



CHRISTIAN FAITH PERSPECTIVES IN  
LEADERSHIP AND BUSINESS

# Women in Leadership

*Biblical and Contemporary  
Perspectives*



*Edited by*

STEFANIE ERTEL

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macmillan

# Christian Faith Perspectives in Leadership and Business

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Stefanie Ertel · Doris Gomez ·  
Kathleen Patterson  
Editors

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# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
	Stefanie Ertel, Carlo Serrano, and Steven Crowther	
<b>2</b>	<b>Women in Leadership: Examining the Biblical Text and the Context</b>	<b>7</b>
	Stefanie Ertel	
<b>3</b>	<b>Women as Central to the Collective Mission of God</b>	<b>23</b>
	Carlo Serrano	
<b>4</b>	<b>Beyond Riches and Rubies: A Study of Proverbs 31:10–31 and Servant Leadership</b>	<b>43</b>
	Elizabeth Graves	
<b>5</b>	<b>Positive Gender Identity for Women in Leadership: Examining and Embracing Experiential Learning through Deborah as a Mother in Israel</b>	<b>61</b>
	DeLoria Savoy	
<b>6</b>	<b>Sensitivity and Courage: A Social and Cultural Analysis of Esther 4:13–5:8</b>	<b>79</b>
	Carla Smith	
<b>7</b>	<b>Esther and Mordecai: Leadership Lessons from an Unnamed God</b>	<b>95</b>
	Eva Christine Sorrow	



<b>8</b>	<b>The Impact of Women in Leadership: Headship vs. Lordship; Position vs. Power; Honor vs. Submission; A Cultural Analysis of 1 Corinthians 11:1–16 and 1 Peter 3:1–6</b>	<b>117</b>
	Ca-Asia Lane and Joshua Henson	
<b>9</b>	<b>Women and Servant Leadership: Truths and Misconceptions About Submission</b>	<b>137</b>
	Carlo Serrano	
<b>10</b>	<b>Great Women in Early Kingdom Work: A Cultural Contextual Analysis of Romans 16:1–16 and the Applicability of Women in Leadership in the Twenty-First Century</b>	<b>151</b>
	Ca-Asia Lane and Joshua Henson	
<b>11</b>	<b>Where Are Women Today in Leadership</b>	<b>171</b>
	Steve Firestone, Doris Gomez, and Kathleen Patterson	
<b>12</b>	<b>Female Leadership in Intercultural Contexts</b>	<b>185</b>
	Cassi Sherley Krei	
<b>13</b>	<b>Women Leaders Across the Nation: A Study in a Leadership Movement</b>	<b>213</b>
	Stefanie Ertel	
<b>14</b>	<b>Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Biblical Perspective and Framework for Christian Women in Leadership</b>	<b>241</b>
	Ashley Graves	
<b>15</b>	<b>Career, Life, and Family: Do Christian Women Have to Choose</b>	<b>255</b>
	Ashley Graves	
<b>16</b>	<b>Beliefs and Action Steps</b>	<b>271</b>
	Stefanie Ertel	
	<b>Index</b>	<b>275</b>

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## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Support-church governmental positions for women	15
Table 2.2	Opposition-church governmental positions for women	15
Table 7.1	Providential timing	104
Table 8.1	Principles that support women in leadership in the twenty-first century	132
Table 10.1	Characteristics applicable for women in leadership in the twenty-first century	165
Table 12.1	The GLOBE study	192
Table 12.2	Social Games	200
Table 12.3	Contextual Intelligence	203
Table 13.1	Value	231
Table 13.2	Mentoring	233



# Introduction

*Stefanie Ertel, Carlo Serrano, and Steven Crowther*

## 1.1 HISTORY

I grew up in a traditional household as a non-denominational pastor's daughter (Ertel). I have three older brothers, and my dad pastored a small church in South Florida. At that time, our family did not believe it was biblical to have female pastors. Instead, we believed women could teach and lead at various levels in the business world and within the church if she was not a pastor or had governmental-level leadership in the local church.

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Steven Crowther: Deceased

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My dad was one of my biggest encouragers while I stepped more into leadership. As I developed in this area, and my dad's experience and knowledge grew in women and leadership, his views developed and changed due to his deep study of the biblical narrative of women. However, I remember growing up in a great household, yet at times, feeling less because of the restrictions placed on me due to my gender. I acknowledged the differences in biological gender and the roles of a husband and wife communicated in the Bible. However, I was confused about women in the Bible, women in leadership today, successful women pastors, and where God had placed me in leadership. I would like to believe the many conversations I had with my dad played a part in his pursuit of a deeper exploration of this topic. God used my dad, Dr. Steven Crowther, to play a significant part in getting where I am today, encouraging me as a leader, and helping me lay the foundations for starting this book; he contributed to this chapter and this book shortly before his passing and has left an indelible mark on me and many other women in leadership.

My dad connected me to the appropriate people and helped me during the first two years of the process of this book. We often talked about the day we would write and publish a book together. Unfortunately, he unexpectedly passed of cancer four months before the contract was officially accepted with Palgrave Macmillan. Many of the authors in this book knew him personally or knew of him professionally, and his work is cited throughout the following chapters. I am honored to continue in this process. This book is about honoring God and revealing the truth from His Word about His daughters.

As we step into this research process together, I would like to highlight a quote from a previously written book by my dad, also published by Palgrave Macmillan. Crowther (2018) wrote a book on biblical servant leadership and explores how this approach applies in current contexts. His research is beneficial to consider in light of the research within this book. *Women in Leadership: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* delves into a needed topic, but let one's focus not be diverted. This research

should bring forth needed knowledge and empower women to lead, not divert and cause distractions by embracing the negatives. Crowther writes (2018),

The way into the future for the human race is effective good leadership. Our world is filled with divergent troubling issues and many of the solutions need effective, good leaders with a robust way of leading. Looking into the future, which can appear dark at times, is actually very bright. It is an opportunity for new ways of leading with new effective, good leaders to be developed and to rally many of the new effective leaders of the world to bring bright change into our world. In the church, there is a bright future. As the church faces opposition and trouble and even cultural rejection, this is an opportunity for good effective biblical leaders to rise to the surface in the church and ministries to lead in real advance for the Kingdom of God on the earth. These are dark times, these are good times. Frankly, these times inspire me and they should inspire you too (pp. 164–165).

The future is bright within the Church, and the future is bright for women leaders inside and outside the Church. Let us continue to climb upon the shoulders of previous researchers, leaders, and men and women world changers.

## 1.2 HIGH-CAPACITY LEADERS

The world needs high-capacity leaders who serve from a foundation of ethical and moral values. Thus, it is important for Christian scholars to continue to explore the nexus of organizational leadership and biblical principles. This is especially true when exploring the role of women in leadership, specifically in the business context. Women are already leading around the globe at the highest levels. In mainstream society, women are empowered more than ever to stand up against injustice, thrive, and fulfill their unique calling. Yet, within some organizational contexts, the issue of women in leadership remains unexplored at best and controversial at worst, wherein women in leadership are still considered anomalies in high positions of leadership (Chin, 2011). Some argue that women are allowed to teach within their homes, but they should never teach or lead in an ecclesial context (Grudem & Piper, 2012; MacArthur, 2009; Pawson, 2009; Smith, 2012). Others suggest women have equal access



to leadership roles within a local church due to the egalitarian descriptions found in certain biblical passages (Lee, 2021; Stackhouse, 2015; Gal. 3:23–29). A major database search of the phrase “biblical women in leadership” yielded over 9800 unique peer-reviewed publications on the subject. Indeed, much has been written on the subject of women in ecclesial leadership (de la Rey, 2005; Klenke, 2004; Rhode, 2017). Yet, what is often lost within the literature is a biblical perspective on the role of women in leadership from a macro level.

It is important to consider the role and value of women in leadership across all social sectors. Indeed, there are numerous examples in the Scriptures of women leading outside of the local church context. In the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, women are shown leading at the national level (Judges 4:4–14), on the front-lines of organizational life (Luke 8:1–3; Acts 18:18–19; Romans 16:1–5), and of course, leading at home (I Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:4). Thus, it is important to explore the issue of women in leadership from a biblical perspective with application for business and executive leadership as well as within ecclesial settings. This book is not a call to the revolution of past or present movements that fight for women’s rights in all areas. Those movements are important and need exploration from the view of Scripture. However, this book is a much-needed biblically based and research-centered exploration of women’s unique and important role in leadership across multiple domains, especially within organizational contexts beyond the local church. This biblical and researched understanding develops a strong foundation for women leaders to lead with confidence by removing gender role confusion and allowing for context to empower women to lead.

### 1.3 EXPECTATIONS

The following chapters contain research and truth that can, and hopefully will, contribute to today’s leadership movement: effective, high-capacity leaders of all genders advancing the Kingdom of God, no matter the environment, career, or calling. Jesus valued women from various backgrounds and ethnicities in a day that emphasized these areas significantly. According to McLaughlin (2019), “Jesus’s valuing of women is unmissable. In a culture in which women were devalued and often exploited, it underscores their equal status before God and his desire for personal relationship with them” (chap. 8, para. 26). Let us continue to train

and empower leaders, both male and female. In today’s culture, undervaluing women may still be present in some environments and cultures, but let us follow this example of Jesus elevating women by allowing their perspectives to be heard.

This book was designed to empower women and go deeper into this topic for graduate-level research to equip current and future leaders with the appropriate knowledge to move forward, leading both men and women. The following chapters will focus on areas throughout the Bible focusing on women, what the Bible says about them, and how this is acted out in contemporary environments. It is critical to look at the many verses in the Bible and the examples of women leaders. This book was written with the view that the entire Bible is the inspired Word of God, final in its content, containing no errors within its teaching (2 Tim. 3:16). This belief significantly impacts every chapter within this book. This may not be the book for you if you do not have this belief. However, if you believe in the inerrancy of Scripture and want to study, research, and know more about what God has communicated about women, this book is for you. I encourage you to step into this journey with an open mind asking the Holy Spirit to guide you. Hard questions will be asked, but one should not shy away from difficult topics. We, the Church (body of believers), have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to do more than we ever could on our own. Part of this may start with asking the question, “why?” Why did Jesus treat women as He did at that time? Why were there women leaders in the Church in the Bible, while some today are explicitly against most forms of women in leadership? Join us and ask the question “*why*” –while looking deeper into Scripture, culture, and context, how the Church is acting this out, and what God is challenging us to do today with this knowledge.

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# Women in Leadership: Examining the Biblical Text and the Context

*Stefanie Ertel*

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Men and women of all nationalities are in leadership roles across the globe. In the past, there have been stigmas about individuals in leadership due to their gender or race. Even though many can identify diversity in senior leadership roles in the United States, there is still an identifiable minority in these positions across organizations. In some countries, racial, class, or gender minorities are not treated equally in their workplaces. Currently, some cultures still treat women as weak workmates. As time has progressed, minorities have been increasingly promoted in the workplace, to the point of purposeful hiring of minorities to increase an organization's level of diversity. The world has given more acceptance to

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women in leadership roles than the church typically does. Both men and women have their strengths and weaknesses, but is one called to leadership, and more specifically to full-time vocational ministry in the church, where another is not? What does the Bible say about women in leadership? What aspects were cultural, and what truths live on beyond that time and culture?

The business world is searching for exceptional women for employment, leadership, and executive leadership positions. They have learned that the leadership style of most women complements an unstable, diverse environment (Daft, 2011). The church does not necessarily have the same viewpoint. As a result, much controversy among Christians has arisen concerning whether women can be leaders, specifically regarding church leadership.

Much of this discussion focuses on 1 Timothy 2:11–15, which states women cannot teach nor have authority over men. Various denominations have differing views of the interpretation of this passage, as well as Bible scholars. Nevertheless, the interpretation of these verses are essential for women, especially those who are leading in the church. Thus, the following study will explore the topic of the biblical teaching concerning women in leadership while focusing on this passage in 1 Timothy 2. There will be a focus on interpretation, context, and application for today.

Throughout the Bible, there may seem to be inconsistencies concerning women and leadership. Therefore, this is a cry for a deeper study! This study began many years ago with the thought that God does not contradict Himself, and there appears to be a contradiction in the Bible on the topic of women and leadership. How could Deborah lead the nation of Israel but not have authority over men? God does not contradict Himself, and He is a God of details. Every Word in the Bible is inspired. With this belief, if an area contradicts another part of Scripture, we are missing the deeper details.

## 2.2 THE TEXT WITHIN THE CONTEXT

When exegeting Scripture (expounding on and interpreting Scripture), it is essential to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture (Gentry & Wellum, 2012; Hahn & Scott, 2011; Rice, 2009). When a passage seems contradictory to other passages in the Bible, it is vital to identify the context of the verse. The following research builds off the truth that the Bible is the written Word of God—“inspired by God” (NASB) and “breathed out by

God” (ESV). 2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV) says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” God cannot and will not contradict Himself, and He does not contradict Himself in His written Word.

One argument states that God should only give a command once for His children to follow. If the only view in the Bible concerning women and teaching and having authority over men were the same, it would be a valid argument to state that women should not teach or have authority over men. However, since this is not the case, the following will identify the context of the 2 Timothy passage in the Bible concerning women in leadership. According to Witherington (2006), “Unless the text is studied in its historical literacy, rhetorical, religious, etc. contexts, we are bound to distort its meaning and misuse it. A text without a context is just a pretext for whatever you want it to mean” (para. 5). Therefore, one should not start with an idea and try to prove it through Scripture, but rather look at Scripture and ask, what is the idea God is communicating here? Therefore, the following will delve into one of the most controversial verses and topics in the Bible among Christians, considering the text within the context.

- 1 Timothy 2:11–12

- A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet (NASB).
- Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet (ESV).
- A woman\* should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman\* to teach or to assume authority over a man\*\*, she must be quiet (NIV).

*\*or wife; \*\*or husband*

*The above versions used were chosen since NASB and ESV are word-for-word (literal translations), and the NIV is a blend of word-for-word and thought-for-thought.*

1 Timothy 2:11–12 has been used to support the idea that women should not have authority over men, particularly within a church or spiritual setting. To some, this means that women cannot preach from the

stage because this could demonstrate authority over men. According to Witherington (2006), this passage does not state that women must be completely silent. It does not command women to be subordinate to all men; it simply states in this passage to listen quietly and intently to learn. This verse tells women to respect those giving instruction, just as one would expect most individuals to do today when receiving instruction. The focus of this verse is how women ought to learn. Paul gives this command to the women within this local body, but this same command is for men in various other passages. 1 Timothy 2:1–2 (ESV) says, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” That last phrase in the NIV and NASB state, “that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (NIV), and “so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (NASB). According to Cobrae (2007), one can identify the word used for peaceable (or peaceful in the ESV and NIV), which is the identical word for silence (or quietly in the NASB and ESV). According to Strong’s definition, “it is the same word; but in the feminine form of the Greek word *hesuchios* which means to be still and at peace” (Cobrae, 2007, p. 9). According to Witherington (2006), men are encouraged to exhibit quietness in worship in Titus 2:2, 1 Thessalonians 4:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:12, and more. This passage deals explicitly with women due to the context of the situation, specifically addressing the problems within this church, addressing the women who were misbehaving (Harrison, 2011).

Early Church leaders included Phoebe, Priscilla, Euodia, and Syntyche, all women who functioned in the Church in ways that may seem contrary to the passage in 1 Timothy (Harrison, 2011). When highlighting such women in leadership in the Bible, Davis (2009) writes, “there is no hint in the canonical texts that the activities of these women were viewed in a negative light. This diversity—the fact that women’s authoritative leadership is sometimes prohibited (1 Tim 2) and sometimes permitted (Deborah, Judg. 4)—indicates that circumstantial factors are in play, not merely ‘transcultural, creational’ norms that are applied without regard to local problems” (The question of homosexual practices section, para. 3). If Paul was not addressing a problem within the church and it was a command for all women, then several early Church leaders went against this command by supporting women in leadership. However, if Paul were addressing a problem within that church with the women, the

other passages in the Bible supporting women leaders would not be in contradiction to this passage.

