

Women in Ministry (Part 2)

by Bayless Conley

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Hello, friend. I am so glad that you have joined me. I'm going to continue on with a message that we started last time. Don't worry if you missed the last one. Today's will be complete in and of itself. To some people, this is more than a bit controversial, yet it is thoroughly biblical. So, if you love the Bible, you're going to love this. Get ready. If you have a Bible, grab it, and let's get into the Word together.

My dear friend, if I could, I would sit down with you at your kitchen table, or your dining room table, or on your porch. Hopefully, you could put a kettle on, and we could get a couple of cups of tea. Now, listen, I'm living in the US. We only do mugs of tea here. I know to some people, this is absolutely ridiculous. There's like three cups of tea in this thing. I've got a mug of tea here, but hopefully, at your house, we can sit down and have a proper cup of tea and just talk about things.

I've had something on my heart here that I wanted to share. We're answering the question, does God call women into ministry? Does God ever appoint women to roles of leadership among His people? Of course, to answer that, we have to go to the divine record. I'd love to, if I could, sit down with you. We could enjoy our tea and just talk about it and look at the Scriptures together because it's important. God talks a lot about this in His Word. If God talks about it, we need to know about it. None of His Word is throw-away, "Oh, this is good, this is just excess," no, it's all important.

You know what? I can't come sit down with you in your home or in your kitchen, but here's the next best thing. I'm going to maybe sip on my mug of tea, and let's just talk about this. Last time, we looked at a couple of women. In fact, I want to mention three women in the Old Testament who were all called prophetesses. They served in the ministry of a prophet. They understood the plan and the purpose of God, and they spoke God's mind to God's people.

One of them was Miriam. We talked about her. She was the sister of Moses and Aaron. Then we talked about Deborah last time. Deborah was not just a prophetess. We read where she prophesied. She predicted the future very, very accurately, but she was also called a judge. People came to her for judgment. She was a judge in Israel. She was the only woman who ever attained that position because she was called to it by God, and obviously, recognized and given the common consent of the people. And what a leader she was.

In fact, at the end of her time as a judge, it says that the land had rest for 40 years. I pray that your ministry and that, your influence, and that, your contribution gives people great rest in the Lord. I'd like to move on rather than go back and re-preach what I did. Let's talk about another prophetess. Her name is Huldah. In 2 Kings 22, as the story opens up, we find a young boy named Josiah. Who becomes king of Judah at age eight. Imagine becoming a king when you're eight years old. Now, his father and his grandfather were both idolatrous. Josiah knew nothing about God.

Women in Ministry (Part 2)

Israel had basically lost the plot. Israel is filled with idols. The country is wholly given over to pagan practices. They've completely forsaken God. Even the temple is filled with idols. I want to pick it up in this story where Josiah, some years later, gives orders to repair the house of the Lord. The high priest finds a Book of the Law inside. Now, it's unbelievable that the high priest, these guys, are cleaning out the house of the Lord and doing repairs, and they find a Book of the Law. And they don't even know what it is. They're that far removed from God. It's like, "We found this Book," and they bring it to the king and the king reads it, and realizes that they've disobeyed God, they've angered God, and wrath is looming over Jerusalem and over Israel.

They go for counsel to Huldah, the prophetess. When they come to her, she prophesies, "Look, all of the things prophesied in this Book are going to come to pass. It's going to happen. All this destruction and judgment is going to come, but you go tell the king 'because his heart was tender toward me,' says the Lord, 'Because he humbled himself, because he wept, and he tore his clothes. I'm going to give blessing in his life. This is not going to come to pass in his life. He's not going to see this calamity come upon the people or upon the land in his lifetime.'" The result of it, listen, this is the result of them bringing back the word of this prophetess to Josiah, who's now a young man, it says in 2 Kings 23:1-3 NKJV,

¹ Now the king sent them to gather all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to him. ² The king went up to the house of the Lord with all the men of Judah, and with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord. ³ Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant.

