

Escape From Intimidation

✖ I had no idea when my husband, John, started his traveling ministry that God had a call on my life, too. It all began so innocently—and I almost missed it because I was afraid.

In 1990 John resigned an associate pastor position to pursue the burning call he felt for our nation. Our two sons and I traveled from place to place with him. We drove almost everywhere because John's ministry was unknown at the time, and no one was willing to provide an airline ticket for him.

But before the end of John's first year as a traveling preacher, ministry invitations began to flow in from places that were willing to fly him out for extended meetings. He was often gone for weeks at a time, and the family rarely accompanied him. This meant I was home alone with two toddlers—and a baby on the way.

Occasionally our entire family would go on a road trip. It was exciting to see the increase in authority and anointing on my husband's life. But one thing troubled me. I was singled out a number of times by pastors and prophets to receive a word from the Lord.

"Do you realize there is a calling on *your* life?" they would say. Or "You should be ministering." Or even worse, "God wants you to confront the Jezebel spirit!"

Who, Me?

I was afraid of the Jezebel spirit myself and shrugged off these words. John did encourage me to share sometimes before he spoke, and under much protest I occasionally did a women's meeting. But I wasn't convinced. The fact that my husband preached didn't make us a package deal.

When my third son, Alexander, was born, I threw myself into

the care of my children. If asked to speak I gave a firm "No!" with little thought or prayer. After all, I had three young children and a husband who was gone more than home—surely someone with nothing else to do could go. What could a breastfeeding mother possibly have to offer these women anyway?

Besides, I was already active in our ministry, editing John's books and handling administrative functions. I felt certain God couldn't possibly want anything more from me.

How wrong I was! But I couldn't see my error until God showed me that I had to choose between my will and His, between my comfort and His commission.

One Sunday I felt compelled to go to the evening service at our church to hear a guest speaker. The entire message was on obedience. "You may be secure, but you are not safe!" the speaker declared. "Only obedience protects you!"

Suddenly I didn't feel secure, safe or obedient. Instead, I felt self-willed and ?disobedient. Though the speaker led us in a group prayer at the end of the service, I experienced no release from the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

As soon as I arrived home, I ran upstairs to my prayer room and confessed everything that came to mind. Then I asked, "God, is there some area of disobedience ?in my life?"

I cowered as an immediate awareness of sin overwhelmed me. I clearly saw that I had drawn boundaries to protect my comfort zones and then established my independence by declaring what I would and would not do. I had fenced myself in and drawn back.

In answer to my question, the Lord brought to mind Hebrews 10:38: "But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him" (NIV).

I definitely felt the displeasure of the Lord. The next

Scripture He gave me was Hebrews 5:12: "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again."

"What are you saying, God?" I questioned further. "Are you saying that I should be teaching, or that I've regressed, or both?" Then I got the clincher: "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

I wept. I had heard the story of how my father sensed God's call on his life and ran from it. Growing up I watched divorce, adultery and alcoholism ravage our family. Had the baton passed to the next generation?

But what did I have to say? Was I even allowed to say anything? Women were encouraged to be quiet in my church.

I wasn't that comfortable myself with most women ministers—they scared me. They were either too strong and had weak husbands or way too sweet and feminine for me.

And how could I bring relief or deliverance to any one? Unlike Esther, I had no "royal position." Yet I could not deny the heavy hand of the Lord's correction on me. I had felt its constant weight since the service.

Finally, I surrendered. I confessed my willful tendencies, my unbelief, my fears and my disobedience. I told God I would let go and do whatever He placed before me. I told Him I realized only obedience would protect my children and acknowledged my own inability to protect them.

Then I began a search to validate my call. *Should* a woman teach? Previously, I had taken the Scripture that an elder is to be the husband of one wife as an excused absence for all women.

I wasn't supposed to have authority over a man, right? But was sharing what God had done in my life or truths He had revealed exercising authority?

No, it was not. I concluded that even if the question about whether a woman has *governing authority* is unresolved, there is nothing in Scripture to keep her from ministering, teaching, preaching, prophesying or praying for others.

Overcoming Intimidation

Later that week when John came home I shared what had happened and showed him the Scriptures I had found. It was very important to me to have his blessing. I knew if this was all from God then the scepter of my husband's favor would be extended toward me. I understood that in order to *have* authority you must be *under* authority. We prayed together for wisdom and direction.

I expressed to John some of my deepest fears and concerns. I had observed that women in the pulpit were considered guilty until proven innocent. If a woman made a mistake she was quickly labeled a Jezebel, or even worse—a witch.

Men in pulpits seemed to enjoy a bit more grace. They were innocent until proven guilty. The thought of volunteering to stand under such intense scrutiny terrified me.

Though I wanted to be obedient, I was still more afraid of the faces I could see (those of people) than of the one I could not (God's). I was intimidated. I had only pretended to be strong when I was weak and pretended to be brave when I was fearful.

I stripped myself of this pretense in order to face some truths. I realized that *I will serve whom I fear*. If I fear man I will serve man. If I fear God I will serve God. The greater fear always swallows up the lesser. I chose to embrace the fear of the Lord and turn from the fear of man.

In the course of the decision-making process, however, I learned something about intimidation that applies to all believers. The objective of intimidation is to restrain us from action and force us into submission. Intimidation seeks to overwhelm us with a sense of inferiority.

If we retreat, we become the servants of the intimidator. Once captive, we are no longer free to fulfill the will of God, but doomed to satisfy the oppressive desires of our captor.

Then our authority is stripped from us. Our own authority is used against us and those under us.

The root of intimidation is fear, which originates from our adversary the devil. He attacks us by way of our thoughts, imaginations and visions and uses circumstances and those under his influence to intimidate. Regardless of the method, he has one objective: to control and limit us.

Before I submitted my will to God in obedience to His call on my life, the gift of God and grace to obey were dormant. An intimidated believer has lost his authority in the spirit by default; consequently his gift, or God's ability in him, lies asleep and inactive. Though it is present, it is not in operation.

Paul encouraged Timothy this way: "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For *God did not give us a spirit of timidity*, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:6-7, emphasis added).

Each and every believer has a calling and God-given gifts. These gifts are to be used to serve others, as Peter declared: "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Pet. 4:10).

Not everyone's gift is the same; there are various forms

because there are various needs. When we hide behind what is comfortable we fail to meet the needs of the body as God intended.

What would happen if all believers functioned in their proper places? If men, women and children began to flow as a family? What tremendous things we would see! Revival is not just for preachers, but for the entire body—and it will be manifest when every one of us takes his position.

I challenge you to step out from behind the realm of the comfortable and ask God how you can be faithful with the gift He has entrusted to *you*. Dare to walk in obedience—for only obedience protects.

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