

This Is the Hour for Women to Arise

This week I'm ministering at Trinity Christian Centre, one of Singapore's largest churches. It is led today by Dominic Yeo, but for 30 years it was pastored by Naomi Dowdy, a brave American missionary who grew the church from about 250 believers in 1976 to more than 4,000 members in 2005. The Pentecostal congregation has grown even larger since then, when Dowdy set Yeo into his pastoral role so she could do more traveling ministry.

Dowdy is a friend and a spiritual mother in my life. I've ministered with her in Malaysia, Nigeria, Venezuela, Ukraine and other countries. I've gleaned from her leadership skills, benefited from her counsel and been inspired by her zeal for missions. I view her as one of the planet's best examples of a female church leader. When I consider her amazing legacy I'm grieved that we don't have more women like her.

The primary reason we have so few Naomi Dowdys today is that the church does not encourage trained and anointed women to step into leadership. A second reason is that many women have either disqualified themselves from taking on such roles, or they aren't willing to face the criticism that inevitably comes when a woman defies tradition.

I agree with the makers of the 2011 film *Courageous* that Christian men should demonstrate integrity, sexual purity, family values and moral courage. But isn't the same response needed from women? For every brave Abraham, David and Mordecai in the Bible there was a fearless Sarah, Abigail and Esther. God's women don't just sit around waiting for the guys to act when things get tough.

Deborah is the best biblical example of a fearless woman. Many "Bible-believing" Christians don't take her seriously because they have no room in their theology for a woman leader. Yet Scripture is clear that God raised up Deborah to be a prophet, and He blessed her 40-year rule. She responded to the call of God in a time of national crisis. She wrote in Judges 5:7: "The peasantry ceased, they ceased in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose, until I arose, a mother in Israel" (NASB).

That is a prophetic mandate for women today. They need the courage of Deborah. God is calling His daughters to arise in three ways:

1. Arise from fear and inaction. Deborah lived in a culture where men did most of the fighting and leading. Yet because God's mantle of leadership rested on her, she understood His purpose for her nation and she discerned the enemy's plans to invade and overthrow Israel. She exerted enormous courage to initiate an act of war.

Deborah's assignment was not easy. Some tribes yawned and ignored her call to military service—perhaps because they could not follow a woman. Yet she knew that if a remnant of God's faithful people would trust Him on the battlefield, they would see a miraculous victory. She stoked the fires of faith and prodded her people to overthrow Satan's plan.

2. Arise to disciple.

Deborah described herself as “a mother in Israel.” This phrase is packed with meaning. We tend to associate motherhood with domesticity, but Deborah broke out of her cultural box. She was willing to step outside her normal family sphere to influence many.

Christian women are an untapped resource in the church today. Many are sitting idle in pews when God wants to engage them in discipling others—especially younger women who lack role models—as well as in outreach. The world would change dramatically if women of faith decided to invest in the next generation through mentoring.

3. Arise to protect.

Would Israel have been victorious if Deborah had not stepped into the fray to defend her nation? Some Christians believe only men can lead, and that women are to be perpetual followers. But Scripture actually shows us that some battles are reserved for women. In Deborah's case, a woman

mobilized an army,
encouraged a general and prophesied the victory. Then, another
woman named Jael
delivered the final blow (see Judges 4:21).

Strong mothers exhibit a fierce,
God-given protective instinct. Deborah arose to fight because
she was stirred
by the Spirit to see the enemy approaching. Today, women must
open their eyes
to see the war—especially the one that has been raging against
women through
domestic violence, sexual abuse and all other forms of gender
oppression. These
horrific social problems will never be solved until women
respond.

Women of God—do you hear the
call? The captain of the Lord's hosts wants to enroll you in
His army. Your
mother's heart is not a weakness; it is needed on the
battlefield. Your gender
is not a hindrance; it is a weapon in God's hand. There is a
victory with your
name on it, waiting for you claim what God has promised. I
encourage you to
swallow your fears and discover your full potential.

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