Examples of women in leadership roles are throughout the Bible. They are less prevalent than in men, but there are a few reasons for this. Two significant reasons for this include that patriarchal thinking dominated the culture of Bible times, and prominent leadership characteristics of that time were more typically related to men. Even more recently, one can identify similar parallels with the belief that most leadership characteristics were more notably masculine. Northouse (2019) identifies the rise of “great man” theories in the early twentieth century. According to Daft (2011), “The earliest studies of leadership adopted the belief that leaders (who were always thought of as male) were born with certain heroic leadership traits and natural abilities of power and influence. In organizations, social movements, religions, governments, and the military, leadership was conceptualized as a single ‘Great Man’ who put everything together and influenced others to follow along based on the strength of inherited traits, qualities, and abilities” (p. 19). As leadership theories have continued to develop throughout time, scholars and practitioners agree that this approach to leadership has more weaknesses than strengths. It is noteworthy to identify that this idea that men are leaders and women are not continued significantly longer after Bible times. Currently, some cultures and denominations continue to have this view.

Huizing (2011) identifies the commands in 1 Timothy 2 as not prescriptive. Looking at the verses directly preceding 1 Timothy 2:11–12 many scholars believe, including Huizing (2011), these are not literal commands for current contexts. Many scholars and leaders within the Church agree that Paul’s purpose in this passage is to address specific problems, not to add to the Church’s doctrine (Harrison, 2011; Huizing, 2011). 1 Timothy 2:8–9 commands men to lift their hands whenever they pray (verse eight) and women not to wear nice clothes or jewelry (verse nine).

The imperative in this passage is to learn; this command was noteworthy during this time due to the cultural elements at play (Huizing, 2011). It was prohibited in Jewish traditions to teach women about the Torah, and this passage commands women to be taught (Witherington, 2006). Thus, this passage allows more opportunities for women by allowing them to learn. As one considers the context, we see an elevation of women in their current roles, even during a time of rebuke.



Another reason this passage of Scripture can be challenging to translate is due to a Greek word that is only used here in Scripture (Gundry & Meadors, 2009). This word (authentēō) translates as “to exercise authority,” which is an essential element of the translation for this passage (Gundry & Meadors, 2009). Thayer’s Greek Lexicon defines this word from 1 Timothy 2:12 as, “one who with his own hand kills either others or himself...one who does a thing himself, the author...one who acts on his own authority, autocratic...an absolute master...to govern one, exercise dominion over one” (G831—authentēō—Strong’s Greek Lexicon). The word authority is present throughout 1 Timothy and the Bible. It is interesting to note how the word used in this passage differs from all the others in Scripture. However, the word authentēō is in Greek literature (Gundry & Meadors, 2009). This term may have negative meanings (to intend with harm or to have dominion over), yet, this word links with the word teach, and when they are linked together, they must both be positive or negative (Grudem, 2006; Gundry & Meadors, 2009). Here the word teach is used in a positive, and thus the word authority does not have a negative connotation (Grudem, 2006; Gundry & Meadors, 2009). Witherington (2006) argues that the focus is not on the word ‘teach’ and whether it has a negative sense. Instead, the focus is on the context, which deals with correcting problems and is, therefore, a negative context, which would change the meaning of this word to the negative translation, as seen in the Greek Lexicon above.

Dr. Davis (2009) additionally researched this word used in Greek and emphasized how Paul had many other commonly used words (even from Paul’s writings) that would have been more straightforward in the meaning if the intent was ‘authority’ in 1 Timothy 2. Davis (2009) writes, “The fact that a highly unusual and ambiguous word is chosen in 2:12 would be consistent with an unusual set of circumstances in the context to which the text is addressed. It will be argued below that these circumstances, as indicated by clear references in the Pastoral Epistles themselves, involve women who are being deceived by false teachers and, as such, are not suitable for the exercise of teaching or ruling authority in Ephesus” (*Authentein*: “have authority” or “domineer”? section, para. 4). Additionally, Witherington expounds on this topic as well. He describes this command in the present continual sense; Witherington (2010) writes, “The verb here, epitrepō, is present continual sense. Paul does not say, ‘I will not/never permit,’ but rather, ‘I am not [now] permitting.’ As

Phillip Payne has pointed out, there are no examples in the New Testament or in the LXX where this verb in the present active indicative first person singular indicates or implies a perpetual ordinance; rather a timely and specific prohibition is in view” (pp. 226–227; Payne, 1981). It can be concluded from the previously supported research that the command given in 1 Timothy 2 to women was due to the issues within the local body. Even though some may argue that the word translated for women could have been wives (as seen referenced in the NIV version), with these circumstances and the specific tenses with the words used, the meaning for the current application does not change. It is still evident; this was not a command for all time.

- 1 Timothy 2:13–15

- For *it was* Adam *who* was first created, *and* then Eve. And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a wrongdoer. But women will be preserved through childbirth—if they continue in faith, love, and sanctity, with moderation (NASB).
- For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control (ESV).
- For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety (NIV).

Some believe 1 Timothy 2:11–15 is entirely descriptive (as discussed previously), while others believe a shift occurs when Paul relates a command to the creation order; the shift from descriptive (telling about the rebuke of these women in the local church) to prescriptive (giving instructions, telling what Christians should continue to do). Individuals today still debate whether the shift takes place or not. Some scholars identify male leadership in the church as supported by the creation order (Gundry & Meadors, 2009), “For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve” (verse 13). According to Gundry and Meadors (2009), “Women should learn the faith and share their knowledge in some settings, as Paul says in Titus 2:4. But they should not become primary public instructors and defenders of the faith in the local church’s

pastoral positions, as Paul envisioned them in his instruction to Timothy” (p. 112). Many scholars and practitioners believe women leaders are present throughout the Bible, but not women as the primary instructors or senior leaders in the church. Some would argue that Deborah fulfilled this senior leadership role in a civil and spiritual leadership capacity (Davis, 2009). Egalitarianism and Complementarianism are the two primary opposing viewpoints on this topic. Egalitarians believe women can be leaders at all levels, and they believe in equal leadership in family life as well (Cole, 2019). Complementarians believe that women should not lead in pastoral roles within the church, though most agree that leadership in a small group, or departmental lane such as women’s ministry and children’s ministry, is acceptable (Cole, 2019). There are levels of both these camps that vary slightly. There is a growing camp within the crossover between these two belief systems. These individuals typically believe that the husband is the leader in the household, but women can be a pastor and have nearly the same roles as men, but the highest leadership roles within the church are for men (Cole, 2019). Some also vary in this camp, specifically on church governmental leadership for women (senior pastors or elders).

This split between the crossover view is also the one seen here on whether or not 1 Timothy 2:11–15 is entirely descriptive. As stated previously, when looking at Scripture that is unclear, it is critical to let Scripture interpret Scripture. Therefore, the following will bring in additional Scriptures to examine this disagreement. Both approaches have points from qualified researchers to strengthen their argument.

These tables overview typical interpretations of other Scriptures that affect the meaning of one aspect of this verse and the reasoning behind the creation narrative. Currently, there are still several areas that both theological camps can agree. However, while comparing versions of the Bible within these Scriptures and taking into account other areas in Scripture, one argument appears stronger than the other, and that argument is with Table 2.2. One of the stronger arguments within Table 2.1 lies with Deborah. However, one must be careful to take one aspect of Deborah’s life and apply it to all women, for all time, and all contexts. We can learn from Deborah and her leadership and how God called her to leadership. However, one may want to reevaluate if a belief is based strongly on a judge from the Old Testament with no obvious commands or examples in the New Testament.

**Table 2.1** Support-church governmental positions for women**1 Timothy 2:11–15 Passage Entirely Descriptive—Other Passages and Interpretations in Support of Church Governmental Positions for Women**

Deborah fulfilled this senior leadership role in a civil and spiritual capacity. Judges that led Israel then led in both capacities (Davis, 2009).

Believes Junia in Romans 16:7 is a woman and an apostle. They interpret the Scripture on Junia as “prominent among the apostles,” as used in the NIV version (Hamilton, 2022; Ng, 2020)

It was prevalent in Bible times for men to have more than one wife (Riggleman, 2020), and polyandry was not allowed, and due to these facts, 1 Timothy 3:2 is not clear if this disqualifies single men and women from these roles (Knight, 1992)

In 1 Timothy 3:11, according to Lafosse (2013), there is good evidence that the women referenced in this verse are referring to female deacons, compared to wives. The NIV notes that this is a possible translation

A possible chiasm in 1 Timothy 4:6–5:22 would make the often translated older women to older women presbyters or elders. The NRSV version notes this possible translation (Bailey, 2000)

**Table 2.2** Opposition-church governmental positions for women**1 Timothy 2:11–15 Shift Takes Place at Creation Narrative—Other Passages and Interpretations in Opposition of Church Governmental Positions for Women**

Deborah was a prophetess and judge; she made executive decisions but did not preach or teach and therefore did not hold spiritual authority such as governmental roles within the Church (Gupta, n.d.).

Many from this position interpret Junia in Romans 16:7 as a woman “well known to the apostles,” as translated by the ESV (Hamilton, 2022)

Women are assigned different roles, but this does not make them inferior or less than men. Additionally, men are assigned the role of the elder while being “a husband of one wife.” In 1 Timothy 3:2, this phrase could not apply to women in the reverse role (a wife of one husband), and therefore this supports that elders and those in governmental roles in the Church must be married men (Butt, 2012)

In 1 Timothy 3:11, according to Knight (1992), due to the order of the qualifications listed, this would be a continuation of qualifications for the wife

Supports the meaning of 1 Timothy 4:6–5:22 from most translations, which does not support a translation for older women deacons or elders in this passage

At the same time, other important questions arise even within the belief system of Table 2.2. For example, can a woman be a church’s lead pastor if she is under the authority of another governing church or pastor? It is common to have a woman house church leader in other countries, but does this apply in the Western world within local churches? A deep

analysis of whether or not women can have the highest level of governmental authority within the church is beyond the scope of this book. The purpose of this book is not to settle this argument; but rather to empower women in areas of leadership that can be clearly established as appropriate. Regardless of whether or not a woman can be the most senior leader within the local church, a case can be made from Scripture that women can hold pastoral positions, have a level of authority over men, and lead in and outside the church. It is evident in the Bible that women led and had authority over men and women (Acts 12:12; 16:14–15; 18:24–26; 21:9; Rom. 16:1–3; Col. 4:15; Phil 4:2–3). Several of these women will be studied in the later chapters of this book. The following analysis will continue focusing on verses 14–15, where both camps from the previous tables can typically agree on this passage in 1 Timothy.

In verses 14 through 15, Paul focuses on the transgression of Eve. However, other instances in the Bible focus on Adam's sin compared to Eve's. Romans 5:12–14 (NASB) says, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned— for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come." They both transgressed, but it does not mean a man or a woman is more susceptible than the other to be deceived (Witherington, 2006).

Moreover, 1 Timothy 2:15 is interesting because the Bible clearly articulates salvation through faith, not through works. Many Scriptures throughout the New Testament describe salvation through faith; one of those Scriptures include Ephesians 2:8, which says (NASB), "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Therefore, women do not earn their salvation through bearing children, but through Mary, others can receive their salvation through her childbirth, through the birth of Christ (Witherington, 2010). A definite article is located directly in front of the word childbearing in this passage; also, the verb used in this passage is singular ("she will be saved") (Witherington, 2010, p. 230). More importantly, this would be a significant salvific issue if this meant women receive their salvation through childbearing, compared to being saved through the Child that was born through Mary. Witherington (2010, p. 230) continues as he discusses this passage in Scripture, "In other words, the curse on woman incurred in Eve is reversed through Mary. Human fallenness came through a

woman, and so did human salvation. This was the view of many of the church fathers about this verse, not least because they recognized that the Pastorals elsewhere had strongly insisted that salvation was by grace through faith, not by producing offspring while maintaining a highly moral lifestyle!”

From this narrative on Eve, some scholars translate this as women should not be allowed to speak publicly because they are more susceptible to deceit. According to Payne (1981), Moo (a scholar who took this stance) makes generalizations on questionable assumptions. Moo (1980) interpreted the Eve narrative (in verses 13–15) as the support needed to validate the commands in verses 11–12 for all time. Payne (1981) directly addresses this view in writing (p. 177).

Moo has not mentioned, however, the much more simple interpretation which takes Eve as an historical example of what can happen when women are deceived and warning lest deception of women in the Ephesian church lead to their fall. This view does justice to the stress on Eve’s deception and the seriousness of its lasting effects (certainly the fall is a serious enough lasting effect without postulating that it made women particularly susceptible to deception and made them by nature unsuited to some activities such as engaging in public teaching!). This view also supports the restrictions Paul has laid on women in the Ephesian church in 1 Tim. 2:11–12, but it avoids the dangerous extrapolation from historical example to anthropological norms which are not explicit in Scripture.

Paul uses the story of Eve and her deception as a typology; in the same way Satan deceived Eve, false teachers will also seek to deceive the women in the Church (Huizing, 2011). The women in the church were not acting as they should, and thus, Paul is warning them not to fall away and not to teach at this time. In this context, Paul is not allowing them to teach or have authority (Huizing, 2011). It is evident through the words used in the original language and the context in which Paul is speaking that this command was only for a specific time. It is critical to be aware that identifying the creation narrative as a validation of this as a continual command causes significant issues. This stance would point to women as more susceptible to deceit and, more importantly, a “contradiction within the canon” (Davis, 2009, p. 8). Women in Scripture taught and had authority over men; if Paul is saying that women can never do this, here lies the contradiction.

## 2.3 IMPLICATIONS

This passage in 1 Timothy is one of the most controversial about women and leadership in Scripture. Aspects of these verses make it challenging to interpret, as discussed previously. In addition to the previously mentioned, many arguments are currently in debate. Even though the issue of women and leadership may not be salvific, it is an active dispute at varying levels within the Christian community. Since this topic does not affect our beliefs in salvation, often, this topic may not be addressed within the local church. Even within the same local body, individuals may have strong opinions on this topic, opposing one another. To some women, this may not be a significant issue. To others, this could be a hindrance. Kade Cole writes in her book *Developing Female Leaders* (2019), “these subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) messages can really wreak havoc on her understanding of who God has made her to be and what He has called her to do” (p. 6). For careerwomen and women leaders in general, if this is not clear in the local church this could potentially turn them away from the church. Even though this does not affect our responsibility to trust in Jesus, this view and its communication to others could potentially impact those considering coming into the local church.

In many ways, women rise above cultural norms within the church; one can identify this throughout the Bible. Even in this passage in 1 Timothy 2, women are allowed to learn, Jesus had women disciples, and we see women leaders throughout the Bible. Across the globe, some cultures lessen women, but the Church has house churches across many countries with women as their house church leaders. Many women worldwide are leading in various roles in the church and playing a pivotal role in bringing many into the Kingdom of God!

Conversely, in the Western world, women are at times lessened in the church. Christians who believe women cannot lead, teach, or have authority over men may reject women leaders from all fields seeking to come into the local church. People sometimes walk out of church services if a woman teaches from the stage, even though the church leadership supports this female leader. Within faith-based businesses and organizations, some individuals struggle with the idea of a woman being the executive leader, even though most leaders within the Church do not believe there is an issue here (specifically head leadership in the business world).

