stay home and raise the kids. The two sexes are interchangeable. But think about that. If men and women are interchangeable, neither is indispensable. Said another way, if the two are interchangeable, either is dispensable.

This is where egalitarianism leads, but complementarianism goes somewhere altogether different. We believe men and women are inherently equal in worth but that each uniquely contributes to the health and fruitfulness of the church. Yes, God has given men the responsibility to lead, but leadership doesn't mean "superior," and leadership cannot do it all. Men cannot do it all! Women in all their glorious complementarity are needed to bring their unique gifts and indispensable contributions. The church *needs* a feminine touch, and this makes women as equally valuable as men are to its mission.

Celebrating Countless Contributions

In general terms, much could be said about the invaluable contribution of women to Christianity. Examples in Scripture abound. There were the women who traveled with Jesus and provided generously for his mission (Luke 8:2-3). Paul commended Phoebe as a trusted and valued helper, Prisca as a hostess of a house church, Mary as a hard worker, Junia as a fellow prisoner, and Tryphaena and Tryphosa as workers in the Lord (Rom. 16:1-16). Women were known in their communities for acts of kindness and charity (Acts 9:36-42), they nurtured future leaders in the church (Acts 18:2; 2 Tim. 1:5), and women provided hospitality for house churches (Acts 16:40). Scripture demonstrates how women worked in various ways for the cause of the gospel, laboring side by side with Paul as fellow workers (Phil. 4:2-3).

In his excellent book, *Men and Women in the Church*, Kevin DeYoung stresses the many ways women can make a profound and lasting impact in the church:

Women can minister to the sick, the dying, the mentally impaired, and the physically handicapped. They can share their faith, share their resources, and open their home to strangers. They can write, counsel, mentor, organize, administrate, design, plan, and come alongside others.

They can pray.

They can serve on committees of the church. They can come alongside the elders and deacons in difficult situations involving women or those needing a woman's perspective.

They can minister to single moms, new moms, breast cancer survivors, and abuse victims. They can bring meals, sew curtains, send care packages, and throw baby showers. They can do sports ministries, lead women's Bible studies, teach systematic theology to other women, and plan mission trips. They can teach children. They can raise their kids to the glory of God, and they can embrace singleness as a gift from God.

I pray for women who love to cook and quilt and work in the nursery. I pray for women (not the male elders, but women) to counsel almost-divorced wives and mentor young ladies and teach the Bible and good doctrine to other women (oh, how we need women who love the Bible and good doctrine!).

Women can help widows; they can care for those struggling with the remorse of abortion; and they can show the glory of the gospel in racial and ethnic reconciliation. And they can do all of the above cross-culturally in unreached places and with the unwanted peoples of the world. In other words, there are ten thousand things women can be doing in ministry. Pastors especially need to make this point abundantly and repetitively clear.⁷¹

This is indeed a point that pastors must make abundantly and repetitively clear. DeYoung also encourages pastors to have women share publicly in appropriate ways:

As a general rule, I believe most complementarian pastors could do a better job finding biblically allowable ways to use women in church gatherings to pray, to relate a story of God's grace, or to share an encouraging word.⁷²

⁷¹ Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 94-95.

⁷² Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 62.

Among the many ways women are valuable in the life and mission of the church (and there are many!), I want to highlight three commonly overlooked and undervalued contributions found in particular callings and seasons of life.

The Invaluable Contribution of Wives and Mothers

Healthy churches are built with healthy families, and for wives and mothers, a woman's ministry is uniquely focused on nurturing and serving her family. We see this right at the start of Scripture when Eve was made for the specific purpose of being Adam's "helper" (Gen. 2:18). Adam was responsible for working and keeping the ground from which he was made (Gen. 2:7, 15), while Eve was responsible for serving and nurturing the man from which she was made (Gen. 2:18, 24-25). All of this was God's plan *before* the fall. Man would primarily advance the cause of God *in the world*, and woman would primarily advance his cause *in the home*. A wife and mother could (and should) contribute more than service to her family, but never less (Prov. 31:10-31).