Then he goes throughout Judah, throughout the land, and utterly cleanses it of every vestige of idolatry and pagan worship. He cleanses the temple. He burns all of these idols and actually fulfills the prophecy in doing so. He obeys the words in the Book, even to the re-establishing of the Passover, which had not been kept in two generations. Then, literally, a national revival takes place. The nation comes back to God. Though not much is written of her, Huldah, the prophetess, had an important part to play in this national revival. She was a lynchpin in this whole thing happening. God used her in an amazing way.

She's a prophetess. She operates in the gifts of the Spirit. She speaks God's mind to His people. You think about this woman, Huldah. In a time when the nation, wholesale, has gone into idolatry and turned their backs on God, she has not forsaken God. She has remained true to God, and she has developed in spiritual things. She's respected. These men could have gone to Jeremiah, the prophet. He was the contemporary of Huldah, but they had confidence in her, and they respected her ministry. She accurately prophesied concerning the future of Judah and concerning Josiah's personal future. She encouraged and inspired Josiah to obey God and, by so doing, played a key role in bringing a nation back to God.

Now, in her, we see confirmed, once again, the important role that women can play in God's plans. In fact, you ought to read it as well. We all know of Isaiah, the prophet who wrote the marvelous book of Isaiah. It's one of my favorite chapters in the Bible, in that book, Isaiah 53. The great redemptive chapter that talks about Christ, His sacrifice, why He went through a sacrifice, and what was purchased for us through the sacrifice. Did you know that Isaiah's wife was a prophetess as well? Yes, the Scripture says so in Isaiah 8. She spoke by inspiration of

Women in Ministry (Part 2)

the Spirit of God. She had the gifts of the Spirit operating in her life, at least the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom, and the gift of prophecy. She was a Prophetess as well. Let's move over. Let's step over a line and come to the time, just after the birth of Christ, we read about a woman named Anna. Luke 2:36-38 NKJV,

³⁶ Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; ³⁷ and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. ³⁸ And coming in that instant...

Now, that instant means that Mary and Joseph have brought Jesus to the temple to dedicate Him according to the law.

³⁸ And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him (that is, she spoke of Jesus) to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Now, Anna was widowed after seven years of marriage and she chose to spend her lifetime in service to God by fasting and by praying. She was a prophetess. She was very sensitive to divine time, and she came in at that very moment that they had brought the Christ child there. She recognized who He was, and she heralded the Savior in the temple, in the house of God. She spoke to people about Jesus, for those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. Amazing. Now, after the resurrection, once the New Testament era started, do we find women in ministry? Do we find women in roles of leadership among God's people? Well, again, we have to go to the Scriptures, and I will say the answer is yes. Acts 2:16-18, Peter quotes Joel's prophecy on the day of Pentecost. He says this in Acts 2:16-18 NKJV,

¹⁶ "But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. ¹⁸ And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.'"

You know, in Acts 21:8-9, we read about Phillip, who had four virgin daughters who prophesied. Now, according to 1 Corinthians, Paul defines the gift of prophecy as this: He who prophesy speaks to men to edification, exhortation, and comfort. Philip's four daughters spoke to men to edify them, to exhort them, and to bring comfort to them. That's what the gift of prophecy does. Romans 16:1-2 NKJV, Paul writes to the church at Rome,

¹ I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, ² that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

Paul calls Phoebe, this woman, a servant, which is the Greek word, diakonos. She's a deacon in the church or a deaconess. She has served and ministered to the saints in Cenchrea, a port city near Corinth. Paul uses this same word where she's a servant of the church. We can read it in 1 Corinthians 3:5 NKJV. Paul says,

⁵ Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed...

Women in Ministry (Part 2)

It's the identical Greek word. Paul uses the same word in a number of other places to describe both himself and others who preach the gospel. Concerning Phoebe, this servant, this minister of the church in Cenchrea, she ministered to people. Paul says, "Receive her." That's a word of honor. It means to accept her, accept her ministry. He said, "Assist her," indicating that she is to assume a leadership role. It said, "Assist her," that means yield to her, stand by her, and aid her by assuming a supportive role. Paul said she is a helper, which literally means to help, to protect, or to defend. In what way? We don't know, but she was definitely a woman of stature in the church.

