

Six Women Leaders to Avoid

A popular female evangelist arrived at an airport and was escorted to the baggage claim area. After she retrieved her luggage she was taken to the passenger pickup lounge where she met her hosts from a local church, who planned to take her in a comfortable van to a nearby hotel so she could rest before speaking at an evening service.

The members of the welcoming team were not prepared for this woman's icy response to their greeting. When they opened the door to the van, she told them bluntly: "I will not ride in that." Then she stormed back into the airport with her entourage. After making inquiries, one of the church staff was informed by the woman's assistant that Her Highness must be transported in a certain type of vehicle.

The stated choices were a Bentley, a Mercedes-Benz or a Lincoln Town Car! Nevermind that Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. This regal woman of God insisted on arriving in luxury.

When I heard this story I didn't know whether to start a petition drive or just vomit on the spot. I was outraged, bewildered and nauseated.

For the last seven years I have given my life to help empower and release women leaders in the church. I have dedicated my life to ending gender discrimination—especially when it limits women's spiritual gifts and callings.

Yet when I hear of poor examples of women pastors and preachers, I must confess I fight discouragement. Yes, we need many more trained women church leaders—but we don't need any more bad examples!

In my travels I have observed all kinds of women leaders, some who are stellar role models and others who would do us all a

favor if they pursued different careers. If you have aspirations to pursue leadership in ministry at any level, I pray you will avoid becoming like the ones I am about to describe.

1. THE DIVA To this woman, ministry is all about her. She is the star. Surely she started out with genuine passion for God, but today her message is not defined by her unseen prayer life but by what people see on stage. Greed and pride have deceptively lured her into compromise.

She knows how to move a crowd. There is obviously a strong anointing on her life, but it has been subtly fused with a carnal agenda. She can inspire people to success and wow them with her own accomplishments, but there is nothing in her sermon that brings true repentance or brokenness. Her message may be loud, and it can elicit shouts at the altar. But the people don't realize they've been drugged with a spiritual form of cocaine that triggers a religious high but can't bring them closer to Jesus.

The diva is known for her demands. Someone must carry her Bible, her water bottle, her purse and her cell phone. Those who ask her to preach in their church soon learn that she is "high maintenance." She will require the priciest hotel rooms and the biggest offerings—which she will collect with plenty of manipulative arm-twisting.

Her Christian values were once admirable. But the holy fire that burned in her heart a few years ago has been quenched by greed and an addiction to the crowd's approval. She stopped studying the Bible and now focuses more on what she plans to wear at her conferences. She stopped spending time in God's presence and began craving the glow of television lights.

The diva loves grand entrances. She comes into the meeting late and is whisked off the stage as soon as she has delivered her sermon. She doesn't associate with common folks or spend

too much time praying for them. A strange atmosphere surrounds her: A mixture of the Holy Spirit's irrevocable gifting and a disturbing aura of self-importance. Only those who are discerning can recognize the difference.

2. THE CONTROL FREAK If you saw the movie *The Devil Wears Prada* you know the type of leader I am talking about. Unfortunately the main character of that film, the fearsome fashion publisher Miranda Priestly, has a few counterparts in the religious world.

Beware of this woman if she is in any church leadership position. She rules with an iron fist and leaves a trail of wounded bodies behind her. Somehow she missed the elementary Leadership 101 class, which teaches that every Christian leader must learn to serve. To her, authority is about dominating people.

This woman does not know how to delegate. She is not a team player. The control freak believes she knows all the answers, and therefore she must sign off on all decisions, no matter how petty. People line up outside her door night and day to get her approval, and anyone who needs an appointment is first advised to obtain a "weather report" on her shifting moods.

Somehow this woman never took care of her anger issues when she was a young Christian. Now that she has a position of power, no one is brave enough to challenge her ungodly behavior. She surrounds herself with yes-men and yes-women who dislike her authoritarianism but are too intimidated to admit that her ruthless temper is a sin.

The control freak has no peers and doesn't have a relational style. She may claim to have an older mentor (who usually lives in a distant city) but she doesn't open up her life to those who work with her. They are her subjects, and she demands obedience and long hours of work to prove loyalty. Her employees usually resign on a regular basis because of her

harsh criticism and abusive words.

3. THE FLIRT I recently took a pastor friend of mine to a conference to hear a visiting woman preacher from another state. Imagine my horror when this lady walked to the podium wearing a dress that looked like it had been sprayed on.

Every curve and crevice on this woman's body was visible to the ogling eyes in the audience. Some of the guys, to their credit, began looking at the floor toward the end of her sermon so they would not commit adultery in their thoughts. I wanted to run to the podium, grab one of those "modesty cloths" they use during prayer times and wrap it around Sister Shapely before anyone else stumbled.

This woman obviously missed the memo about adopting a "professional and sensible dress code" for ministry. Or perhaps she simply ignored the memo because of her own unresolved sexual issues. Somebody should have yanked her off the platform and sent her back to the new believer's class, where godly women teach other women why it's wrong to use their femininity as a sexual weapon.

