

## **Leading Together**

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Today we do honor mothers for the great sacrifices they make, and the great nurturing love they provide in helping to raise their children. Some with the help of husbands and some as single moms. **They do deserve a day of special honor. Thank you, moms! We honor you in our house today and all those online.**

This morning I want to direct my focus not just on mothers but on all women and God's plan for their lives in our church and world. Whether you are a mother or not a mother, single or married, a stay at home mom, or in the workplace, **you have gifts that God has given you to help shape our world.**

You have gifts to serve alongside men. We are called to advance God's kingdom and **lead together.**

I recently wrote a small book called Leading Together. **(put picture on Screen)**

It is about a biblical understanding of the role of women in leading alongside men. We are making the book available to you today for free or you can get it online for your Kindle for \$1. Link info is in your bulletin. The books will be available in the lobbies for you to pick up if you would like one.

**This subject has been a lifelong study and journey for Erma and I.** We were both raised in churches where women were not allowed to teach or have leadership roles in the church. This was because of a faulty understanding and interpretation of certain bible passages that seemed to forbid women to speak in church. I won't be dealing with those passages this morning, but I unpack these misunderstood passages in my book.

I will simply say this, in these passages, Paul was dealing with a problem with certain women and was not making a rule for all women in all churches.

**The key to unlocking this whole debate on the role of women is found in the book of Genesis.** We need to go back to the beginning. We need to ask the question *“What did God have in mind when he created man and woman. What was his original plan when he declared it is good?”*

Bible scholars call this **“the law of first mention”**. The law of first mention says that, to understand a particular word or doctrine, we must find the first place in Scripture that word or doctrine is revealed and study that passage.

The reasoning is that the Bible’s first mention of a concept is the simplest and clearest presentation of God’s intent; doctrines are then more fully developed on that foundation. So, to fully understand an important and complex theological concept, Bible students are advised to start with its “first mention.”

This is really important because like many other things it is easy to lose the original design of something after several generations. **Over the generations, doctrines can develop more out of tradition and culture than the foundation of God’s Word and good biblical interpretation.**

Sometimes the present looks far different than the original. I think that is what we have today in this whole discussion of the role of women in leadership. So, let’s take a journey back to the beginning. Look at the first mention of man and woman.

**Genesis 1:26-28, 31**

**26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”**

**27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.**

**28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”**

**Vs. 31 God saw all that he made, and it was very good.**

The first thing we notice is that .....

**1. Both men and women are image bearers of God.**

We are both made in his likeness. We both equally reflect who God is. **Together we are a more perfect representation than we are separately.**

Men only reflect a portion of God's character and nature. Women reflect the other portion of who God is. We need both to more fully understand who God is.

**Women are of equal worth and value in the eyes of God.** Sadly, in most of the world women are undervalued and, in some places, viewed as property and treated unjustly and cruelly. Ex: the sex trade is mostly women and girls.

But in the beginning, this was not so. God created Eve with dignity and respect alongside Adam in a place of mutual honor.

I believe ever since the fall of mankind in the garden, Satan has targeted women for oppression. God describes Satan and the result of the fall this way....

**Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.**

Enmity means - hostility, hatred, antagonism, opposition. **In other words, Satan especially oppresses women.** Partly because it was through a woman that Jesus would come and defeat and crush his head.

The second thing we notice from God's original plan is that...

## **2. God created man and woman with a mandate to rule together.**

This was God's design and plan from the beginning.

Notice what God says to both of them equally.

**Vs 26. That they may rule....** Let them govern, take dominion together

**Vs. 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."**

From this we see that God's original plan was for man and woman to work together as **equal partners**. He told "them" to subdue and rule over the earth.

**They were to share rulership and work and lead together in taking dominion over the earth.**

**This was, and still is, God's intent.** The only thing that has changed is that sin has corrupted the relationship between man and woman, causing them to be in conflict with each other.

Before sin messed up their relationship, Adam and Eve ruled together as a team. Eve was an equal part of that team. They were real partners and co-leaders.

**We have twisted words** to try and displace women from their God given position of equal rulership. In Genesis 2:18 God calls Eve a helper suitable for Adam.

**Gen 2:18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."**

We have often implied that the term "**helper**" is an inferior or subservient term or role. But it is never used in a subservient way in the scriptures. Helper is the name given to the Holy Spirit and, in other places, to Almighty God. He is our helper! He is at our side!

Man has twisted the scriptural idea of "helper" in regard to women, to mean one who is lesser and the servant of another. This is wrong, and not biblical.

God designed the perfect person to come alongside Adam to rule with him with her gifts and abilities. God's will then and now is for men and women to serve side-by-side with an equal mandate to rule.