If women can lead and teach men, and God has placed that calling on their life, is this enough to say God qualifies them and that He has called them to a leadership role? It is vital for the woman leader to be confident in her calling and know that only God qualifies the called. At the same time, it is critical to realize that individuals can claim that God has called them to a particular area they are not. Even though this is a crucial aspect for the individual in identifying and stepping into their calling, it is also crucial to realize this does not biblically prove that women can be leaders within the church. Women often use this argument, but at moments only through emotion and likely due to the lack of ability to present a sound opposing viewpoint. How can others disprove what the woman leader believes God has told her? If God has given an individual a particular calling and groups of other Christians believe it is unbiblical, the call itself does not prove it is biblical. There are various ways to confirm or deny these believed callings, and one of those ways is a fundamental question—what does Scripture say? 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NASB) says, “All Scripture is inspired\* by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man or woman of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work” (\*literally God-breathed). More profound studies on such areas as 1 Timothy 2:11–15 are essential to further this conversation. This area should not be a controversial topic; women in leadership should be a transparent matter. It is transparent in that the views are apparent within the local church for all the women to feel empowered. If the theological stances are blurred, empowerment is not within reach since they do not know where they or their leadership stand. Women in their local church should know the beliefs of leadership and how it is based biblically.

There is a deep need for knowledge in this area. Christians and churches need to know why women can or cannot be spiritual leaders and at what levels. These views need to be communicated to the church and explained. Many people today do not know the meaning of these verses. Many wonder why Paul says women cannot teach with prominent women leaders in the Bible. This is not a time to believe blindly along with the masses. However, it is always a time to study Scripture taking in the text and the context.



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# Women as Central to the Collective Mission of God

*Carlo Serrano*

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

One finds all the trappings of a modern national capital city in Ottawa, Canada. There are government buildings, museums, convention centers, and countless monuments and memorials erected to reflect on the nation's past while always looking forward to a better future. Capital cities are both incubators and playing fields for organizational leadership, and Ottawa is no exception. Leadership, management, and an entrepreneurial spirit flow from Parliament Hill to the National Defense Headquarters and from the Shaw Centre to the halls of the University of Ottawa. However, at the northwest corner of the Senate of Canada Building stands a small yet powerful monument to the strength of leadership: A monument to personhood.

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In 1927, five brave women officially challenged Canada's outdated yet regularly practiced British mandate. At that time, women were considered "persons" when it came to legislative punishment but not when it came to rights and privileges, such as serving in the very legislature that administered judicial punishment (Benoit, 2000; Bowman, 2011). Emily G. Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby, and Nellie L. McClung stood together to confront a broken system and won. These women, now forever known as the "Famous Five," became some of the first women in the British Empire to hold public office (Bowman, 2011; Sharpe & McMahan, 2007). Moreover, they "were social reformers with vocational priorities informed by Gospel sensibilities" (Bowman, 2011, p. 5). The "Famous Five" monument is a profound testimony to a timeless truth: Women are persons. This evident truth is only sometimes evident in organizational life.

The fight for women's equality is well-documented in the literature. Volumes exist on the obstacles faced by women in various industries. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries witnessed an exponential improvement in women's rights globally, from the right to vote to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 to the allowance for women in combat roles in the military. Even the controversial *Roe vs. Wade* and its overturning in 2022 shows how women in the United States continue to stand at the center of human rights conversations. Social-media-based social justice continues to amplify women's issues, and movements such as #METOO and #CHURCHTOO reveal that society has a long way to go in protecting the human rights of all, especially women. Women are persons, and it would be easy to approach the topic of women in leadership from the usual angles as done so by the previously mentioned movements and legal decisions. However, focusing on the negatives, or lack of representation and equality, only sometimes leads to positive change. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the value of women as seen in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, with specific application to organizational life.

An organization's health often flows from a commitment to its vision, mission, and values. Vision refers to the big picture or ideal future that an organization wishes to bring into reality. Values are the core principles that describe the behaviors and beliefs that set the organization up for vision fulfillment. Sandwiched between the two is the mission. Mission

describes the organization's core purpose. The mission drives an organization toward the desired future articulated in its vision and lived out in its values. The mission is the main "thing."

The literature is full of studies that challenge leaders to guard against mission drift, work on mission alignment, and understand the practical elements of crafting mission statements (Greer & Horst, 2014; Grimes et al., 2019; Ometto et al., 2019; Ramus et al., 2017). Even the United States military emphasizes: "Always place the mission first" (Vespia et al., 2016, p. 21). Churches and other Christian organizations are not exempt from the popularization of all things mission (Kang, 2005). There is room for nuance and "splitting hairs" when defining and differentiating an organization's mission, vision, values, and purpose. However, there needs to be more debate about the importance of individual persons in organizational life and health.

One could get lost in various theological debates surrounding qualifications for Christian leadership, the place of women in Christian leadership, the importance of age in Church leadership, and the need for diversity in ecclesial organizations. These debates are often well-intended and supported by a multitude of Scriptures. However, debating needs to focus more on the simple and central truths of how Christian organizations should function and flourish. The mission needs people and an examination of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, along with a look at church history, shows that women play a central role in the mission of God. Women are persons in the total sense of the word.

As stated in my previous work, "...since the Christian church represents one of the most diverse and exponentially growing organizations in history, it seems essential to explore the church's roots from an organizational standpoint to gain insight..." (Serrano, 2022, p. 120). This is especially true when it comes to the often-overlooked role of women. This chapter examines the strategic place of women in the mission of God as lived out through God's organization—the church.

### 3.2 THE IMAGE OF GOD

Throughout history, there has been much debate and many attempts at defining the image of God as it relates to humanity. The totality of Scripture connects humanity with the creator and His image (Erickson, 1998). For example, Scripture clearly states that all humans are made in the image of God (Genesis 9:2, James 3:9–10, Psalm 137), which applies to every

nation, tribe, tongue, age group, and both biological genders (Erickson, 1998). Although there are behaviors that do not reflect the image of God in humanity, divine salvation always restores the image of God in fallen humanity (Elwell, 2001). The image of God also exists equally among all of humanity, meaning there are no such things as superhumans or demigods (Erickson, 1998). The bottom line is that humankind was created in the image of God simply by His prerogative.

Given the scriptural position regarding the image of God in humanity, it is unbiblical to view women as lesser beings (Erickson, 1998). The New Testament teaches that in Christ, there is neither male nor female but Christ in all (Galatians 3:28). Although that passage is salvific, it also speaks to how God values men and women equally. Genesis 1 paints the picture that both men and women possess the image of God. Genesis 2:18 describes women as co-workers and positive enablers who journey alongside men (Erickson, 1998). This passage is often misinterpreted to mean that women exist to serve men or were created as lesser beings. In Scripture, women are spoken of highly and not presented as insignificant or less than human. Women are essential and valuable from the creation account to the Gospels to the Apostle Paul's letters. This value comes first and foremost from the biblical truth that God fearfully and wonderfully created women in His image, just like men. Not to say that there are no functional differences between the two. However, what is important is that one does not equate function with equal standing before God or significance in living out the *missio Dei* as bearers of the *Imago Dei*. One could argue that for the Christian, the mission of God is the higher purpose through which all else must flow (Althouse, 2009). What is the mission of God?

### 3.3 THE MISSION OF GOD

Before one can understand the mission of God's organization (the church), it is critical to understand the mission of God. Scholars debate the origins of the term *missio Dei*. However, it likely finds its ancient roots in the writings of Augustine and its contemporary usage in the work of the 1952 International Missionary Conference in Willingen, West Germany (Kemper, 2014). Most agree that the term refers to God's primary purposes relating to all creation. The mission of God is "God's intention and activity to restore all creation to the purposes for which he created it" (Hahn, 2011, p. 40). As many believe, this restoration

hinges on spiritual salvation and relational reconciliation between God and humankind. The mission of God “underpins all the socio-ethical teachings of the Bible” (Knoetze & Mwangi, 2018, p. 2). According to Trinitarian theology and most orthodox views of Christianity, God’s primary agents for the execution of His mission are His son, Jesus Christ, and the empowerment of God, the Holy Spirit. This is the point where some diverge in their understanding of the *missio Dei*.

There are two primary camps of thought regarding God’s mission. One camp suggests that since salvation is the center point of God’s restoration process, then the mission of God is synonymous with the Great Commission as articulated in the Gospel of Matthew (Konz, 2018). Some who hold this view do not see creation care, social justice issues, equality, or the restoration of human dignity as being priorities of the *missio Dei*. That is not to say that they do not believe these issues are unimportant. Instead, they believe these issues do not directly connect to the mission of God, which in their view, is all about evangelism and discipleship and the local church’s activities. For them, the local church (and the Church) has a mission, and God approves.

The other camp believes that the winning of souls is just one, albeit important, element of the *missio Dei* (Konz, 2018). For them, the mission of God involves the restoration of all that was lost during the Fall of Humankind, as articulated in the Genesis 3 narrative, meaning that God’s activity expands beyond the activities of the local church and that God’s mission does not depend on human agency. Some who hold to this view reject the centrality of evangelism in the *missio Dei* and instead argue that restoring human dignity through social justice is the primary purpose of God’s people. For them, God has a mission, and the church may or may not get in the way.

Both camps run the risk of ignoring the essential elements of the other. Instead of an either/or approach to the mission of God, one could argue that a healthier approach is to recognize that God’s mission has a Church (Sarisky, 2014). The mission of God involves Christ-like living in every context, physically and spiritually (Freeks, 2018). This view avoids the pitfalls of extremes and offers a more holistic understanding of how God’s organization (the church) should function within the grand scope of his ultimate mission.

The church should reflect the mission of God, which is to seek and save the lost via spirit-filled incarnation and to restore all broken in creation

(Althouse, 2009). The *missio Dei* interacts in various ways with leadership development and practice. For example, in Acts 2–8, Luke reveals how apostolic leadership views the mission of God and the church. Likewise, an exploration of Pauline leadership offers insights into missional leadership development. Furthermore, it is vital to consider the doxological approach to missional living. Instead of focusing on numerical church growth or radical social change as the fruit of effective mission, it is wise to remember the early fathers of the church considered the glory of God synonymous with abundant life (Paas, 2021).

It is easy to drift from the central purposes of the Church (Greer & Horst, 2014). There is no mission without the church; without the mission, the church is nothing but a gathering of like-minded individuals (Karkkainen, 2002). The teachings of Jesus emphasize the Kingdom of God as a present reality and a future state. Jesus teaches his followers how to reflect God’s character on earth while anticipating the ultimate restoration of all things lost in the Fall. The teachings of the Apostles Paul, Peter, and John also speak to how God’s organization should operate in relation to each other and the world. God’s mission has a Church (universal) and a church (local), and this organization involves and includes people. In other words, “the church is an instrument for mission” (Kang, 2005, p. 280). All people in the church play a critical role in accomplishing God’s mission (1 Corinthians 12). Thus, it is essential to understand how God’s plan has always been to involve women in His mission and restoration process.

The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are the best places to mine for data related to the *missio Dei*, which is especially true as it relates to biblical concepts, principles, or theories related to the broad field of organizational leadership and design. Scholarship at the nexus of exegetical research and organizational leadership demonstrates that these ancient biblical texts have much to offer modern scholars and practitioners (Serrano, 2020). Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter (and this book) to provide an in-depth exegetical analysis of all passages related to women in leadership, it is possible to conduct a review of the relevant texts to demonstrate that women are persons who play a central role in the *missio Dei*.



### 3.4 WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

Although Christian leadership starts and ends with the *missio Dei*, a wide variety of essential leadership principles guide all the excellent work in the middle (Karkkainen, 2002). God calls all of the church to participate in His mission, not just leaders (Karkkainen, 2002). The Scriptures inform every area of the Christian life (2 Tim 3:16–17). Thus, it is important to systematically review women’s leadership roles as central to God’s mission throughout Scripture. Stated in my work on resilience in leadership, “It is safe to assume that when one thinks of leadership in the Bible, they often turn toward the common understanding of a leader as being one who leads a large group of people such as a king, ruler, or boss” (Serrano, 2021, p. 116). For example, Esther, one of the 16 queens mentioned in Scripture, stands as a primer on bravery, service, strategic leadership, missional biculturalism, and redemption (Akinyele, 2009; Gentry, 2020; Rasmussen, 2022; Serrano, 2021). Deborah, “the only female judge, and one of the few, if not the only female military leader mentioned in the Bible,” oversaw a period of peace only rivaled by the rule of King Solomon (Serrano, 2021, p. 117). Future chapters of this book dive into the lives of these great women. However, this chapter focuses on the “everyday woman” as central to the mission of God, not to downplay the women who achieved positions of power, but rather to highlight how all women play an equally important role in the *missio Dei*, regardless of their title or position.

There are 205 named women and over 600 unnamed women in the Hebrew, Christian, and Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books (Meyers et al., 2000). It is important to note that those 205 mentions are not of 205 different women but of instances where a woman is named, including women known by more than one name and instances where several women have the same name (Meyers et al., 2000). Of these 205 named women, 49 have their words recorded in the text (Freeman, 2014; Meyers et al., 2000). Those 49 instances account for 14,000 words, or 1.2 percent of the Bible and the Apocrypha combined (Freeman, 2014). This chapter approaches the Scriptures from the perspective of evangelical Christianity, which means that I only consider the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as canon and sacred texts. I do not downplay the importance of the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books in Roman Catholic, Eastern, and Russian Orthodox traditions. Instead, I make this distinction to avoid inadvertently elevating non-canon books to the level of the canon as

viewed by evangelical Christians. Thus, when this chapter speaks about “Scripture,” it speaks about the Hebrew (Old Testament) and Christian (New Testament) Scriptures. 86 specific women speak in Scripture individually or in groups of women (Freeman, 2014; Meyers et al., 2000). The Hebrew Scriptures contain the most words spoken by a woman. The Shulamite woman (Song of Solomon), Hannah (1 Samuel), and the woman of Tekoa (2 Samuel) speak six times more than the two most well-known women in the Bible (Ruth and Mary, the mother of Jesus) (Freeman, 2014). It is worth mentioning that no women speak in Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Ezra, Nehemiah, Psalms, Proverbs (unless one counts “wisdom”), Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micha, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude, and Revelation (Freeman, 2014; Meyers et al., 2000). That means roughly 65 percent of the Bible contains no words from a woman. Some may find that discouraging. Others may write that off as a statistical reality of the cultural norms that inform the worldview of the biblical authors. However, this allows for deep reflection on the importance of the words found within Scripture. The remaining 35 percent matters just as much as the words of men (1 Tim 3:16–17). These women may not have said much in the Bible, but what they said, and what Scripture says about them, speaks volumes about the importance of women as persons and as central to the mission of God and His church.

### 3.5 WOMEN IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Any discussion on the specific role of women and the mission of God should start at the obvious yet often overlooked beginning. When one thinks about women and leadership in the Bible, one considers the well-known stories of Deborah, Esther, Ruth and Naomi, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. While those women are worth discussing, one cannot rush past the first woman: Eve. One could argue that if the *missio Dei* is about God restoring all lost in the Garden, then there is no *missio Dei* without Eve. After all, she was a catalyst for the necessity of the *missio Dei*. I do not place all blame on Eve, nor does Scripture. The Apostle Paul argues that original sin lies at the feet of Adam (Romans 5:12–13), and both Adam and Eve received punishment in the Garden

narrative. However, Eve is the one who engaged in conversation with the tempter. She is the one who gave the fruit to Adam. She ate too. However, many believe that the *missio Dei* starts with the protoevangelium, or first mention of the Gospel, as found in Genesis 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring[e] and her offspring’ he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” In this verse, God commits to bringing salvation to the world through the offspring of Eve—Jesus. Thus, from the very beginning, God’s plan of restoring relationships, reconciling the eternal disconnect created by sin, and renewing creation back to the perfect state, is connected to womankind.