The flirt disregards sexual boundaries. She hangs around with men alone in the church office, and might even counsel men alone. She may even use sexually charged language or veiled vulgarity in her sermons. (Note: Just because male leaders engage in this behavior does not make it acceptable.)

Women in ministry do not have to wear their hair in a bun or don ankle-length flannel dresses in order to be modest. There's nothing wrong with looking your best. My favorite women leaders usually wear smart pantsuits, tasteful jewelry and comfortable shoes when they preach. They dress like respectable businesswomen—and they command respect from their churches because of it.

4. THE FLAKE God knows we need leaders today who understand the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But whenever there are revivals

of Pentecostal power, the devil always lures some people to unbalanced and unhealthy extremes. In the modern charismatic movement, leaders who misuse the gifts of prophecy or other supernatural phenomena have deceived or irreparably wounded many people.

The flake may have had a legitimate experience with God, but because of pride she begins to believe that her gift is unique. She may even claim special access to God and have frequent visions or dreams that bolster her claims. These experiences might be from God. But if she does not stay grounded in biblical truth and seek accountability in healthy ministry relationships, she may elevate herself to a point where no one can challenge her revelations.

No one who steps out in the supernatural is going to get it right 100 percent of the time. We prophesy in part, and those who use the gift of prophecy are likely to “miss it” from time to time. But the flake will rarely admit to missing it. She will stubbornly contend that she heard from God, even if all the evidence proves otherwise.

It’s bad enough when flakes are in the pews because they can cause divisive splits in congregations. But when a flake is elevated to a leadership position, an even bigger disaster looms. That person may veer into extrabiblical methods or outright heresy because she cannot receive correction.

The flake usually has serious unresolved emotional issues. She may be prone to depression, and she might seek unusual spiritual experiences to soothe her damaged emotions. She is always in superspiritual mode and rarely enjoys the normal routines of life. My advice to the flake: Come down to earth!

5. THE FEMINIST I don’t believe all forms of feminism are wrong. In the early years of the 20th century, many brave Christian men and women worked tirelessly to win women the right to vote. Gender equality is a human right, and it is

something that God set down in the first chapters of Genesis. Because both male and female are created in His image, we should work to correct the injustices of gender inequality and abuse.

But there is another more sinister form of feminism that has no support in Scripture. It is a bitter, vengeful attitude that places women against men, and often elevates women to a superior position. Sadly, this worldly spirit has invaded the church.

The feminist church leader has a man-hating spirit. She may be a gifted communicator, but if you listen closely you will hear the sound of a grinding axe when she speaks. She has not forgiven the men who hurt her in the past, and she intends to punish those men who get in her way today. Her unresolved issues are transferred to her audience. Her poison is injected into everyone who hears her.

She may claim that she believes in gender equality, but she will often surround herself only with women and refuses to put men in certain positions. Oftentimes the feminist has experienced at least one failed marriage and does not have any healthy relationships with men. Because she is unhealed, she cannot be an effective healer.

6. THE VICTIM This is the most pitiful of all the bad examples I've listed. She is guaranteed to make you feel sorry for her. And she might use a full box of Kleenex to help you understand her pain.

What the victim lacks in leadership skills she will make up for in sob stories.

Everyone is against her. She is suspicious of her own congregation. Other churches, she says, are maligning her. The devil, she insists, has targeted her ministry for destruction. Every trial that comes her way confirms that she is the focus

of a demonic conspiracy.

Chaos surrounds this woman. Her ministry is always in turmoil. The victim moves from crisis to crisis, always anticipating another tragedy around the next corner. True joy has been replaced by a constant religious anxiety that repels people—thus making sure that her ministry will always be composed of a small “remnant” of people who have similar emotional baggage.

Of course if you suggest that this woman’s misfortune might be the result of her negative outlook on life, she won’t listen. That’s because the victim has found a bizarre form of pleasure in her dysfunction. She’s become quite comfortable at the center of her painful universe.

DON’T SETTLE FOR LESS

All these bad examples are in the church today—and each has her male counterpart. But I am not giving up in my resolve to see an army of gifted, trained women who will serve as pastors, missionaries, evangelists, CEOs, government leaders and social reformers. This is the hour for women to arise.

Instead of divas, we need humble women who are willing to serve even if they receive no public recognition. Instead of control freaks, we need leaders who wash the feet of their disciples and push them to greatness while modeling sacrifice. Instead of flirts, we need mature, dignified mothers of faith who have crucified their adolescent fantasies.

Rather than flakes who are tossed around by spiritual fads, we need discerning women who love biblical truth more than charismatic goose bumps. Rather than feminists, we need women who have resolved their issues with men and are willing to partner with them on equal footing. Rather than victims, we need women in ministry who are emotionally healthy.

Don’t be discouraged if you see yourself in any of these negative examples. There is probably a little bit of diva in

all of us! And all of us have resisted the urge to become control freaks.

If you are called to leadership, God will guide the preparation process—and He will bring mentors and positive role models in your life to challenge and encourage you. If you allow the Holy Spirit to shape your character, you may end up being the good example the church is waiting for.

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