

# Respond to Your Call to Influence

The church has not always recognized the spiritual gifts of women. But God has fashioned them to be key players in His kingdom.

Let's imagine for a moment what the world would be like without women. All the wonderful traits women are capable of providing with exuberance—gentleness, nurture, care, refined beauty—would be missing.

Men possess these same qualities but in smaller supply; women, on the other hand, overflow with them. Without women the world would look like an army base where everything's painted white or gray and designed for efficiency at the expense of beauty. An awful sense of incompleteness would permeate the planet.

Women have many qualities unique to their gender, one of the grandest being the ability to host life. This privilege to shelter another life at such an intimate level has been granted exclusively to Eve and her daughters.

Women can nurture their newborns through the most intimate interaction between a female adult and a child: breastfeeding. The image of a baby being nursed by a loving mother is a picture of total dependency, perfect care and the most sublime transfer of nurture from one being to another.

Women are also the ones who predominantly shape the character of their children during their crucial early years. They plant tender gestures in the inner layer of a child's malleable soul and watch as, like the seeds in a flowerbed, the spiritual seeds sprout, spreading beauty over the adult landscape in the form of noble deeds.

When were the seeds planted? During the nurturing years when a

child spends most of his time with a woman: his mother!

### **Jesus' First Teacher**

It was a woman, young Mary, who first heard beating within her the heart of God Incarnate when she was pregnant with Jesus. It was her hands that first touched Jesus' body and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes.

Think for a moment what this reflects: God Almighty, Creator and Preserver of the universe, took the form of a baby and became dependent on the care of one of His creatures. When God experienced human flesh, with all its limitations, who was there to meet His needs? A woman.

Jesus' mother, Mary, was His first teacher and also later His first disciple. No other human knew Jesus as intimately as Mary did.

Ponder for a moment the scene at Calvary. While most of Jesus' frightened disciples hid at a distance, Mary and a group of faithful women gathered at the foot of the cross. Despite the pain and suffering Jesus endured, His last earthly concern was for a woman—His mother.

He could not forget that she had taken care of Him when His earthly life began. And now, as His life was about to end, Jesus lovingly turned her over to the care of His beloved disciple (see John 19:26-27).

### **Women's Hall of Fame**

Throughout the Bible are inspiring testimonies of other brave and brilliant women who were not mere privates in God's army but key players who were given pivotal assignments at strategic points and in crucial times.

Moses' mother challenged the pharaoh's genocidal decree when she preserved the life of the one who would eventually lead millions of Hebrews to freedom (see Ex. 2).

Rahab held the keys to the taking of Jericho. By turning them in the right direction she assured the fall of the fortress city (see Josh. 2).

Hannah cried out to God for Samuel to be born, and he went on to become the greatest prophet and judge Israel ever knew (see 1 Sam. 1).

Deborah was an illustrious judge and a proven prophetess who delivered Israel from the mighty chariots of Jabin, the oppressing king of Canaan. Another woman, Jael, helped to bring total destruction to Jabin and his leading general, Sisera (see Judges 4-5).

Esther courageously risked her life to save her nation, God's people, when they were in danger of being exterminated.

Sarah was called "mother of nations" by God Himself (see Gen. 17:16) and is listed among the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11.

Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, instructed and guided Apollos, who had been preaching less-than-perfect theology (see Acts 18: 24-26). The fact that in most translations, Priscilla is listed first in this passage signifies the prominence of her role.

On the shoulders of these women—and countless more down through the ages—rested the fate of cities, tribes and nations.

### **Pillars of the Early Church**

One of the main reasons Christianity spread so rapidly in the early years is because its message restored honor and self-worth to half the world's population: women. Romans had such a low view of women that some men engaged in sex with other men. Jewish rabbis completely silenced women inside the synagogue, and pagans used them as temple prostitutes.

However, early church leaders dignified women by teaching that in Christ “there is neither male nor female” and we “are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28, NKJV). Women were also given positions of honor and leadership.

Priscilla, for instance, was part of the team that founded the church in Ephesus—site of the greatest power encounter recorded in the book of Acts. She was there, inside the crux of God’s power, when God dethroned Artemis and brought down the demonic socioeconomic structure that had controlled Ephesus.

Throughout the epistles women are unapologetically exalted as pillars of the faith. Paul identified two women as the headwaters of Timothy’s faith: his mother and his grandmother (see 2 Tim. 1:5). In Romans, a letter intended for wide circulation and public reading, Paul praised several women as people of faith and proven ministry (see Rom. 16:1-15).