If Abraham is considered the father of the Jewish faith, then it is fair to say that his wife, Sarah, is the mother of the Jewish faith. After all, Sarah is a crucial player in the Abrahamic covenant, from which the Jewish (and the Christian) faith flow. There is no Isaac without Sarah. It is important to note that there is also no Ishmael without Sarah and Hagar. According to the Genesis narrative, Sarah concocted the plan that led to Abraham and Hagar conceiving Abraham’s first son, Ishmael. Thus, Sarah played a central role in the birth of the Hebrew and Arab people (Genesis 16). Hagar is not as well-known as some other women in the Bible. However, she is the first person in all of the Scripture visited by an angel and the first person to give God a name (Beer-lahai-roi or “The God who sees”) (Genesis 16:13). Hagar’s status as an exiled servant changes by the intentional placement of her story in the Genesis narrative. Women are persons, even when cast out and left to fend for themselves. Sarah may be central to God’s plan, but Hagar was seen by God too.

Abraham’s son, Isaac, had two sons: Jacob and Esau. Jacob had two wives, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to unpack the detailed story behind why he had two wives. However, it is important to note that although he favored his second wife, Rachel, the *missio Dei*, articulated in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, flows not through the favorite wife but through the unfavored wife, Leah. According to Genesis 29, Leah was forced into marriage by her father (a custom of the day), unloved by her husband Jacob, and she did not match the beauty of her younger sister, Rachel. Most summary readings of Genesis 29–50 lead the reader to favor the lineage of Rachel. After all, Joseph is, at least on the surface, the hero of God’s redemptive plan in the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, a more careful reading shows that it was Leah’s 4th son through whom that Davidic covenant flowed: Judah.

Moreover, Leah was also the mother of Levi, whose lineage was responsible for all things related to the temple worship of the Hebrew God. Leah's son Judah is the one who puts his life on the line to save his youngest brother during Joseph's inquiry in the latter portion of Genesis (Genesis 44:18–34). Judah is the tribe through which Israel's greatest king enters the world. Furthermore, of course, as spelled out in the genealogies found in the gospels, Judah is the lineage of Jesus. The mission of God as fulfilled in the life, teachings, and continued work of Jesus directly flows back to a woman treated as an afterthought: Leah.

Women in the Hebrew Scriptures were so much more than the bearers of children. For example, the mother of the first organizational leader of the nation of Israel was Jochebed. She was more than the mother of Moses. She was a strategic woman who used her intelligence to save the life of her infant son. Thanks to the quick thinking of Moses' sister, Miriam, Jochebed had the opportunity to care for Moses until turning him over to Pharaoh's daughter, where she raised him in a position of privilege (Exodus 2:1–10). Yes, God used the leadership of Moses to advance his purposes. However, the story of Moses only takes place with help from the strategic instincts of a woman, which seem obvious to the twenty-first-century reader. However, the Hebrew Scriptures recount a time when patriarchy dominated the culture. In that culture, women were often viewed as possessions, not persons of equal standing. However, time and time again, throughout these ancient Scriptures, the authors include details about women's actions and lives, not as background but as essential to the overall story.

For example, 2 Samuel 11 introduces the reader to a woman named Bathsheba. Those familiar with the life of King David place her in one of the three categories. Some view Bathsheba as a victim of a morally compromised King, a willing adulteress, or a helpless plot device used to further the story of King David (Benckhuysen, 2015). However, my research into King David's life demonstrates that the Deuteronomist history's compilers (Joshua—2 Kings) were intentional in their storytelling, especially regarding David's life (Serrano, 2017). Bathsheba stands as one of three moral contrasts to the unethical behavior of David in 2 Samuel 11. The author of 2 Samuel 11 goes so far as to inform us that Bathsheba was a practicing Jewish woman (most likely a convert) and that her family was devoted to the Davidic monarchy in word and deed. Bathsheba was married to Uriah, one of King David's inner circles of

warriors, and she was the daughter of Eliam, who was also part of David's mighty men (Serrano, 2017).

Moreover, some suggest that Ahithophel, one David's chief counselors, was Bathsheba's grandfather (Serrano, 2017). A careful examination reveals that Bathsheba was not just some random woman or a mere victim of an abusive king (although abused she was). Instead, Bathsheba stands out as an intentional player in the mission of God as related to the line of David. One could view Bathsheba as the cornerstone of King David's greatest failure. However, another better way to view Bathsheba is an honorable woman, an influential leader (1 Kings 1:11–21; 2:13–25), and the mother of the wisest man who ever lived: King Solomon.

One cannot overstate the value of women as central to the *missio Dei* as seen in the Hebrew Scriptures. Time in this chapter will not permit detailed discussions on Tamar, the daughters of Zelophad, Rahab, Naomi, and Hannah, or the mother of Jabez (Schmidt, 2020). Moreover, one could write an entire volume on women such as Athaliah, Jezebel, and Potiphar's wife. Those women, too, played critical roles in God's ultimate plan of redemption and restoration. The women mentioned throughout the Hebrew Scriptures are not minor characters in God's story. Rather, these women are linchpins, catalysts, change agents, strategists, and often, reflections of how God executes His mission on earth as it is in heaven.

### 3.6 WOMEN IN THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

The Hebrew Scriptures lay the groundwork for the mission of God, and the Christian Scriptures outline how the mission of God finds fulfillment in the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and how it is lived out in His organization: the church. Some suggest that womanhood in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures reflects a subservient gender forced to align with an antiquated patriarchy (Ademiluka, 2017). However, that suggestion fails to consider New Testament authors' high value on women. One could argue that Jesus elevated the status of women in life and leadership more than any leader in history. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John intentionally mentioned how Jesus' ministry received financial support, hospitality, and organizational growth from the direct efforts of women. If the mission of God, as seen in the mission of the church, is to spread the "good news" about Jesus to the masses, then it is fair to say that the Gospel narratives related to evangelism are incomplete

without the direct action of women. For example, as I state in my work on Jesus and Emotional Awareness in reference to the Samaritan woman caught in an affair:

Upon seeing the disciples: “The woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?’” (John 4:28–29). This is significant for several reasons. First, the woman had a bad reputation in her town. Evidence for this assumption has already been given earlier in the chapter...Yet after her encounter with Jesus, she hastily left her water pot and beckoned the town to come and see Jesus. Second, her actions show that Jesus’ teaching on living water and true worship must have made an impact...Third, the fact that the entire community came to Jesus based on the testimony of an adulterous woman shows that the actions of Jesus influenced a community as a whole to abandon their biases, if but for a moment, to seek spiritual truth (John 4:30; Serrano, 2021, p. 65).

The words and actions of the Samaritan woman led several people in her town coming to believe in Jesus (John 4:39–42). Not only was a woman one of the first pre-resurrection heralds of the message of Jesus, but women are also clearly named as the first person to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the foundation of the Christian faith (Matt 28:1–8; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–12). According to Thomaskutty (2019), “Women’s positive role and status in the Gospel of John enable us to understand them not merely as passive actors, but as active interlocutors and dialogue partners” (p. 79). The inclusion of the female voice in the post-resurrection narratives is not only firm evidence for the authenticity of the narratives, but it also underscores the refrain of this chapter, women are central to the collective mission of God.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, stands above all the women named or unnamed in the Christian Scriptures. According to the Scriptures, she was the chosen vessel to bring forth Emmanuel, or God “with us” (Matthew 1:23). Mary garners veneration for good reason. Her humble story, willing obedience, faithful parenting, and place in the early church set her apart as unique above all other New Testament characters. Moreover, Mary is the only person (other than Jesus, obviously) to witness the birth of the Son of God, the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the birth of God’s organization, the Church (Luke 2:19; John 19:25–27; Acts 1:14). With all respect to those of the Roman Catholic tradition, the contributions of Mary to the mission of God expand far

beyond the Immaculate Conception and Virgin Birth. Mary led her family in their post-Joseph reality and was also an essential leader in the life of the early Church (Friedman & Friedman, 2012). It is also worth noting that all four Gospels mention Mary of Magdalene. She, too, followed Jesus in the crucifixion narrative and is recognized as one of, if not the first, to witness the resurrected Jesus (Tönsing, 2022). The Gospel narratives mention women at least 102 times. Some of these are duplicates within the Synoptic Gospels, and some are unnamed women used as illustrations (Freeman, 2014; Meyers et al., 2000). However, one cannot read the story of Jesus without seeing the story of women.

In the Book of Acts, one finds women taking a prominent leadership role in the church's mission. The history of the first generation of the church is full of leading women, from Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost to the devout women in Pisidian Antioch and Philippi to the daughters of Phillip who prophesied (Freeman, 2014). What is fascinating is that the Apostle Paul, the author of most books in the Christian Scriptures, is careful to refer to certain women as being of "high-standing," valuable within the practices of the local church, as sisters, deacons, and worthy of honor (Acts 17:12; Romans 16:1–3; Timothy 3:11, 5:2). Sharma (2020) suggests that Priscilla and Aquilla stand as a prime example for the effectiveness of cross-gender leadership effectiveness. Together, Priscilla and Aquilla co-labored with the Apostle Paul and contributed directly to the development of Apollos, who was another influential leader in the early Church (Acts 18:24–28). If the New Testament authors such as the Apostle Paul were so careful to include women, then why do some use their words to downplay the importance of women in the mission of the church? We will explore that in future chapters. For now, it is clear that women are persons who play a central role in the collective mission of God, as evidenced in this summary of women in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

### 3.7 WOMEN IN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

According to Brothers (2021), "The goal of leadership is to bring people into a productive zone of disequilibrium so a new adaptation can emerge" (p. 28). This means that leadership can come from anywhere and anyone within an organization, especially women (Brothers, 2021). There is a myriad of theological positions that influence church leadership preferences. For example, the theological position of complementarianism

argues that although men and women are equal from a salvific standpoint, they have unique and different roles within the household and the church (Grudem, 2020). Complementarians do not believe that women can hold the position of elder/pastor within the local church. This position stands on a literal interpretation of Paul's "husband of one wife" directive found in the pastoral epistle's requirements for church leadership (Gundry, 2010).

Conversely, egalitarianism builds from the "freedom" language of Galatians ("...neither male nor female...") to argue that all ministry roles are available to women (Gundry, 2010). These two theological and doctrinal positions directly impact church leadership and church preferences in that they influence how local assemblies operate from a governance standpoint and how congregants "choose" which body to fellowship with. There are also cross-cultural implications for these theological perspectives, especially in the United States, where power and authority may equally distribute, regardless of gender (House et al., 2004). Scholars have explored the bias against women in local church ministry from various perspectives, such as patriarchy, hermeneutics, and economics (Hamman, 2010, p. 770; Shin, 2021). But what about non-pastoral Christian leadership?

Since the collective mission of God expands beyond the activity of the local church, it is essential to acknowledge how (and where) Christian women lead in sectors not directly tied to the local church. Women will represent 47 percent of the total workforce by 2024, according to the latest research from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (Mgrdichian & Aguas, 2020). Christian women play a vital role in every organizational sector on earth, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where women in countries like Rwanda make up 64 percent of the elected legislative and political positions (Hughes & Paxton, 2019). Many of these women are practicing and professing Christians. Conversely, in Latin American, "politics as a whole remains a markedly gendered institution" (Setzler, 2015, p. 49). This is true despite the increased Christian population and democracy in these regions. There are exceptions, such as Bolivia, where women hold 53 percent of the legislative positions (Hughes & Paxton, 2019). According to Ma (2014), "Women in the Global South are called to make serious contributions to Christian mission" (p. 203). However, "their potential is often buried in culturally hostile environments" (Ma, 2014, p. 203). Since the *missio Dei* is about advancing God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, it is vital for Christian women to serve in



all areas of leadership to influence positive change. Geographical borders and cultural differences are no longer valid excuses for the mistreatment or underrepresentation of women in leadership.

### 3.8 THE COLLECTIVE MISSION

Individualism in many Western cultures impacts economic perspectives and relational dynamics such as family, marriage, friendship, and organizational leadership. For example, American individualism consists of self-reliance, autonomy, independence, and self-determination (Bianchi, 2016; Finkelstein, 2012). However, the Apostle Paul challenged these dynamics by explaining how Christ-followers ought to react given their standing within the Church and the Church's place in culture (Greco-Roman world) (Malina, 2001). Thus, viewing the issue of women and the mission of God through the lens of twenty-first-century Western individualism may offer a skewed perspective of what biblical relationships look like in community. However, upon close look, one finds both individualism and collectivism interwoven throughout the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures (Kim, 2009). In the Hebrew texts, God calls unique individuals into a collective (Israel), which is dependent on individual behavior (law keeping) (Kim, 2009). The behavior of these individuals directly impacts the collective (Kim, 2009). Likewise, the Christian Scriptures reveal how God redeems individuals through Jesus Christ and calls them to be a part of His church (collective) (Kim, 2009). Thus, the collective mission of God is a collaboration of individuals, each accountable and responsible for their participation in the community of believers.

Indeed, the Church is the people of God and the Body of Christ (Karkkainen, 2002). However, the Trinitarian activity of the *missio Dei* calls for the church to act as more than a local assembly of like-minded believers (Althouse, 2009). However, it is critical to understand that “human beings not at all responsible or on the driver’s seat of *missio Dei*” (Thinane, 2021, p. 2). In the same way, God sent His son, the son sent the Spirit, and the Spirit empowered Christ and empowers believers; Jesus sends His disciples into the world in the power of the Spirit to fulfill the father’s mission (Althouse, 2009). Indeed, God has a mission, and His mission has a Church, but God is ultimately in control. This sending includes leadership within familiar ministerial contexts. However, a holistic definition of the *missio Dei* involves a broader understanding of “sending.” God sends Christian women (and men) into the marketplace,

the military, businesses, and beyond. Christ-followers live on mission in their homes, neighborhoods, and schools. Thus, one could argue that a theology of the church that is not fundamentally missiological-trinitarian is in an error of missing the “point” of the church. One needs to look no further than the writings of the Apostle Paul to see this explained:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Cor. 13:14).

Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, ‘Jesus is accursed!’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Cor. 12:3–7).

Paul used some form of triadic formulation in no less than 13 biblical passages (Grieb, 2005). Simply put, Pauline Ecclesiology (in my opinion, New Testament Ecclesiology) defines the Church as The People of God, the Body of Christ, and the *Koinonia* of the Spirit, which means there is no missional fulfillment without male and female (Grieb, 2005). Scripture supports the issue of women as central to the collective mission of God, as does the peer-reviewed literature and, yes, the lived experiences of Christians throughout the ages. While there is room to debate the role of women in church leadership or even within the household/family unit, there is no room to debate the value of women as critical members of the Body of Christ. One should never use the Egalitarian versus Complementarian debate to dehumanize, diminish, or dismiss the role of women in God’s plan to redeem humanity and advance His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. The mission as the “main thing” is a healthy paradigm as long as that perspective never forgets the importance of “people” as essential agents in mission participation and fulfillment. Women are persons, and that is a beautiful truth.

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# Beyond Riches and Rubies: A Study of Proverbs 31:10–31 and Servant Leadership

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

As more organizations experience issues of corruption and low morality, business leaders and organizational scholars turn their interest to the practice of servant leadership (Peterson et al., 2012, p. 565; Sendjaya et al., 2008, p. 402). While the theory lacks consensus in definition, one model, argued by Liden et al. (2008, 2014), provides a foundation for study (Northouse, 2018, p. 232). This model entails antecedent conditions, behaviors, and outcomes of servant leadership (Northouse, p. 232). While evidence shows servant leadership's positive influence on followers, organizations, and society, the example of the woman described in Proverbs 31:10–31 improves upon the theory. Therefore, this chapter seeks to enhance servant leadership theory by examining the description of the

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noble woman in the pericope (Proverbs 31:10). Intertexture analysis uncovered oral-scribal, social, and cultural intertexture support for interpretation. The historical intertexture analysis did not provide sufficient reinforcement; however, the remaining elements were used in detail.

