

An Open Letter to Women's Ministries

Author's Note: This column is not directed at any one church or experience. It is an amalgamation of my many years—more than 20—being a part of womens' ministries in various churches of various denominations in many different contexts.

Dear Women's Ministry:

The world can give me cute cupcake designs and decorating tips, scrapbooking parties, casserole recipes and other ways to pass the time in the first world—Jesus is coming, so let's all look busy. But truly, with my respect and love, may I be honest? If I wanted to learn how to decorate cupcakes, I would take a class on it. If I wanted to be educated on strategies for decorating my home inexpensively from *Winners*, I would just, you know, go to *Winners*. Or Pinterest. (I love Pinterest, you know.)

But I'm here with you tonight because I want what the world cannot give me. We're choking on cutesy things and crafty bits—safe lady topics—and if one more person says that “modest is hottest” with a straight face, I may throw up. We are hungry for authenticity and vulnerability, not churchified life hacks from lady magazines. Some of us are drowning, suffocating, dying of thirst for want of the cold water of real community. We're trying really hard—after all, we keep showing up to your lady events and we leave feeling just a bit empty. It's just more of the same every time.

The women of our world aren't looking for a safe place to complain about housework and *ooh* and *ahh* over centerpieces. We're not all mothers, some of us work outside the home, some of us have kids and others don't or won't or can't. Is womanhood only about wifedom and motherhood? What about those among us that are not wives and mothers? We're not all in the same season of life. We are—or should be—diverse image-bearers of a divine God.

We need Jesus. We are seeking deep spirituality. We are seeking fellow travelers. We are hungry for true community, a place to tell our stories and listen to another, to love well. But above all, point me to Jesus—not to the sale at the mall.

You know what I would have liked tonight instead of decorating tips or a new recipe? I would have liked to pray together. I would have liked for the women of the church to share their stories or wisdom with one another. No more celebrity speakers; please just hand the microphone to that lady over there that brought the apples.

I would love to wrestle with some questions that don't have a one-paragraph answer in your study guide. I would like to do a Bible study that does not have pink or flowers on the cover. I would have liked to sign up to bring a meal for our elderly or drop off some clothes for a new baby or be informed about issues in our city where we can make space for God. I would like to organize and prioritize, to rabble-rouse and disturb the peace of the rest of the world on behalf of justice, truth, beauty and love. I'd love to hear the prophetic voice of women in our church.

Please, may we be the place to detox from the world—its values, its entertainment, its priorities, its focus on appearances and materialism and consumerism?

So here is my suggestion: Please stop treating womens' ministry like a Safe Club for the Little Ladies to Play Church.

We are smart. We are brave. We want to change the world.

We run marathons for our sisters, not so that we can lose weight. We have more to offer to the church than our mad decorating skills. I look around and I can see that these women can offer strategic leadership, wisdom, counsel and even, yes, teaching.

We want to give and serve and make a difference. We want to be

challenged. We want to read books and talk politics, theology and current events.

We want to wrestle through our theology. We want to listen to each other. We want to worship. We want to intercede for our sisters and weep with those who weep, rejoice with those who rejoice, to create life and art and justice with intention.

Let's be a community of women, gathered together to live more wholehearted, to sharpen, challenge, love and inspire one another to then scatter back out to our worlds bearing the mandate that my friend Idelette wrote: We are women who love.

Let us rise to the questions of our time. Let us speak to the injustices in our world. Let us move the mountains of fear and intimidation. Let us shout down the walls that separate and divide. Let us fill the earth with the fragrance of love. Let us be women who love.

I'll bring the cupcakes next time (although they likely won't look as cute).

Sincerely, Sarah

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