The first European convert was a woman, Lydia, and hers was the first household to be baptized (see Acts 16:14-15). She was very assertive in her interaction with the apostles: “She begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us” (v. 15).

Three centuries later, the driving force behind Constantine’s conversion and the subsequent Christianization of the Roman Empire was another woman, Helena, the emperor’s mother.

### **Extraordinary Sensitivity**

Women have an extraordinary sensitivity to spiritual things. I am not saying that they are more godly than men, but I believe they are definitely more spiritual. This is why Jesus was able to reveal two of the most powerful truths in the gospels to women.

He told Martha that He is the resurrection and the life (see John 11:25-27). To the Samaritan woman Jesus explained that He

is the living water (see John 4:7-15). These women were in a state of confusion when Jesus found them, but both were able to hear, understand and believe these profound truths.

Women also have the ability to express a greater range of emotions, an ability which enables them to experience worship in a more intense way. Many times female acts of worship are dismissed as emotional and disruptive.

The men at Simon the leper's house who were watching the sublime act of worship of a woman who was ministering to Jesus accused her of wasting a very valuable flask of perfume. They judged her actions from a financial, cost-effective perspective (see Mark 14).

But Jesus rebuked these men and declared that she had exhibited great spiritual foresight—she had prepared His body for the sepulcher. As He anticipated His imminent betrayal and rejection, Jesus was overwhelmed by sorrow.

His heart was taxed with pain; He needed someone to minister to Him. It was a woman who sensed the urgency and spent everything of value she had to comfort Him.

Women in the church are often accused of being excitable, but this is not necessarily true. Eli, for example, accused Hannah of being drunk when in fact she was genuinely broken before the Lord (see 1 Sam.1: 5-17).

Many times God has turned to female generosity when needs have emerged in His kingdom. Amid a terrible famine He sent Elijah to the house of a widow to ask for everything she had—and she gave it to him! (See 1 Kin. 17.)

In another instance, a group of women used their personal resources to support Jesus' ministry (see Luke 8:2-3). Interestingly, no man is explicitly identified in the Gospels as a financial supporter of Jesus.

## **Courage Under Fire**

Women in the Bible also showed remarkable courage, even risking their own lives. On Resurrection morning, for instance, it was the women who ventured out to visit Jesus' tomb, even though as a "convicted criminal" He was under constant military guard.

The disciples, after seeing the same empty tomb, locked themselves up for fear of the Jews (see John 20:19). Later, Thomas demanded tangible proof of Jesus' resurrection even though Jesus was standing right there! Jesus was probably thinking of the women when He rebuked Thomas, saying, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

By appearing first to women on Resurrection Sunday, Jesus made them the first messengers, the first evangelists, the first prophetesses, the first teachers and the first witnesses of His resurrection. This was no small privilege!

In my opinion, women are more prone to believe God and with greater ease than men. They are following the example from Acts 12:12 when Mary, mother of Mark, fearlessly hosted a large prayer meeting while Herod was shedding apostolic blood all over town. Likewise, Lydia made her house available to the entire church at a time of violent opposition (see Acts 16:40).

When God spoke, Deborah had no doubt that God could deliver the Israelites from Sisera's army. Likewise, Mary stood firm in her faith that she could bear a child despite being a virgin; and the women at the tomb, deep in sorrow, accepted the resurrection message without hesitation.

## **It's Time for a Change**

For far too long the devil has haunted women with a negative portrayal of Eve in the Garden of Eden. Satan wants Eve to be seen as the weak link, the one who brought so much misery to

the human race. Even though she was deceived and fell into transgression, let us not miss an important point: Eve was the one who identified the enemy!

In spite of the shame she felt, Eve understood and described accurately what had happened and who the instigator was, setting the stage for God to announce the rematch.

Let us be strengthened by the Genesis 3 passage and view it without the distorting lens the enemy has used for so long. Like Eve, women know who the enemy is. Furthermore, Satan knows that her seed will eventually destroy him.

It is time for a change. It is time for women to stop paying attention to Satan's demeaning remarks, so often channeled through those who look at the exterior and miss the wealth stored inside them.

Women do not need a human platform to be heard because God has given them considerable spiritual height from which to speak. They are designed to be influencers and shapers. No wonder God has called them to play key roles in His strategic plans!

Read a companion devotional.

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