## 4.2 INTERTEXTURE ANALYSIS AND PROVERBS 31:10–31

As interpreters hunt for understanding, intertexture analysis provides enlightening answers, whereby examination of a text outside the pericope brings insight to the text itself (Robbins, 1996, p. 40). Intertexture analysis helps provide a deep understanding of the text and its multiple dimensions (Robbins, p. 3). Through an analysis of Proverbs 31:10–31 and its interaction with oral-scribal, cultural, and social intertexture, the poem brought life to a female embodiment of wisdom, one who served others with the fear of the Lord and received the ultimate reward.

## 4.3 ORAL-SCRIBAL INTERTEXTURE

Interpreters uncover oral-scribal intertexture by analyzing text outside the pericope, where reference to the text may or may not be explicit (Robbins, 1996, p. 40). There has been much debate about who authored Proverbs 31:10–31. Although scholars believed Solomon might have written portions of Proverbs, they do not believe he could have written this poem about a noble wife, because he himself had many wives (Pfeiffer & Harrison, 1962, pp. 554–555). It is safe to say, however, the author of the pericope remains unknown (Pfeiffer & Harrison, p. 555). Through oral-scribal analysis, one uncovers several references to wisdom: who it is for, what it is not, what it looks like, the challenge of finding it, how it is obtained, and ultimately its reward.

- Wisdom for All: Proverbs 31:10–31 is an artistic and acrostic poem about a wise and virtuous woman (Labahn, 2014, p. 2; Pfeiffer & Harrison, 1962, p. 582). The acrostic uses each of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet to begin each of the twenty-two verses of the poem (MacArthur, 2005, p. 729). In parallel, Psalm 112, also an acrostic poem, described a moral man who experienced many strikingly similar topics. (McCreesh, 1985, p. 25; Wolters, 1988, p. 448). In both texts, their actions related to their “fear of the Lord” (Wolters, p. 448). Psalms 111, also an acrostic poem and

nearly identical to Psalms 112, is called a “wisdom psalm” (Wolters, p. 448). It is different from Psalms 112 and Proverbs 31:10–31 because it described God, instead of a man or a woman (Wolters, p. 448). Hawkins (1996) claimed wisdom is not limited to a specific gender (p. 19). He stated, “the character traits...serve as examples to both men and women” (Hawkins, p. 19).

- The Contrasting Folly: While wisdom is available to all, so too is its opposite: folly, which likely represents sin (Hawkins, 1996, p. 19; Pfeiffer & Harrison, 1962, p. 553). Pfeiffer and Harrison (p. 553) asserted the book of Proverbs primarily taught a life of higher ground through contrast. The virtuous actions described in Proverbs 31:10–31 implied the existence of an opposite, which was acknowledged at the beginning of the chapter in Proverbs 31:3, “do not spend your strength on women, your vigor on those who ruin kings” (NIV). Proverbs 31:31 talked about charm and beauty as deceptive and fleeting. This echoes Proverbs 6:24, as folly talked with a skillfully deceptive tongue. Folly was noisy and boisterous (Proverbs 9:13), as opposed to the virtuous woman who spoke wise and truthful words (Proverbs 31:26; McCreech, 1985, pp. 45–46).
- An Image of Strength and Dignity: Proverbs 31:25 described a figurative armor, “she is clothed in strength and dignity.” This echoed Psalms 93:1 where the Lord had a similar armor—“the Lord is robed in majesty and is armed with strength” (Wolters, 1988, p. 451). Both passages mention being covered in strength; however, MacArthur (2005) argued the Proverbs 31:25 passage described her inward clothing (p. 730). In Psalms 35:26, one finds contrary words, “clothed in shame and disgrace,” which described the result of sinful acts. Isaiah 52:1 called Zion to dress themselves in strength. Here, they were being asked to turn from their drunken ways and clothe themselves with the Lord’s attributes (MacArthur, p. 823). This armor of strength and dignity represented both “physical strength and strength of character” (Hawkins, 1996, p. 14).
- An Image of Noble Character: The passage began with a description of a noble woman (Proverbs 31:10). This level of character was aspirational, and described a mature woman, having lived a life full of wise choices (Hawkins, 1996, p. 21). She was later described in Proverbs 31:29 as a woman who “in the eyes of her husband” surpassed other women who did noble things. MacArthur (2005) asserted Proverbs 31:25–27 emphasized her character (p. 730). A



competent and intelligent woman, Crook (1954) noted she is called “Woman of Worth” in Hebrew (p. 137). Proverbs 12:4 said, “the wife of noble character is her husband’s crown.” Wives of this caliber are held in high esteem (Pfeiffer & Harrison, 1962, p. 582). In Ruth 2:1, Boaz was described as “a man of standing,” which implied a similar nobility. One uncovers mentions of this type of character in Ruth 3:11, which stated “All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.” Ruth was a strong woman and efficient in her feats (Hawkins, p. 14). Both Ruth and the woman of noble character showed strong similarities (Hawkins, p. 14).

- Wisdom’s Elusiveness: The text warned the seeker that finding this personification of wisdom would not be an easy task (MacArthur, 2005, p. 729; Proverbs 31:10). In Job 28:12, the question about where to find wisdom echoed this challenge. McCreesh (1985) argued, it can only be found with God (p. 37). He contended, although finding the elusive woman seems nearly impossible to attain, it is still a worthy pursuit (McCreesh, p. 37). In Proverbs 8:35, one learns if they do find her, they will also find life and the Lord’s approval. This approval or “favor” is echoed in Proverbs 18:22.
- Fear of the Lord: Proverbs 31:30 spoke about “the fear of the Lord” or a reverence for God (MacArthur, 2005, p. 698). As discussed in Proverbs 1:7, it described wisdom as the “beginning of knowledge.” This phenomenon was a significant concept that both introduced and concluded the book of Proverbs (McCreesh, 1985, p. 25; Pfeiffer & Harrison, 1962, p. 583). These exact words are written in Psalms 111:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Job 28 described the search for wisdom and ended with similar words in Job 28:28, “the fear of the Lord - that is wisdom” (Pfeiffer and Harrison, p. 480). Pfeiffer and Harrison (p. 480) asserted, the attainment of wisdom begins when one ceases to rely on their own knowledge. To submit to or to fear the Lord lays the groundwork for wisdom (MacArthur, p. 698).
- Wisdom’s Reward: A virtuous life results in a promised reward. Proverbs 31:31 ended the pericope with an earned promise of “praise at the city gate.” Proverbs 12:14 described how wise words and actions are rewarding. Proverbs 22:4 also spoke of this life-giving reward which brought a different sort of wealth. As the woman in the pericope served her “family and community,” she earned their

praise (MacArthur, 2005, p. 730). However, most significant was the praise she received in death, after a life of service, as MacArthur (p. 730) contended, “the result of her efforts comprise her best eulogy.”

#### 4.4 CULTURAL INTERTEXTURE

To obtain insight into the culture of the time, one uses cultural intertexture analysis (Robbins, 1996, p. 58). It is a sort of inside intelligence, only the people of the time understand (Robbins, p. 58). Through the examination of Proverbs 31:10–31, three key cultural elements emerged in themes of wealth, worth, and work.

- Wealth and Worth: The poem used language that was clear enough for the reader to understand, but without examination, one would miss key cultural elements. In the pericope, material items determined wealth and worth, such as fine linen, rubies, scarlet, and purple.
- Fine Linen: While the woman worked to make bed coverings with fine linen, she was also clothed in it (Proverbs 31:22). Reference to fine linen in other Old Testament passages provides insight. Isaiah 19:9 said, “those who work with combed flax will despair, the weavers of fine linen will lose hope.” Proverbs 7:16 stated, “I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt.” Ezekiel 27:7 stated, “Fine embroidered linen from Egypt was your sail and served as your banner.” Each outside verse told a story about the culture of the time. One learns Egypt was a known exporter of fine linen. The people derived worth from this material. Not only did the woman in the pericope make and sell these items, but she also wore them (Proverbs 31:24). In wearing these expensive items, her family’s physical wealth was displayed and she was placed in the upper cusp of society (MacArthur, 2005, p. 730; Wolters, 1988, p. 455).
- Rubies, Scarlet, and Purple: The text used jewels and color to describe worth. Proverbs 31:10 stated “she is worth far more than rubies.” One hears similar reference to rubies earlier in Proverbs 3:15; 8:11. Here, the author talked not about material wealth, but spiritual wealth. If wisdom is far greater than rubies, which was a valuable item in the culture of the time, then it is worth the pursuit

(Hawkins, 1996, p. 16). The color red, purple, and scarlet also meant quality and was known for its value (Pfeiffer & Harrison, 1962, p. 582). In ancient times, the color scarlet was used to make the fabric red; however, it was a very expensive color (Labahn, 2014, p. 3). Because of this expense, the color was associated with wealth (Labahn, p. 3). Within the text, one sees few mentions of scarlet and purple. Proverbs 31:22 stated, “She is clothed in fine linen and purple.” Judges 8:26 mentioned the purple garments which were worn by a king. Song of Songs 3:10 talked about a seat that was upholstered in purple. Luke 16:19 talked about a rich man who wore these colors and lived a lavish life. Revelation 18:10 talked about the city that wore purple and scarlet material. In each of these passages, the specific mention of color was not just a description of the scene. Instead, it was meant to bring value to the item it described.

These references to wealth afforded a certain fearlessness. The woman did not fear the future; instead, she dismissed it with a laugh (Proverbs 31:25b). While her physical clothing depicted her physical wealth, she was also clothed in spiritual wealth or “clothed in strength and dignity” (Proverbs 31:25; Hawkins, 1996, p. 15). These character traits, which provided a different sort of wealth, are accessible to all people, regardless of their financial status (Hawkins, p. 15).

- Work: The language concerning work derived meaning from key elements of the passage, including field and idleness. Proverbs 31:16 spoke of how she discerned the purchase of a field, bought it, and worked it. Proverbs 24:30–31 showed a contrast of her field to the fields of lazy owners, which were covered in weeds and thorns. The slothful field owners were described as lacking judgement. This association of judgement and work, or lack thereof shows the importance of wisdom and action. Pfeiffer and Harrison (1962) suggested, buying a field would not have been part of a woman’s duties at the time (p. 583). However, the intent was to show her resourcefulness in action (MacArthur, p. 729). She was not one to sit idle. In fact, idleness was looked down upon. Proverbs 31:15 spoke of how she woke early in the night to start her work. In contrast, Proverbs 6:9–10 accused the “sluggard” of sleeping too long. Proverbs 20:13 instructed one to learn not to enjoy sleep or they will become poor. These insights around work provide understanding which goes beyond the mere act of daily chores. Her work

implied action (Wolters, 1988, p. 454). To deduce her to be an “exceptional housewife” would be an “oversimplification” (Szlos, 2000, p. 99). The passage was meant to show action on a much deeper level.

#### 4.5 SOCIAL INTERTEXTURE

Social status of the time, in roles, institutions, codes, and relationships provide important social intertexture elements (Robbins, 1996, p. 62). In Proverbs 31:10–31, social intertexture analysis revealed insights into the social institution of family through her role as a wife, mother, and entrepreneur.

- Role as a Mother: The most basic social institution of the biblical period was the family, consisting of a mother, father, and children (Powell, 2011, p. 281). Slaves were occasionally present in the household, and as Powell (p. 281) suggested, were also considered part of the family. Through their families, children learned about how God dealt with Israel, along with the beliefs and customs of their people (Powell, p. 282). Children also learned honor and obedience to their parents (Powell, p. 282). Her role as a mother was that of a teacher. Proverbs 31:26 said, “she speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on her tongue.” In Proverbs 1:8, children were told to keep their mother’s instruction. In exact words, Proverbs 6:20, again instructed the children not to turn away from their mother’s teachings. It was through her teaching and her example, she taught her children and others to live a higher life of morality (Labahn, 2014, p. 4).
- Role as a Wife: A husband’s reputation depended largely upon his wife’s actions (MacArthur, 2005, p. 730). In Proverbs 31:23, the respect her husband received in court was attributed to how well his wife supported him in the home (MacArthur, p. 730). The benefits of finding a wife are referenced in Proverbs 18:22. A husband’s success resulted from how well he was taken care of at home (MacArthur, p. 730). Due to her leadership in the home, her husband was able to lead in the community and gained the respect of others (Hawkins, 1996, p. 20).

- Role as an Entrepreneur: In ancient biblical times, families sustained themselves by growing their own food and making their own clothes (Powell, 2011, p. 282). The pericope described an enterprising woman, who not only provided clothes and food for her family, but traded with the Phoenician maritime traders (Classens, 2016, p. 12). Her ability to manufacture and trade these items increased her family's socioeconomic status (Classens, p. 12). The passage's emphasis on her entrepreneurial activities implied the importance of her role in supporting and elevating her family's position.

#### 4.6 THE ATTRIBUTES OF LEADERSHIP AND PROVERBS 31:10–31

Without deep investigation, one might interpret Proverbs 31:10–31 as an aspirational construct for wives and mothers. However, that sort of application would fall short of its purpose. Many key attributes of leadership are derived from the passage, describing her character and her actions. In Proverbs 31:12, she focused on bringing good to those she served. Her strong work ethic was represented by her hands (Proverbs 31:13). She was an enterprising woman, buying fields and trading good (Proverbs 31:16–19). She supported those who needed a little extra help (Proverbs 31:20). She was confident and elevated others (Proverbs 31:21–23). She was a woman of strong character, a wise teacher and protector (Proverbs 31:25–27). Because of her acts, she was praised and admired (Proverbs 31:28). Proverbs 31:10–31 is a passage full of leadership, with striking similarities to an emerging interest in servant leadership theory.

#### 4.7 SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The theory of servant leadership was founded by Greenleaf in the 1970s (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012, p. 555; Northouse, 2018, p. 225). Early on, there was not much research on the servant leader's behavior (Northouse, p. 225). Today, the most notable research on servant leadership behavior comes from Spears, Laub, Russell and Stone, Patterson, and Liden et al. (Van Dierendonck, 2011, p. 1231). Spears uncovered 10 characteristics of servant leaders (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002, p. 57). Laub's construct included six key characteristics (Parris & Peachey, 2013, p. 19). Russell

and Stone's work included nine functional characteristics and 11 additional characteristics (Van Dierendonck, p. 1232). Patterson uncovered seven characteristics based upon virtues and added compassionate love to the mixture (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015, p. 122). Liden et al. (2008, 2014) model pronounced certain preceding conditions, behaviors, and outcomes (Northouse, p. 232). As one can see, there is not much agreement between the scholars on a single behavioral model (Mittal & Dorfman, p. 556).

Servant leadership is best defined as one's primary desire to serve others, which evolves into an "aspiration to lead" (Northouse, 2018, p. 226). Crippen (2006) contended, because of one's service, they become known as a leader (p. 11). Their main reason for leadership is not leadership itself, but their desire to serve (Russell, 2001, p. 78). Reinke (2004) claimed, leadership is less than a bunch of attributes and more of a positive interaction between individuals (p. 34) resulting in future servant leaders (Stone et al., 2004, p. 358).

Although a relatively new leadership theory, it has been practiced throughout history, from biblical times to modern-day inaugurations (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002, p. 58). According to Sendjaya and Sarros (p. 58), Jesus was the first person to demonstrate and teach the concept of servant leadership. It was just as much of an anomaly then as it is now (Northouse, 2018, p. 225; Sendjaya, p. 59). Although servant leadership is not gender-specific, Sims and Morris (2018) asserted, women may gain great benefits from servant leadership because of its "communal aspects" (p. 409). The emerging desire for servant leadership within organizations today results from instances of low moral and ethical behavior seen in today's leadership (Peterson et al., 2012, p. 565). With an emphasis on service, leaders elevate to higher levels of morality (Parolini et al., 2009, p. 276). Liden et al. (2014) contend servant leadership will continue to gain momentum globally (p. 1447). Although, servant leadership is not necessarily accepted in all countries. Depending on a person's cultural values, they may or may not identify with the practice (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012, p. 555). One thing is clear, however; servant leadership is growing in interest and will only become more visible in practice in the future (Sendjaya et al., 2008, p. 405).