Turning to the New Testament, the same focus remains on a woman's ministry to her family. She is to submit to her own husband, as to the Lord (Eph. 5:22). Women are to work out their salvation through childbearing (1 Tim. 2:15). With their husbands, they should bring their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4), and children should learn the faith through their mothers and grandmothers (2 Tim. 1:5). Younger widows are to marry, bear children, and manage their home (1 Tim. 5:14), while older women are to train younger women to love their husbands and children and to work at home (Titus 2:3-5).

When it comes to the question of how a wife and mother should steward her time and direct her labor, wisdom is required, and decisions will vary from one family to another. We should never lay down rules that are not given in Scripture. But we do need to value what God values. And we should be concerned when a growing number of young married couples embrace cultural assumptions about career in a way that doesn't give sufficient attention to the importance of the family, including what Scripture says about the blessings of many children (Ps. 127:3-5) and what Scripture says about the unique responsibilities a mother has in the home (Titus 2:4-5, Prov. 31:10-31).

When a wife and mother supports her husband, raises her children, and orders a warm and hospitable home, she's not just doing her half of the chores. She's living out God's good design for women. Nurturing a life-giving home powerfully advances the cause of God and distinctively adds to the health and fruitfulness of the church's mission. Such women will be blessed by their children, praised by their husbands (Prov. 31:28), and ought to be honored by their pastors and their church (Rom. 13:7).

The Invaluable Contribution of Single Women

Singleness is not a curse; it is God's gift. It is not a problem, and neither is marriage a right. Both are given as divine gifts (1 Cor. 7:7). And like every other spiritual gift, they are given for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7). Singleness is a gift *to* the church. God gives it for the upbuilding of his body. So unmarried women are not wallflowers waiting to be plucked. Neither are they imprisoned in a sub-Christian experience. These single women have *a lot* to contribute as good stewards of God's varied grace (1 Pet. 4:10).

The Proverbs 31 woman is a portrait of the excellent wife, but we often forget that it was written to instruct a young man on what to look for in a *single* woman. The *role* that's described in this passage is that of a wife, but the character and conduct are what all women should desire. She is a savvy businesswoman, skilled cook, and tasteful homemaker. She speaks with wisdom, joyfully trusts the Lord, and is thoughtful of others. This godly woman is ambitious but always puts others first. She opens her hand to the poor and reaches her hand out to the needy.

This is all included in God's portrait of femininity. And a single woman can use her God-given freedom from the responsibilities of a family (1 Cor. 7:32-34) to pursue her femininity for the church's good. An unmarried woman might meaningfully contribute to the church's mission by vocational faithfulness, generous giving, volunteering to serve (like Mary Magdalene, Luke 8:2), meeting with unbelievers, going on mission trips (Rom. 16:3-16), investing her time in discipling others, hosting a small group in her home, devoting herself to prayer and fasting (like Anna, Luke 2:36-37), making and delivering meals, or in countless other ways.

The Invaluable Contribution of Older Women

In Titus 2:1-10, Paul teaches how women adorn the gospel through their femininity. By cultivating the qualities listed in this passage – love for their husbands, care for their children, a well-ordered home, and gracious character – women present the gospel as attractive, impressive, and pleasing to a watching world. Women do this uniquely through their femininity, and older women are specifically given the responsibility to cultivate this in the church (Titus 2:3-8).

Some unique difficulties women face can be hard to discuss in detail and at length with male pastors. But this is where godly, older women can serve so effectively in the church by sharing their time, life experiences, and encouragement through Scripture. Younger women *need* older women to disciple, mentor, and care for them. Indeed, it is one facet of fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), as mature women “make disciples” by helping a rising generation “observe all that [Jesus] commanded.” The investment of older women into younger women is an essential part of a healthy church's mission, and pastors would do well to promote this kind of ministry among the women of the church.

Gender: Different and Indispensable

While the battle of the sexes rages on in our culture, God's glorious design of male and female presents the church with an unprecedented opportunity. The biblical vision of manhood and womanhood, equally made in his image, positions us to honor the equality and value of women in the highest way possible.

Scripture's presentation of God-ordained distinctions between the sexes provides all of us clarity and faith in pursuing our respective callings. Contrary to our culture's assumptions, gender means something. Men and women are not interchangeable—they are far more significant than that. And neither is dispensable. And so, as complementarians, we are freed to experience God's grace through his wise design for us as men and women. This means far more than preserving the responsibility of men to lead. We must also promote and pursue the unique and invaluable contributions women make to the church's mission.