

Side by Side in Ministry

I learned a lot about manhood from the men I grew up with. From my observations, being a man was all about power and authority. It was about taking charge and getting ahead, staking your claim and then making it happen.

Men, it seemed, were supposed to keep things close to their breast pockets and not let too much in lest they be taken advantage of.

I used to think it was indigenous to my ethnic background, until I was older and discovered that men in other cultures and nationalities modeled similar behavior. It's all about pecking order and dominance, who's going to be in charge and whose opinions carry the most weight. I learned at an unconscious level how to do my best to be in charge and have my way.

The irony of all that male bonding was that very little bonding actually took place in terms of truly connecting to other men. Instead, it seemed we learned how to model the behavior of the most effective guy in the pack. We would then go out and try to find our own crowd to lead—that is, if we had the urge to be leaders.

I learned how to be suspicious, how not to play my hand and how to bury my feelings. But along the way I also lost touch with genuine authenticity and intimacy. I fell for the illusion that I could make it on my own.

I have since learned that not only can we not make it on our own, but to be on our own is to be alone! Someone much wiser than any man or woman made the statement that it was not good for man to be alone, long before man ever had the chance to prove otherwise (see Gen. 2:18).

Lydia and Rosa

The birth of rising inflation in our era has forced many families to have two sources of income in order to survive. Over the years the traditional role of women as homemakers and men as their family's sole breadwinner has radically shifted. I can clearly remember even in my growing-up days watching my mom and dad deal with the need for both of them to work.

A challenge of a different sort also emerged: While the economy demanded that both men and women have a place in the work force, women were not considered equal to men. They were not equally compensated for the work they did.

Unfortunately, some who chose to distort truth and keep women under used the Bible to justify their failure to relate to the opposite sex in an equitable way when decisions were made and finances were involved. There was an unspoken rule—at least in the neighborhood in which I grew up—that a woman had to keep her place and that place was in the home.

Certainly there is great merit to having a secure home front and a strong maternal love for the family you are raising. No one can take the place of the nurturing influence of a woman, wife and mother.

Yet I wonder how Lydia, the Philippian entrepreneur involved in the textile industry, would have fared in today's post-modern age of Western civilization. What might she have said about a woman's place? (See Acts 16:11-15.)

I find it intriguing that because of Lydia, Paul was led in the strategy of the Spirit to establish a base of operations for a move of God in the Macedonia region.

This was not the Jewish world of the synagogue, in which the study of the scrolls was for men only. This was a Gentile world in which the rules were different, the culture was different, the climate was different and the opportunities

were different. Paul recognized that Lydia was a woman of influence.

There is a great deal of difference between power and influence. Power has little to do with leadership, while influence has everything to do with it.

Even authority has very little to do with leadership. You can lose your authority and still be a leader. You can be denied power and still have influence.

African American Rosa Parks knew she didn't have any authority when she got on the bus that morning just prior to the birth of the Civil Rights Movement and refused to sit in the back. However, she did have influence.

She was the reason the flames of hope burned brightly in the face of the flames of racial discrimination and hatred. Her influence paved the way for Martin Luther King Jr. to speak out against the inequality he saw in this nation.

There is no question that King had a major impact on how we view equality and justice at the end of the 20th century, yet the collaboration of King and Parks changed the outcome exponentially.

The Feminine Voice

In many corridors of today's church there are those who still do not know how to resolve the woman issue. Every time I think we are regaining the glory of Paul's declaration that in Christ there is neither male nor female, some voice rises to condemn the place of women in significantly influencing our world.

It seems to me that the percentage of women who abuse the privilege of power is small. It's certainly not as high as the percentage of men who misuse power on a much broader scale.

But men who are hearing from God in these days of fresh

outpouring are learning to observe, listen, and evaluate as the feminine voice provides the missing pieces and fills in the gap in understanding the unfolding of God's divine purpose and will.

The rib taken from Adam was built into an entire support system that would reflect God's glory in every arena ventured into. Men and women were designed to rule over all the works of the Creator's hands, both in the garden and outside the garden.

The garden was the sanctuary. The first man and the first woman each had a responsibility to beautify the sanctuary and then extend it to the four corners of the globe. In open and honest dialogue they were to find new ways of viewing reality because they learned how to see creation and its workings through each other's eyes. They were to collaborate in the process of heavenizing the earth.

Ironically, in today's corporate world opportunities for dialogue—that is, shared and open conversation—abound between men and women. New and emerging models of leadership and influence are moving on the cutting edge of transforming businesses and organizations. “Empowerment” and “intimacy” are becoming buzz words in business society.

Compassion in the workplace was unheard of as a hot topic just one generation ago. Developing a vision of shared values where everyone feels he or she is a part and has a vital stake in the ultimate outcome wasn't even considered necessary in the global arena three decades ago. Wouldn't it be tragic if the secular arena modeled collaboration between men and women more effectively than the church?

Throughout the story of redemptive history we see vignettes of God's intention to reveal the fullness of His glory through the collaboration and connection between men and women. When abusive authority oppressed the elect of God it was often the

subtle and seemingly weaker vessel that became the key to deliverance.

Didn't Deborah say that the evil oppressor Sisera would die at the hands of a woman? (See Judg. 4:9.) During the heat of battle, as his men were being overcome by the Israelite army, Sisera got off his horse, fled on foot and sought refuge in the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber. Jael drove the spike into the head of the enemy and crushed his skull (see Judg. 4:17-22).

Did Jael have authority? Not really. But she did have influence. While the battle raged not far from her tent, the victory was decided at her hand. It was prophesied that the crushing of the serpent's head and the destruction of the serpent's seed would be the direct result of what a woman had seeded into the situation (see Gen. 3:15).

When God wanted to initiate change in the nation of Israel, He asked for individuals who could get in touch with the feeling side of pain and bring it to speech to alter the flow of history. God, through the prophet Jeremiah, asked for the weeping women (see Jer. 9:17-22).

We don't value tears much in situations in which we desire to be in control. Yet the power of God is revealed in the weak things that fly in the face of Adam's broken image. Jeremiah himself had his entire ministry of influence built on his weakness and propensity for tears (see Jer. 9:1).

The Richness of Collaboration

Men and women will never be complete without each other. While at times we need to segregate, having meetings for women and meetings for men, we don't need to rob ourselves of the richness we'll find when we join together as co-laborers in the kingdom. Then we can manifest God's glory in the church and in the world.

A world grasping for power, yet out of control, requires a church that is not afraid to be touchable, connected and flowing in a river bigger than our individual identity.

I strongly believe it's the intention and heart of our Father that in this new era we begin to appreciate the dynamic that occurs when men and women collaborate for the sake of healing and empowering the nations. We must let the nations see the whole gospel modeled and see that transparency and honesty prevail in our relationships as men and women.

The fresh renewing we are experiencing in these days is ultimately intended to bring us to the true demonstration of God's power and the unspeakable joy of connecting by being present to one another. Our willingness to drink deeply at each other's wells will be the deciding factor in our ability to experience all God has for the nations as well as for our personal lives.

In the Son of Man we see the balance of logic and emotion, reason and feeling. In Him we see man-made cultural rules being broken and women having a place of influence along with the twelve.

In Jewish society this idea of ministering women was an offense to the religious rulers and pseudo-controllers of destiny. But Jesus highly valued both men and women and gave them equal place in His presence (see John 20:1-19; Acts 1:12-14).

If our Father in heaven includes all of us at the table of collaboration (see 2 Cor. 6:1), isn't it time we truly came together to become the healing presence God intended for the nations? It is time for both men and women together to lead the way into the future, even as the hand of the Spirit leads us.

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