#### 4.8 DISCUSSION: SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND PROVERBS 31:10–31

Liden et al. (2008, 2014) developed a servant leadership model with three parts: antecedent conditions, behaviors, and outcomes (Northouse, 2018, p. 231). Since there is little consensus on a true model of servant leadership, this discussion intends to focus on parts of this model and will be referred to as Liden’s model hence forth. Furthermore, the example of servant leadership within Proverbs 31:10–31 appeared to be much simpler than the scholarly research implies. It is through one’s character (antecedent conditions) and behavior, whereby actions performed for others because of the fear of the Lord, one receives spiritual wealth of honor, life, and favor (outcomes).

1. Antecedent Conditions: Leader Attributes (Character): The antecedent conditions consist of context and culture, leader attributes, and follower receptivity (Northouse, 2018, p. 232). It is the intent of this discussion to focus on leader attributes as it relates to Proverbs 31:10–31. A leader’s attributes describe a leader’s “qualities and disposition” (Northouse, p. 232). The way leaders serve others is modeled by their “behavior, attitudes, and values” (Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005, p. 604). Because businesses are shifting away from the self-centered style of leadership, the topic of a leader’s focus is important (Peterson et al., 2012, p. 566). The topic of self emerges as a central part in the service of others. Hannay (2009) asserted, strong servant leaders focus on others (p. 3). This is not to say they lack self-esteem; instead, they have a strong focus outside of themselves (Hannay, p. 3; Peterson et al., p. 586). Narcissistic leaders, whose focus is on themselves, will identify and engage less with servant leadership (Peterson et al., p. 572). In contrast, the servant leader focuses on service and on others (Koshal, 2005, p. 2). The pericope described a woman who focused on others: her husband, her children, her household, her servants, and the needy (Proverbs 31:10–31). There is a parallel between focusing on others and wisdom. In Proverbs 31:30, the woman was described to have the “fear of the Lord.” The oral-scribal intertexture revealed how to obtain wisdom, beginning with reverence for the Lord (Proverbs 1:7). This type of high regard for the Lord described a person who relied not on themselves, but on the Lord.

When servant leaders abandon the esteem of themselves, they are enabled to focus on others.

2. Behaviors: Proverbs 31 Woman as Servant Leader: The second component of the Liden's model is servant leader behaviors (Northouse, 2018, p. 233). The list of these behaviors includes conceptualizing, emotional healing, putting followers first, helping followers grow and succeed, behaving ethically, empowering, and creating value for the community (Northouse, pp. 233–235). Conceptualizing is a leader's ability to understand and think through organizational problems (Northouse, p. 233). In Proverbs 31:16, the woman demonstrated this behavior by considering a field and buying it. Emotional healing demonstrates one's concern for the well-being of others (Northouse, p. 233). While there is little doubt about the woman's inclination for emotional healing through service to her family, she extends this concern to those in need by serving the poor (Proverbs 31:20a). Putting followers first is the cornerstone of servant leadership (Northouse, p. 234). This is evident in the woman's behavior toward her family. In Proverbs 31:11, she brought her husband good. In Proverbs 31:15, she put her own rest aside and woke up very early to complete her familial duties. She taught her children (Proverbs 31:26b) and managed her household (Proverbs 31:27). Helping followers grow and succeed shows a servant leader's ability to know what their followers desire and help them get there (Northouse, p. 234). A parallel exists in the results of her service to her husband. In Proverbs 31:23, her husband was respected, held high esteem, and was elevated because of her service (MacArthur, 2005, p. 730). McCreesh (1985) conferred, the husband's gain was because of the confidence he had in her activities (p. 27). Behaving ethically is a servant leader's high moral standards (Northouse, p. 235). The poem's title, *The Wife of Noble Character* implied her high standard. Not only was she clothed in spiritual wealth, but she spoke with wise words (Proverbs 31:25–26). In Proverbs 31:30 it talked about folly, who was deceptive and then contrasted to the woman in the pericope who found wisdom. Empowering describes the servant leader's ability to make others feel confident to act on their own (Northouse, p. 235). In the passage, her husband and children stood up and praised her (Proverbs 31:28). Those lacking empowerment would not have the confidence to stand on their own. Creating value for the community



shows the servant leader's influence over their followers to get them to also serve others (Northouse, p. 235). The woman in the passage earned the respect and praise of her husband and her children, although it did not explicitly state they served others because of her example (Proverbs 31:11; Proverbs 31:28). While the passage did not clearly describe all the servant leader behaviors, it did represent an overwhelming majority.

3. Outcomes: The third part of the Liden's (2008; 2014) model examines outcomes: follower performance and growth, organizational performance, and societal impact (Northouse, 2018, p. 232). Follower performance and growth focuses on the follower's realization of their full potential (Liden et al., 2008, p. 162; Northouse, p. 236). A parallel exists in Proverbs 31:23, with the perspective of her husband's earned respect with his peers. This verse is located between many verses of action. There are eleven verses describing her actions before this verse and four verses of action after. This implies an association between her actions and her husband's success. There is much debate about the effectiveness of servant leadership on outcomes, specifically a servant leader's effect on organizational performance. While the organization implied in the passage was her household, one might determine whether it succeeded by asking the question, was the household better-off because of her service to it? Because she brought her husband good (Proverbs 31:12), her family and her servants were fed (Proverbs 31:15) and clothed in winter (Proverbs 31:21), and she took care of the household (Proverbs 31:27), this evidence derives an agreement. Yes, the household was better-off. Societal impact deems servant leadership as a vehicle to impact society (Northouse, p. 237). While the text talked about her taking care of the poor, there is little explicit evidence that her service caused her followers to serve and impact society (Proverbs 31:20). However, the passage created a desire for emulation. If it created a desire for others to emulate her service, then her service did in fact impact society.

## 4.9 AN ENHANCEMENT TO SERVANT LEADERSHIP

While Proverbs 31:10–31 and Liden’s (2008; 2014) servant leadership model share many common characteristics, it is enhanced by adding two key points: an emphasis on action as behavior and servant leader growth.

1. Hands, Arms, and Action: Many of the seven behaviors imply action, however, they do not emphasize it. The example of servant leadership in Proverbs 31:10–31 was full of basic actions. The passage described her actions throughout the text. Of the twenty-two verses, fifteen described her in action. It is important to note that her hands or arms were mentioned six times. Vermeulen (2017) contended, “scholars have identified lists of body parts as a compositional device in biblical Hebrew poetry and as a way to highlight key themes in the biblical text” (p. 801). Her hands and arms represented action. “She worked with eager hands” (Proverbs 31:13). “Her arms are strong” (Proverbs 31:17b). “In her hand she holds a distaff,” as she spun clothes (Proverbs 31:19). “She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy” (Proverbs 31:20). These first four verses described her actions toward others; however, in the final verse, she received honor because of what she did with her hands (Proverbs 31:31; McCreesh, 1985, p. 31). It is beyond doubt, the passage intended to show a woman who served through action. Therefore, servant leadership is enhanced by adding an emphasis on action as a behavior.
2. Servant Leader Growth: Liden’s (2008; 2014) servant leader model includes three outcomes affecting the follower, the organization, and society. However, servant leader growth is an outcome which was also described in the text but has not been addressed in the model. Proverbs 31:31 stated, “honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring praise at the city gate.” Greenleaf and Spears (2002) questioned, “do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous...” (p. 27). Is there a similar effect on the leader themselves? After a life of service, the woman is called blessed and is praised by her family (Proverbs 31:28). She is not only rewarded with the fruits of her labor, as she is clothed in physical wealth (Proverbs 31:22), but she is also clothed in spiritual wealth, as well (Proverbs 31:25). The pursuit of the elusive wife goes beyond a

husband's search. Instead, it is a call to all people, as they pursue wisdom. As they fear the Lord, they abandoned service to themselves and serve others. In it, they find riches which exceed the value of rubies (Proverbs 31:10). They find spiritual wealth, resulting in favor, life, and honor (Proverbs 31:31).

#### 4.10 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GENDER IN THE PROVERBS 31:10–31 MODEL

Whether part of the ancient audience or a modern reader, careful attention to what the passage is trying to convey presents a challenge. Some say that only the reader and the text produce the meaning, while others believe the author decides the true meaning (Duval & Hayes, 2012, p. 192). But without inquiry into the original audience and to learn and understand the differences between the audience of then and the audience of now, one might misinterpret the significance of the passage (Duval & Hayes, p. 196). One might miss the value of the message that is being presented in Proverbs 31:10–31 for women leaders today.

The book of Proverbs is full of wisdom. It is one of the four wisdom books of the Bible that exist to foster godly character (Duval & Hayes, 2012, p. 421). Much of the book of Proverbs develops an image of a wise man; however, Proverbs 31:10–31 illustrates a wise woman (Duval and Hayes, p. 425). However, Jensen (2020) argued the description of the woman in the passage ran counter to the reality of its patriarchal Israelite society (Viviers, 2005, p. 879). During the fifth to fourth centuries, the period in which the pericope was thought to have been written (Olojede, 2012), women did not work outside of the home (Jansen, 2020, p. 5). Yet, the passage described a woman who worked quite a bit outside of the home considering the purchase of a field to work and buying it (Proverbs 31:16). Viviers (p. 879) questioned, “even though personified as a ‘she,’ does she really do ‘she’ things or perhaps ‘he’ things?” While women were typically managers of their homes (Jensen, 2020; Olojede, 2012), there were few roles outside of the home in which one would find women (Matić, 2016, p. 175). They certainly would not have their own money to buy a field (Olojede, 2012). Therefore, during the time in which the passage was experienced for the first time, the woman in Proverbs 31 stood out as an example, a role model.

There are differences and similarities between the women of then and today's women. The audience then would have found it odd for a woman to be described doing typically male things, while today's audience may not find differences in the activities she is engaged in, as they are not particularly out of the ordinary for females today. Women work outside the home and engage in entrepreneurial activities. However, one thing remains true for both audiences. The woman stands out as a role model for both. She was a role model of wisdom for both women and men then, and today she stands out as a role model for wisdom and service. She is not a real woman, but one for today's female leaders to aspire to (Jansen, 2020, p. 1). "No woman can be exactly as the woman in Proverbs 31:10–31, but can learn from her diligence, integrity, and ingenuity" (Jansen, 2020). She is a model not only for servant leadership, but for all women leaders today.

#### 4.11 CONCLUSION

The Proverbs 31 woman stands as not only a strong witness for aspiring servant leaders and interested scholars, but also for the female leaders of today. Its pursuit will take genuine work, but its result holds value far greater than anything money can buy. Through the pericope, the theory of servant leadership is enhanced by adding an emphasis on action as behavior and by adding servant leader growth as an outcome. Future study is necessary to determine whether there is a correlation between placing an emphasis on the servant leader's actions and whether it leads to enhanced follower growth. Additional study is required to understand the growth of the servant leader, as this should be considered an additional benefit to organizations and individuals considering its practical implementation.

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# Positive Gender Identity for Women in Leadership: Examining and Embracing Experiential Learning through Deborah as a Mother in Israel

*DeLoria Savoy*

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning is a powerful educational approach that involves learning through direct experience, reflection, and active engagement. It promotes critical thinking and allows for a deeper understanding of the subject matter. While Deborah's story predates modern educational theories and does not explicitly describe her learning through experiential means, her triumphant leadership journey embodies several elements that depict and align with the principles of experiential learning. Deborah's experiences, challenges, reflections, and mentorship demonstrate the value of learning through direct engagement with real-life situations. Deborah's

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story serves as an inspiration and a model of leadership, showcasing how experiential learning plays a vital role in developing effective leaders.

Deborah was a prophetess and judge in ancient Israel, known for her wisdom, courage, and ability to lead. Deborah's story as described in narrative in chapter four and celebrated in poetry in chapter five in the Book of Judges provides lessons on the intersection of gender, leadership, and motherhood; for in 5:7, Deborah identified herself as a "mother in Israel." By exploring the story of Deborah through the lens of experiential learning, valuable insight into women's leadership is gained along with a deeper understanding of how women can thrive in leadership positions while embracing their gender identity. Conversely, examining experiential learning through the story of Deborah as a mother in Israel allows for the recognition of positive gender identity for women in leadership. The experiential learning within and gleaned from the accounts of Deborah's leadership acumen supports that women can excel in leadership while staying true to their gender characteristics. By applying experiential learning to Deborah's story, it allows for reflection on concepts such as leadership development, learning from challenges, mentoring, leading by example, adaptability, and empowerment.

Deborah's diverse social identities intersected to shape her unique position as a significant and instrumental figure in ancient Israel. Her roles as a prophetess, judge, leader, and warrior defied traditional gender norms and demonstrated a woman's capabilities in ancient societies and today. Her story continues to inspire discussions about the representation of women in leadership roles and emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing diverse social identities in positions of authority and influence. While Deborah's narrative comes from an ancient biblical context, the principles and characteristics that define her leadership are timeless and can be applied to modern organizational settings.

## 5.2 SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY BACKGROUND

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a psychological theory developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s. The development of SIT was underpinned by Tajfel integrating work on categorization and social perception with a desire to understand prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup conflict in society (Hogg, 2016). SIT seeks to explain the psychological processes underlying group behavior, intergroup relations, and the formation of social identities (Hogg & Terry, 2014). The theory is based on the



premise that individuals define themselves and others based on the social groups to which they belong, and these group memberships play a significant role in shaping their self-concept and behavior (Hogg, 2016). The premise of SIT saved Tajfel's life when he, a Polish Jew, was categorized as a French prisoner of war during the Holocaust.

SIT includes three cognitive processes as core elements: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison.

- **Social Categorization:** According to SIT, individuals tend to categorize themselves and others into various social groups based on shared characteristics, such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, or even simpler categorizations like the preference for a particular sports team. These social categories help people make sense of the social world and simplify complex social interactions (Trepte, 2013; Trepte & Loy, 2017).
- **Social Identification:** Once individuals categorize themselves as members of a particular social group, they tend to identify with that group. Social identification involves adopting the norms, values, and behaviors associated with the group, leading to a sense of belonging and a feeling of "us" versus "them" regarding other groups (Trepte, 2013; Trepte & Loy, 2017).
- **Social Comparison:** SIT is also influenced by social comparison, where individuals evaluate their own group positively in comparison to other groups. This process of positive distinctiveness enhances self-esteem and contributes to group cohesion (Trepte, 2013; Trepte & Loy, 2017).

Additional concepts in SIT are intergroup behavior, self-esteem, in-group and out-group, identity salience, and social change.

- **Intergroup Behavior:** SIT proposes that people's social identity significantly influences their intergroup behavior. In-group favoritism and out-group derogation occur as a result of individuals seeking to enhance the status of their own group. This leads to prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup conflict (Ferguson & McKeown, 2016; Trepte & Loy, 2017).
- **Self-Esteem:** SIT is closely tied to self-esteem. When individuals positively evaluate their own social group, they experience a boost

in self-esteem. Abrams and Hoggs (2010) argued that the social comparison aspect of SIT is crucial to the self-categorization process because an individual is trying to place themselves into the best self-esteem enhancing group. “Social identity provides important sources of meaning, continuity, and direction in people’s lives” (Abrams & Hogg, 2010, p. 189).

- **In-Group and Out-Group:** In-group refers to the social group to which an individual belongs and identifies with, while out-group refers to other groups with which the individual does not identify. SIT explains that people tend to favor their in-group over out-groups and may exhibit behaviors that promote their in-group’s interests. The in-group and out-group concept is the output of the evaluation process within social identification and social comparison (Treppe, 2013).
- **Identity Salience:** The salience of SIT refers to how prominent or relevant a particular group membership is in a given situation. The more salient a social identity, the more likely it is to influence behavior and attitudes (Treppe & Loy, 2017).
- **Social Change:** SIT highlights how social change occurs when individuals redefine their group identities or engage in collective action to challenge the existing social order and norms attitudes (Treppe & Loy, 2017).