Most scholars agree that she was the one who carried this epistle from the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome. She carried what is now in our Bible as the book of Romans to the church in Rome, most scholars agree. Listen, no more precious cargo has ever been carried. You could take all of the ships that have sailed throughout the history of the world, take all of the treasure on those ships, gather all of the gold that has been mined in the history of the world, and it would not come close in value to the book of Romans. You don't give a precious cargo like this to some klutz or to some half-committed believer. Phoebe played an important role in her home church, in Cenchrea, in Rome, and in the life of the church worldwide. She not only helped Paul, but she carried this epistle to the saints in Rome, which has blessed the whole world. My, my, my, thank God for Phoebe. Then we read further, Romans 16:3-5 NKJV,

³ Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵ Likewise greet the church that is in their house.

They were husband and wife, Priscilla and Aquila. They were fellow workers in Christ. Paul said they risked their necks. Without them, we wouldn't have the New Testament as we have it now because Paul would not have fulfilled his ministry. We wouldn't have the Scripture as we know it now. They played this important role, both of them, the husband and wife. Paul talks about the church in their home. They probably pastored that church and led that church; we can't be certain, but it stands to reason if someone else actually was the leader or the pastor of the church in their home, that they would have been mentioned or recognized by Paul when he talks about, "Greet the church that's in their house," but he didn't. I think we can safely assume, again, it is an assumption that they led that church. In 1 Corinthians 16:9 it mentions the church in their home as well. We read this in Acts 18:24-26, we find that Priscilla certainly had the ability to teach, the gift to teach. Acts 18:24-26 NKJV,

²⁴ Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵ This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

Now, this man Apollos, he's already eloquent, and he's mighty in the Scriptures. He's teaching accurately, and they explain to him the Scriptures, the way of Christ, the way of God, more accurately. Thank God for Aquila, thank God for Priscilla. We read on in the book of Romans. Romans 16:7 NKJV,

⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

Women in Ministry (Part 2)

Paul is saying, "Look, they were believers before I was." Well, Andronicus is a male name, and Junia, that's a female name. In that day, that name was not given to men. Whether they were brother and sister, or just brother and sister in the Lord, or husband and wife, we don't know, but Paul says they're of note among the apostles. That can be taken two ways, actually, the way it's structured in the original language. It can be read one of two ways: They were both apostles, that Andronicus and Junia were both apostles, or it can be read that they were just of note, that they were well known to the apostles, but here, they were suffering for their faith in Christ, for their faithfulness to the gospel, just like Paul was. They were his fellow prisoners, but they were obviously prominent people in the church. In Romans 16:12 NKJV, Paul says,

¹² Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord.

All three of those are feminine names. They are all the names of girls, and they all labored much in the Lord. In Philippians 4:2-3 NKJV Paul says,

² I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ And I urge you also, true companion, help these women (you help them) who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

These women, Euodia and Syntyche, labored together with the Apostle Paul. They were fellow workers, and he said, "Look, help them." Apparently, Euodia and Syntyche were key leaders in the church, and they were in conflict. They were not seeing eye to eye concerning something. If the devil can and he can't run over the church, he'll try and create confusion in the church. Where there's strife, there's also every evil work. Strife opens the door to the devil. Apparently, these women are trying to patch things up, and he says, "Look, help them. You know, give them some help in seeing eye to eye and getting things fixed."

We cannot overlook the fact that Paul said they were fellow workers. They labored much in the gospel, and they labored with him in the gospel. These are women of renown. Women to be respected. Women that, to one degree or another, we don't know what they did, but they obviously had important roles among God's people. Does God anoint women for ministry and place them in significant roles among His people? Yes, He does. Psalm 68:11 NKJV says,

¹¹ The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those who proclaimed it.

Now, the amplified Bible puts it this way,

¹¹ The Lord gives the word [of power]; the women who bear and publish [the news] are a great host.