### **3. We either view the roles of men and women through "the fall" or through God's original design.**

**The fall puts man and woman in competition and conflict.**

**The original blessing puts man and woman in cooperation and mutual honor.**

**The fall causes us to try to control and rule over each other.**

**The original blessing causes us to rule together.**

**The fall of Adam and Eve turned this divine relationship into a battleground.**

**The original blessing creates harmony in the relationship.**

We have to decide if we want to live under the curse of the fall, which is the battle of the sexes, or through the redemptive work of Jesus in our hearts and allow him to redeem and restore us back to God's original plan.

In my opinion much of the theology of the church in this area is a theology based on the fallen relationship of man under the curse instead of redemptive based. They define the role of women based on the fall and not God's original plan.

God defines the curse or brokenness of the fall this way. **Genesis 3:16b And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.**" This is living under the curse. Jesus came to redeem us from this brokenness.

Yes, we still live and deal with a fallen world and a defiled human nature, **but I want to pursue God's best, not settle for that which the enemy has corrupted.**

We don't get it right every time, but I think we are moving in the right direction as a church. **I apologize to our sisters for the times we don't get it right.** We do want to release women in their gifts and calling so we can lead together.

#### **4. Jesus restored the dignity of women, and the scriptures affirm them as leading alongside of men.**

Let me give you some examples from the scriptures that reveal God's heart and design. Throughout the scriptures we see the Holy Spirit calling forth the leadership gifts of women.

**Deborah in the O.T.** held the top-ranking governmental position. People came to her for direction and discernment. Under her leadership, the children of Israel were delivered from a twenty-year-long occupation by their enemy.

**Miriam** served as the prophetic worship leader before the congregation of people.

**Huldah** served in an influential role as a prophetess. The priests looked to her for counsel. Through her influence, sweeping moral and spiritual reforms resulting in revival came to the nation.

**When Jesus came, he began to restore women to their rightful place in his kingdom.** Jesus treated men and women as having equal value, and restored women to the dignity and worth of God's original purpose.

**Jesus came and broke the stereotypes and confronted the cultural and religious biases and taboos of his day toward women.** Jesus welcomed and embraced them to sit and learn from him and also help him in his ministry.

As a result of Jesus ministry and example, we see the early church embracing the gifts of women in leadership roles. **Lydia** led a church, **Pricilla**, along with her husband, had a public teaching ministry, **Phoebe** oversaw several churches, **Nympha and Chloe** each pastored a house church, **Junia** was an apostle.

In God's kingdom the Spirit is poured out on sons and daughters alike, men and women equally.

**Acts 2:17-18 'In the last days,' God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike— and they will prophesy. (NLT)**

**The ascension gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher are given to both men and women.** God is no respecter of persons or gender.

We are living in a New Covenant. We are now living by kingdom rules, and his rules call us to lead together. I don't have time to describe the biblical design of headship or why Paul instructed certain women to keep silent. It is all in the book.

## **5. To lead together well, we have to be intentional and gracious**

Here are some practical keys. – Home – job - church

- Ask “what do you think?” How would you do it? What are your dreams— Value the other persons thoughts, ideas and dreams
- Recognize each other's gifts and skills and release each other to use them
- Ask who is the best person for this role or task regardless of gender.
- - Financial Expertise, Management, Administration, Supervision, Teaching,
- Empower them to go for it – give the tools and resources they need.
- Show equal honor – titles, promotions, pay, public recognition, opportunity

**I want to close with a prayer over us as both men and women as we strive to understand what it means to lead together in our homes, jobs, businesses, and church.** (After which the prayer ministers will be at the side for those who would like prayer this morning.)

#### STAND FOR THE PRAYER

- Lord, when you created man and woman and set them in your garden to rule together you said it is good. Helps us to rediscover the goodness of working, serving and ruling together as men and women in a spirit of mutual honor.
- Forgive us of mindsets, attitudes and actions that are contrary to your redemptive purposes in our lives and relationships.
- Renew our minds to think like you do and to desire what you desire. Restore us to the place of meaningful partnerships as men and women.
- Help us to reclaim what the enemy has stolen from us as men and women created in your likeness and image.
- Help us to be examples of humility and servanthood in our relationship to a world fighting for control and dominance over each other.
- I pray that our daughters and granddaughter will thrive and be greatly valued in this church. I pray that they will find their place alongside of our sons and grandsons and together lead their generation according to your original plan.
- So, on this Mother's Day we bless our mothers and we are grateful for each single and married woman you have placed in our church family.
- We call them forth in their homes, marketplace and our church to lead together in the advancement of God's kingdom in their sphere of influence.