SIT has been applied to various domains. The theory provides insights into the underlying psychological processes that contribute to intergroup conflicts and hostility (Brewer, 2011). SIT helps to understand the formation of prejudice attitudes and discriminatory behaviors based on group identities (Spears, 2011). The theory has been used to study group dynamics and intergroup relations within organizations, affecting employee motivation, job satisfaction, and team performance (Lewis, 2011; Loi et al., 2014). SIT has been applied to analyze the formation and dynamics of social movements based on shared identities and collective action (Thomas et al., 2012; Van Zomeren et al., 2012). SIT remains a fundamental concept in the fields of social psychology and sociology, contributing to the understanding of group behavior and intergroup relations. It continues to be a valuable framework for studying various social phenomena and informing strategies to promote positive intergroup relations and reduce intergroup conflicts (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012).

### 5.3 GENDER AS SOCIAL IDENTITY IN ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Gender, as a social identity, plays a significant role in organizational leadership. Social identity refers to the part of an individual's self-categorization that is derived from membership in social groups, such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and other shared characteristics (Hertel et al., 2019). In the context of organizational leadership, gender identity influences how individuals perceive themselves and how others perceive them as leaders. Organizational cultures can either promote or hinder gender diversity in leadership (Werhane & Painter-Morland, 2011). Inclusive and diverse cultures encourage the representation of women in leadership roles and provide support to overcome gender-related challenges. On the other hand, male-dominated and patriarchal cultures may reinforce traditional gender roles, limiting women's leadership opportunities (Scheifele et al., 2021).

Gender can influence the opportunities individuals receive to assume leadership positions. Historically, leadership positions have been male-dominated, leading to the glass ceiling effect, where women may face barriers in advancing to top leadership roles due to discriminatory practices or implicit biases (Werhane & Painter-Morland, 2011). While leadership style varies among individuals, research has suggested that men and women may tend to display different leadership behaviors. Women leaders may exhibit transformational leadership traits, emphasizing collaboration, empathy, and relationship-building, while men may lean toward transactional leadership traits, focusing on task-oriented goals and rewards (Zbihlejšová et al., 2018). Both leadership styles can be effective, but gendered expectations may affect how these styles and leadership abilities are perceived. Research has shown that both men and women might unconsciously associate leadership with male characteristics. This can lead to implicit biases, where male leaders are more readily associated with leadership competence and authority, while female leaders may be scrutinized more closely or have to work harder to prove their capabilities.

When identifying gender as a social identity in organizational leadership, individuals must recognize and be cognizant of gender stereotypes and intersectionality within the organizational culture. Gender stereotypes are culturally and socially constructed beliefs about the traits, behaviors, and roles that are expected of men and women (Werhane &

Painter-Morland, 2011). These stereotypes shape perceptions of leadership qualities. For example, there may be biases associating assertiveness and decisiveness with male leaders and nurturing and collaboration with female leaders. Such stereotypes influence leadership opportunities and may hinder the advancement of women in leadership roles. It is essential to consider intersectionality in the context of gender as a social identity in leadership (Allen, 2023). Women's experiences in leadership are not uniform, as they can be influenced by factors like race, ethnicity, class, and other social identities (Sales et al., 2020). Women of different backgrounds may face unique challenges and opportunities in leadership. By recognizing gender as a social identity in organizational leadership and actively addressing biases and barriers, organizations foster environments where both men and women can thrive as leaders. Embracing diversity in leadership leads to improved decision-making, creativity, and overall organizational performance (Allen, 2023).

#### 5.4 LEADERSHIP THEORY AND ROLE ALIGNMENT

Leadership theory and role alignment are interconnected concepts that relate to how leaders function within an organization and how their roles align with the organization's goals and objectives (Drath et al., 2008). Leadership theory serves as a framework that seeks to explain the nature of effective leadership and its behaviors, traits, or characteristics that contribute to successful leadership and desired outcomes (Samimi et al., 2022). There are several prominent leadership theories, each offering different perspectives on what makes a leader effective such as authentic, complexity, adaptive, ethical, distributed, situational, transformational, strategic, and servant (Seidel et al., 2019).

Role alignment refers to the process of ensuring that individual roles within an organization are consistent with the organization's overall objectives and strategies (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). It involves matching the responsibilities and tasks of individuals to the goals and priorities of the organization. When roles are well-aligned, employees understand their contributions to the broader organizational vision, and their efforts are directed toward achieving common objectives (Inegbedion et al., 2020).

Leadership theory and role alignment are crucial for organizational success by cultivating an environment that promotes effective leadership development; within it is goal clarity and focus, fertile ground for employee engagement, transparent decision-making and delegation, and

pivotal space for organizational adaptability and performance improvement (Drath et al., 2008). Leadership theoretical constructs help organizations identify and develop individuals with the potential to become effective leaders (Gedro et al., 2020). Understanding different leadership styles and behaviors inform leadership development programs. Leaders who are aware of various leadership theories can adapt their decision-making and delegation styles based on the situation and the capabilities of their team members (Deshwal & Ali, 2020).

Role alignment allows organizations to adapt to changes in the internal and external environment more effectively. It facilitates the allocation of resources and talent in response to shifting priorities and challenges. Role alignment ensures that employees understand how their individual roles contribute to the achievement of the organization's goals. This clarity enhances focus and alignment of efforts toward common objectives. When roles are aligned with employees' strengths and interests, they are more likely to be engaged and motivated to perform at their best (Inegbedion et al., 2020).

Leadership theory provides valuable insights into effective leadership practices, while role alignment ensures that individual roles within an organization are consistent with its overall goals and strategies. By understanding and applying appropriate leadership theories and aligning roles effectively, organizations enhance their performance, adaptability, and overall success (Drath et al., 2008). Leadership theory and role alignment contribute to improved organizational performance by optimizing leadership effectiveness and aligning individual efforts toward achieving organizational objectives.

## 5.5 GENDER DIVERSITY AND LEADERSHIP IN ORGANIZATIONS

Gender diversity in leadership refers to the representation and involvement of both men and women in leadership positions within organizations. Historically, men have predominantly occupied leadership roles, leading to a lack of gender diversity in many workplaces. However, recognizing the importance of diversity and the benefits it brings, organizations are increasingly focusing on promoting gender equality and inclusivity in leadership (Fine et al., 2020). Gender diversity in leadership is essential for several reasons. It brings different perspectives, experiences, and problem-solving approaches to the decision-making process.

Diverse leadership teams lead to more innovative and creative solutions, enhanced collaboration, and improved overall organizational performance (Birindelli et al., 2019). By promoting women into leadership roles, organizations challenge the notion that certain leadership qualities are inherently gender-specific.

Having women in leadership positions serves as role models for other women within the organization. It encourages aspiring female leaders to pursue their career ambitions and provides evidence of the possibilities for advancement. Research suggests that women leaders often exhibit more transformational and inclusive leadership styles, emphasizing communication, collaboration, and empowerment (Pierli et al., 2022). These leadership styles positively impact organizational culture and employee satisfaction. Organizations that prioritize and demonstrate commitment to gender diversity in leadership are often perceived as more progressive, inclusive, and attractive to diverse talent pools (Birindelli et al., 2019).

Providing leadership development and mentorship programs for women can support their career advancement and equip them with the skills needed for leadership roles. Ensuring that hiring practices are unbiased and based on merit rather than gender lead to a more diverse pool of candidates for leadership positions. Implementing flexible work policies can help support work-life balance and remove barriers for women seeking leadership roles. Creating an organizational culture that values diversity and promotes equal opportunities for employees is essential for fostering gender diversity in leadership.

Gender diversity in leadership is a crucial aspect of building successful organizations. By recognizing the value of diverse perspectives and challenging traditional gender norms, organizations can create environments where both men and women can thrive as leaders. Emphasizing gender diversity in leadership is not only a matter of equity and social justice but also a strategic imperative for organizations seeking to remain competitive and innovative in today's globalized world (Fine et al., 2020).

## 5.6 DEBORAH AS A MODEL OF GENDER DIVERSITY IN LEADERSHIP

Deborah, a character in the Bible, serves as a model of gender diversity in leadership. As one of the few female leaders and judges in ancient Israel, her story challenges traditional gender norms and provides valuable lessons about the capabilities and contributions of women in positions

of authority (Lederman-Daniely, 2017). Deborah's role as a prophetess, judge, and leader of Israel challenged the prevailing gender stereotypes of her time. In a society where leadership was predominantly male-dominated, Deborah's ascendancy to a position of power shows that women are equally capable of assuming leadership roles (Thomas, 2021). Deborah is depicted as a wise and decisive leader (McClain-Walters, 2015). Her ability to inspire and unite the people of Israel in times of crisis highlights the effectiveness of her leadership. Her courage and strategic thinking in leading the Israelite army into battle demonstrate her leadership prowess.

Deborah's leadership extended beyond herself. She acknowledged another woman who played a crucial role in the defeat of the enemy army. Deborah's willingness to uplift other women exemplifies her commitment to gender diversity and empowerment. Deborah's leadership style was inclusive, emphasizing consultation and collaboration (Thomas, 2021). She held court under a palm tree, where people sought her counsel and judgment. This approach demonstrates her commitment to hearing diverse perspectives and making informed decisions. As a prophetess, Deborah's leadership was not solely based on secular authority but was grounded in her spiritual connection and guidance (McClain-Walters, 2015). This highlights the potential for gender diversity in both religious and secular leadership roles.

Deborah's story has left a lasting legacy, inspiring generations of women and men to challenge gender norms and embrace gender diversity in leadership. Her example serves as a reminder of the potential that exists in diverse leadership teams. Deborah's story is a powerful testament to the importance of gender diversity in leadership. It showcases the strength and wisdom that women leaders can bring to the table and emphasizes the need for environments that value diverse perspectives. Her narrative calls for question and for the dismantle of societal norms that limit opportunities based on gender; and to create spaces where all individuals, regardless of their gender, can contribute to leadership and decision-making roles (Lederman-Daniely, 2017). As a historical model of gender diversity in leadership, Deborah's story remains relevant in contemporary discussions about promoting women in leadership, fostering inclusive organizational cultures, and embracing the diverse talents and abilities that individuals of all genders can bring to leadership positions (McClain-Walters, 2015).

## 5.7 A MOTHER IN ISRAEL—AND THE WORKPLACE

The phrase “a mother in Israel” originates from the Bible, specifically from the Book of Judges, referring to Deborah, who was not only a prophetess and judge but also described as “a mother in Israel.” The phrase symbolizes her nurturing and caring role, not only as a leader but also as someone who cared for the well-being and welfare of her people (Lederman-Daniely, 2017). Drawing parallels between the role of “a mother in Israel” and the workplace offers insights into the importance of caregiving and support within organizations.

Nurturing leadership is a leadership approach that focuses on supporting, empowering, and caring for the well-being of team members (Hashimy et al., 2023). Rather than using traditional top-down authority, nurturing leaders prioritize the needs of their team, fostering a positive and collaborative work environment. Nurturing leadership is effective in building trust, fostering employee engagement, and creating a positive organizational culture (Hashimy et al., 2023). By placing the needs of team members at the forefront, nurturing leaders create an environment where individuals can thrive, innovate, and achieve their fullest potential (Pierli et al., 2022). This approach to leadership has a positive impact on employee satisfaction, productivity, and overall organizational success.

Like “a mother in Israel,” leaders in the workplace can adopt a nurturing leadership style that emphasizes caring for the well-being of their employees. This involves fostering a supportive and compassionate work environment that values employees’ physical and emotional health. The concept of being “a mother in Israel” reminds us of the significance of work-life balance. Just as mothers balance their caregiving roles with other responsibilities, organizations should promote policies and practices that support employees in achieving a healthy work-life balance. “A mother in Israel” is often associated with empathy and understanding. Leaders who embrace these qualities can build stronger connections with their teams, leading to increased trust and loyalty (Pierli et al., 2022). The phrase also highlights the importance of supporting employees who are parents. Organizations can provide parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and on-site childcare facilities to enable working parents to effectively balance their professional and family responsibilities.



Embracing the concept of “a mother in Israel” contributes to creating an organizational culture that values caregiving and recognizes the contributions of employees beyond their work tasks. This includes acknowledging the caregiving roles that employees may have outside of work. “A mother in Israel” reminds us that individuals bring diverse talents and skills to the workplace. Organizations should appreciate and leverage the unique strengths of employees who are parents (Pierli et al., 2022). To embrace the spirit of “a mother in Israel,” workplaces may have policies that address issues such as gender equality, parental leave, family-friendly benefits, and support for caregivers. The phrase “a mother in Israel” signifies not only leadership and wisdom but also caring, empathy, and nurturing qualities. These attributes are essential in the workplace to create a supportive and inclusive environment for employees. By recognizing and valuing caregiving roles and supporting working parents, organizations can foster a more compassionate workplace culture (Pierli et al., 2022).

Gedro et al. (2020) suggested that “a combination of direction setting, organizing, and evaluating along with collaboration, communication, supportive and nurturing are optimal feminine leadership styles” (p. 402). In times of crisis, characteristically feminine styles of leadership are ideal (Eagly & Heilman, 2016 as cited in Gedro et al., 2020, p. 403). According to Gedro et al. (2020), “Perhaps it is wise to consider leadership development that embraces feminine ways of leading and that mindfully equips leaders to incorporate those styles into their repertoires given the current societal conditions of organizational turbulence and social and economic unrest” (p. 403). The leadership literature often shows both masculine and feminine leadership skills that are valuable, needed, and appropriate for organizational life.

## 5.8 TOWARD A FULFILLING VOCATION FOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Achieving a fulfilling vocation for women in leadership requires concerted efforts to break down barriers, challenge stereotypes, and create supportive environments that empower women to thrive in their leadership roles (Clerkin, 2017). Organizations should actively promote gender diversity in leadership positions and create environments where women have equal opportunities to advance and contribute to decision-making processes. Potential avenues in which an organization can encourage

women in leadership roles include recognizing and addressing unconscious biases that may hinder women's career progression, promoting fair evaluation and promotion processes, establishing mentorship and sponsorship programs that pair women with experienced leaders who provide guidance, support, and advocacy for their career advancement, and offer leadership development programs specifically tailored to the needs of women with a focus on building essential skills, such as communication, negotiation, and confidence, to help women excel in leadership roles (Clerkin, 2017). To increase women in leadership roles, organizations should address providing flexible work arrangements and family-friendly policies to support women in balancing their professional and personal responsibilities effectively and recognizing and rewarding women on par with their male counterparts for contributions and achievements (Clerkin, 2017).

In order to move toward creating a fulfilling vocation for women in leadership, individuals should leverage their sphere of influence in the work to inspire women to challenge stereotypes and societal expectations that may limit their aspirations; promote a growth mindset that emphasizes continuous learning and self-belief; provide platforms and opportunities for women to showcase their expertise and ideas, ensuring their voices are heard and valued in decision-making processes (Clerkin, 2017). Men and other allies should be encouraged to actively support and advocate for women in leadership, fostering a collaborative and inclusive work environment (Smith & Johnson, 2020). There should be clearly defined career paths and advancement criteria to eliminate ambiguity and ensure transparency in the promotion process. The work culture needs to recognize and appreciate the value of diverse leadership styles, especially those traditionally associated with women, such as collaboration, empathy, and relationship-building (Smith & Johnson, 2020). Celebrate both men's and women leaders' achievements and highlight their contributions to inspire and motivate others (Kulkarni et al., 2021).