That's an accurate translation because the word "company" is not just a Hebrew word of feminine gender; it literally means women. "The Lord gave the Word; great was the company of women who proclaimed it." God uses women to proclaim His Word. If you think about it, who did Christ reveal Himself to first other than the apostles?

Well, it was the woman at the well, there in Samaria, and she says, "Well, when the Christ comes, He's going to tell us everything," and her life was a mess. Jesus said, "Look, the one speaking to you, it's Me. I am the Christ." She runs away into the city and tells everyone, "Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" Many of the people,

Women in Ministry (Part 2)

men in that city, they believed in Jesus because of her word. They came out in masses. That's when Jesus said, "Lift up your eyes. Look at the fields. They're white already for the harvest." He was obviously talking about this mass of people that are coming out to meet Him. The apostles had returned from buying food, and He looks at these people, and He says, "There's a harvest that's ready, and it's ripe."

All right, who is it that stirred them up? Who first brought the message to them? Well, it was the woman at the well. The sinful woman where Jesus intersected in her life and changed her and talked about a well of living water that could be in her springing up into everlasting life. Dr. Isaac Leaser, interesting; he translates this verse in Psalm 68:11. He was a great Hebrew scholar. He translates it this way, "The Lord gave the happy tidings. They are published by the female messengers, a numerous host."

Now, having covered all that we have, and there's a lot more than I would like to talk about, but seeing clearly that women can serve in a ministry leadership role, I must say that any married woman with a family has a higher calling and that has to do with her home. That's a higher calling. Marriage and raising your children are your first priority. Here are the priorities of life. Number one, your personal relationship with the Lord, that's number one. Secondly, your husband, if you're a woman, that feels called. Number three, your children and your home. Number four, any other additional calling.

I am called as a preacher. I'm called as a pastor of a church. My first relationship, though, is my personal relationship with God, then my wife, then my family, and then comes others. I can't take care of the bride of Christ if I can't take care of my own bride. I can't take care of the household of God if I can't take care of my own household. So, answering and fulfilling that call must be done. The call to ministry, the call to leadership, must be done without violating the more important call of family and taking care of your home. Listen to this: this is Titus 2:3-5 from the New International Readers version. It says,

³ In the same way, teach the older women to lead a holy life. They must not tell lies about others. They must not let wine control them. Instead, they must teach what is good. ⁴ Then they can advise the younger women to love their husbands and children.

⁵ The younger women must control themselves and be pure. They must take good care of their homes. They must be kind. They must follow the lead of their husbands. Then no one will be able to speak evil things against God's word.

Listen, if you have children at home and you feel like you're called to preach or into some leadership role and you got a husband that works or whatever, let's say, that you're not a single girl, but you've got a marriage, and you've got a family, God's plan is not for someone else to raise your children. God's plan is not for you to have latchkey kids who have to spend their days alone while you're fulfilling your calling. God's plan is not to have some institution or some other people raising your kids. That is your first priority. That is your highest calling. You take care of the needs of your husband, of your children, of your family, and then ministry comes after that.

God is not asking anyone to sacrifice their family so they can preach. God never asked me to put my family on the altar of sacrifice and to sacrifice them. I remember, even when Janet, my wife, we'd had Harrison, our first son, and then we had twins not too long after that, and my wife, she loves to teach the Bible, and she'd be called to different women's meetings, and she refused those calls for several years. Some people got offended. They didn't understand. She said, "No, I feel like my first calling is to be here for my kids. It's for my family, and it's for my home," and God blessed us because of that. Yes, women can serve in ministry roles and can

Women in Ministry (Part 2)

be used by God to do significant things. We've seen it in the Scriptures, but marriage, children, and the home come first.

Anyway, I hope it's been a blessing to you. I hope I've challenged your thinking. Study to show yourself approved onto God. Be like the Bereans who, daily, searched the Scriptures to see whether these things were so. Let us let God's Word be the final authority in our life. I pray now that God's richest and best would be yours always. Friend, you are loved by Jesus. God bless you.

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