Organizations and societies should create an environment that empowers and supports women in leadership, leading to fulfilling vocations and gender equality in leadership positions (Smith & Johnson, 2020). Embracing the full potential of women's leadership drives innovation, improves organizational performance, and contributes to a more prosperous future for all. While Deborah's leadership was situated in a historical and religious context, her qualities and approaches offer valuable lessons for contemporary organizational leaders. Her story encourages

leaders to embrace courage, inclusivity, vision, and ethical principles while breaking barriers and fostering a nurturing and empowering environment.

Lessons from Deborah for the woman leader today:

**Embrace Courage and Vision:** Deborah's courage to step into leadership roles and her visionary outlook in guiding her people are qualities that women leaders today can emulate. Be bold in pursuing goals and lead with a clear vision that inspires others.

**Challenge Gender Norms:** Deborah's story challenges traditional gender norms, demonstrating that women are fully capable of assuming positions of authority and leadership. Do not let societal expectations limit aspirations; break barriers; and pave the way for future generations of women leaders.

**Demonstrate Inclusive Leadership:** Deborah's inclusive leadership style, reflected in her willingness to hear diverse perspectives and consult others before making decisions, underscores the value of inclusive leadership. Foster an environment that encourages diverse voices and ideas.

**Cultivate Empathy and Understanding:** Deborah's empathy and understanding of her people's needs made her an altruistic and conscious leader. Strive to understand the experiences and concerns of team members, and lead with compassion and empathy.

**Lead by Example:** Deborah's story serves as an example of leadership by example. Demonstrate integrity, ethics, and values for the employees within the organization to see and emulate in their work life.

**Empower Others:** Deborah empowered others to fulfill their roles effectively. As a leader, focus on empowering and mentoring others, fostering an environment that encourages growth and development.

**Adaptability and Resilience:** Deborah faced challenges during her leadership journey, and her ability to adapt and be resilient was crucial to her success. Embrace change, learn from setbacks, and display resilience in navigating obstacles.

**Foster Collaboration and Teamwork:** Deborah's collaborative approach in leading her people highlights the importance of teamwork and collaboration. Encourage open communication and foster a sense of camaraderie among team members.

**Engage in Reflective Practice:** As Deborah's story suggests, reflective practice is essential for leadership growth. Take time to reflect on

experiences, decisions, and actions, and use those insights to improve leadership effectiveness.

**Be a Role Model:** Deborah's leadership exemplified the power of being a role model. As a woman leader, be mindful of influence on others and inspire future generations of women to pursue leadership roles.

**Lead with a Purpose:** Deborah's commitment to her people's welfare and her devotion to her faith underscore the importance of leading with a purpose beyond personal gain. Align leadership with a meaningful mission and make a positive impact on the lives of followers.

Deborah's story serves as an enduring testament to the capabilities and potential of women in leadership. By drawing inspiration from her experiences and qualities, women leaders today can navigate challenges, cultivate effective leadership styles, and contribute to positive change in their organizations and in society.

## 5.9 CONCLUSION

Deborah's multifaceted leadership journey underscores the complex interplay between gender roles, social identity, societal expectations, and personal aspirations. Using the lens of experiential learning as a pivotal tool to investigate the idea of Deborah as a mother in Israel, women leaders are provided evidence and proof that they can navigate and transcend barriers, harnessing their unique experiences to drive innovation, collaboration, and change (Hill et al., 2016). It is necessary to recognize and celebrate the versatile dimensions of identity that women bring to their roles. The lessons drawn from Deborah's journey offer valuable insights for organizations, policymakers, and individuals alike, encouraging them to foster environments that empower women to leverage their experiences and perspectives as catalysts for positive transformation (Hill et al., 2016). Motivated by Deborah's story, members of society can collectively work toward a future where women in leadership flourish and are embraced for their uniqueness (Riforgiate & Ruder, 2017).

The story of Deborah serves as a reminder that women's multiple identities need not be compartmentalized, but rather integrated harmoniously to forge a formidable leadership presence. Deborah's ability to

balance the roles of a mother, judge, and military strategist exemplifies the potential for women to draw strength from diverse facets of their lives, fostering innovation and resilience in the face of challenges (Kaufman & Williams, 2010). In navigating the ongoing journey toward gender equality, the story of Deborah offers a beacon of inspiration and a roadmap for future progress. Fostering a culture of support can collectively propel women in leadership roles to reach their fullest potential and shape a more diverse and prosperous world. Deborah's exceptional ability to synergize nurturing qualities with assertiveness and strategic acumen emphasizes the potential of a holistic leadership approach that draws from diverse life experiences (Fine, 2007). Deborah's story is a reminder that embracing one's identity and individual narrative can lead to a more authentic and effective leadership style, benefiting both women and the larger organizational landscape.

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# Sensitivity and Courage: A Social and Cultural Analysis of Esther 4:13–5:8

*Carla Smith*

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Women have long struggled to exhibit their leadership skills in the workplace. Rudman (1998) posits women do not achieve their full potential primarily because of their natural propensity to avoid self-promotion. While self-promotion in men tends to raise awareness of their skills, self-promotion in women can both raise awareness, which causes alienation among other women, and ire with men, as women step out of their typical gender roles (Rudman, 1998). Another potential differentiator comes from gender differences in social sensitivity. Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) found that women have a higher awareness of the context in social situations. This broadened sensitivity allows women to build and sustain a strong team dynamic, promoting the empathy and humility needed to lead to high-performing, courageous organizations, where stability and

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self-promotion allow risk averse and dynamic interactions (Gilligan, 1993; Ramachandaran et al., 2017; Sosik et al., 2019).

The book of Esther elicits diverse views of its value. Some people view it as a patriarchal expression of suppressing women, as early in the book, Esther is meek and subservient to her husband and adopted father, Mordecai (Zucker, 2018). Others view it as ancient Jews becoming secularized and losing their focus on the coming of the Messiah (Pierce, 1992). Even Hollywood uses it as an example of the ideal daughter, with the mention of Esther in the Sabbath Prayer in the film *Fiddler on the Roof* (Bock & Harnick, 1971). Regardless of the perception, Esther remains a unique book in the Old Testament where the title character and primary example of leadership is a woman (Davidson, 2014). This chapter will use social and cultural textural analysis to evaluate the leadership characteristics exhibited in Esther 4:13–5:8 and elicit examples of spiritual female leaders' courage and social sensitivity influencing their leadership ability. Using Esther as a model, women aspiring to and in leadership can emulate walking the fine line of self-promotion while harvesting the strength of their tendency of relationship stability to lead organizations down an ethical path to success.

## 6.2 METHODOLOGY

This chapter will use social and cultural textural analysis of Esther 4:13–5:8 to elicit examples for spiritual women in leadership. The exegetical analysis will analyze the motivations and actions of Esther, showing key characteristics in her leadership style that lead to the salvation of the Jewish people. Once her leadership qualities become apparent, the chapter will analyze what promotes women into leadership within companies, identifying a few critical components of women's character tendencies that, when maximized, allow women to advance into leadership positions and provide better company results.

Social and cultural textural analysis is one of the five methods of socio-rhetorical analysis (Robbins, 1996). While inner texture and intertexture focus on the words and the context, the social and cultural texture analysis focuses on the anthropological and sociological aspects of the time the text was written (Robbins, 1996). This analysis consists of three main themes, specific social topics, common social and cultural topics, and final cultural topics (Henson et al., 2020). Through an examination of these factors, social and cultural textural analysis intends to divulge the meaning

of the text in the context of the world in which the author lived through an analysis of common social and cultural topics (Robbins, 1996). Then it elicits attitudes toward religion and salvation by examining specific social topics (Robbins, 1996). Finally, exploring the “cultural strata” of the actors in the text through the author’s lens, the final cultural categories, reveals the subtleties of the interaction between the players and provides the motivation attributed to actions (Henson et al., 2020). This analysis will explore the three aspects of social and cultural textual analysis to elicit an example of leadership from Esther 4:13–5:8.

### 6.3 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS

The opening of the targeted pericope begins with Mordecai repeating his command to Esther to think of the Jewish people and not her safety and Esther issuing a command to all Jews to fast for three days, a ritual in which she will participate, representing herself as one of them (Esth 4:13–17; Reid, 2008). This period of abstaining shows the rise of Esther from simply Queen of the Gentiles to a leader of the Jewish people as she stands with them in solidarity (Pierce, 1992). While God is never overtly mentioned in the text, based on Old Testament precedent, this fasting period would be synonymous with a period of meditation and prayer in preparation for Esther’s upcoming trial, mainly her revelation as a Jew (Candido, 2013; Pierce, 1992). Esther accepts her role, revealing her moral fortitude and courage as Queen of the Jewish people in Persia.

#### 6.3.1 *Common Social and Cultural Topics*

The Book of Esther’s primary driver, in both the cultural and social sense, revolves around honor, guilt, and shame (Candido, 2013). The King was feared due to his position, and he deserved honor due to his title (Candido, 2013). Haman felt he deserved the same honor by extension of his King’s favor and chose to shame those he felt were unworthy (Esth 3:2; Isaac, 2020). Mordecai shamed Haman when he refused to bow when commanded (Esth 3:5). However, the reason for the insult is unclear in the text, whether due to religious reasons or a lack of acknowledgment of Haman’s position (Adler, 2015). It should be noted that the Greek add-on text, not covered in this analysis, contains a prayer to God by Mordecai with Mordecai’s refusal to worship anyone but God (Candido, 2013). Regardless of the cause, this perceived dishonoring of

Haman proves the impetus of the order to kill all of the Jews in the kingdom.

Banquets provided opportunities to pursue political goals in an autocratic society such as King Ahasuerus's (Brison, 2018). Women were seldom allowed to participate, even those of high rank, as they were possessions (Brison, 2018; Davidson, 2014; Magonet, 2014). Women were confined to the harem to hold women's banquets (Brison, 2018). Esther manages to enact her plan to protect the Jewish community from this position of inferiority. To show her husband honor, she invites him to a banquet in the women's quarters, knowing she risks death if she attends a banquet in the outer court (Avnery, 2016; Brison, 2018). She walked the fine line of self-promotion, using her influence with the King to present her argument without raising the ire of the outer court, ensuring she did not violate social conventions tied to her gender (Esth 5:2–4; Rudman, 1998). Esther is realistic about her situation in court. However, she uses her favor with the King to her benefit to control the situation and show him honor while still attaining her goal of creating a safe environment to share her status as a Jew (Avnery, 2016; Brison, 2018; Pierce, 1992).

A secondary cultural and social driver in the pericope is dyadic vs. individualist struggle of the personalities of Mordecai and Esther. From her introduction until the beginning of the analyzed passage, Esther had a dyadic relationship with Mordecai, relying on him to provide her guidance and an identity (Candido, 2013; Reid, 2008; Robbins, 1996). The relationship shifts in power when Esther accepts her lot and says, "if I perish, I perish" (Candido, 2013; King James Bible, Esth 4:16). From that point forward, Esther becomes the strategist, developing a plan to protect the Jewish people and maturing to direct Mordecai instead of the reverse (Reid, 2008; Smith-Christopher, 2018). Esther rises from following Mordecai to create her identity and exercise her individualist personality.

### 6.3.2 *Specific Social Topics*

Reformists believe that society's social structure is the cause of corruption and must be changed (Robbins, 1996). This characterization matches the motivation of both Mordecai and Esther. Both believe that the issue in King Ahasuerus's kingdom, mainly the impending destruction of the Jewish community, can be changed by showing King Ahasuerus

the error of the edict he has issued and the piety of Haman (Candido, 2013; Gentry, 2020). Mordecai shows his reformist nature throughout the book; however, Esther grows into her reformist tendencies from a gnostic-manipulationist motivation of “coping with (the) evil” around her (Robbins, 1996, p. 73). Pierce (1992) argues that Mordecai forced this growth through a threat on her life, as he predicts the Jew’s destruction and the end of Esther’s house if she does not comply (Esth 4:14; Green-spoon, 2016). Regardless of the motivation, Esther does show creativity in approaching her attempt at reform; instead of risking death by telling her husband she is Jewish and asking for their freedom immediately, she approaches him giving honor to his power, and invites him to a banquet (Davidson, 2014; Esth 5:8; Pierce, 1992). She acknowledges the error of the status quo (Davidson, 2014), that assimilation is the righteous path (Adler, 2015), and takes a stand to change the plight of her people.

The other two characters in the pericope appear to be motivated differently. King Ahasuerus and Haman exhibit strong utopian tendencies, believing the only path to the ideal is by destroying what is wrong in the world (Robbins, 1996). King Ahasuerus orders the execution of Haman when learning that Haman has used the King’s power to eradicate the Jews and his beloved wife (Esth 7:8–10). Haman manipulates the King, pointing out the danger of the Jewish people to life in Persia after Mordecai refuses to bow to him (Esth 3:8–9). When their honor was questioned, they reacted violently to eradicate the wrongs against them in both cases. With this dual utopian threat against her, Esther courageously invites both King Ahasuerus and Haman to a banquet to begin the process of delivering the news of her Jewish heritage and point out the treachery of Haman (Esth 5:8).

### 6.3.3 *Final Cultural Topics*

As the ruling class, King Ahasuerus and Haman represent the dominant culture in Persian society. When Esther becomes Queen, she also becomes part of that dominant culture, following the customs of Persia instead of the Jewish traditions (Esth 2:17–20; Pierce, 1992). The outward display of Mordecai’s distress and the order of the death of all Jews (Esth 4:1) causes Esther to move into a transitional state in both her social and cultural drivers, as discussed above, and her cultural identity. This liminal rhetoric state, a period of transition between two cultural identities (Robbins, 1992), has Esther transitioning from a gnostic-manipulationist

to the reformist she must be to save the Jewish people. At this point, she transitions from the dominant culture toward a counterculture, aligning with Mordecai to address the plight of the Jewish community (Davidson, 2014; Joachimsen, 2019). Accepting responsibility for her people's lives completes the transition and moves her into the counterculture segment of society.

While King Ahasuerus remains unaware of Esther's counterculture loyalties, there are signs that she is no longer part of the dominant culture. Because she is considered only a possession, Persian culture would require she wait to be summoned to the King before making her entreaties for her people (Reid, 2008). However, instead, "Esther put(s) on her royal apparel, and (stands) in the inner court," an action counter to the traditional role of a woman (Brison, 2018; KJB, Esth 5:1; Reid, 2008). King Ahasuerus notices Esther and grants her an audience, but he does not notice that she has exhibited behavior outside the norm (Reid, 2008). This anti-dominant behavior continues when Esther invites both the King and Haman into the harem for a banquet, giving Esther control of the environment to enact her plan (Brison, 2018; Esth 5:4). Again, King Ahasuerus and Haman are oblivious to the manipulation and instead participate eagerly in the banquet, letting Esther's charisma overshadow the counterculture rhetoric she is displaying (Esth 5:5–8; Reid, 2008). Esther lures both Haman and King Ahasuerus into becoming comfortable with "otherness" and being lulled into the invitation of a second banquet (Avnery, 2016; Brison, 2018; Esth 5:8, Joachimsen, 2019). She exhibits courage of conviction, a clear mission behind her actions, and the moral fortitude needed to save her people (Brison, 2018; Davidson, 2014). Once Esther embraces her counterculture status, her leadership skills reach maturity.

#### 6.3.4 *Esther's Leadership Qualities*

The pericope from Esther 4:13–5:8 shows the leadership development of Esther as she transitions from a Gentile to a Jewish queen. Though Mordecai instigates the transformation, Esther must embrace this change for the transformation to be effective, and she does (Esth 4:13–16; Joachimsen, 2019). She first allows herself to fully embrace the magnitude of the threat against the Jewish people by taking three days for mediation to understand the entire social context of the situation (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Esth 4:16). During this break, Esther finds the necessary

moral fortitude and resolves to accept her fate regardless of the outcome of the struggle (Avnery, 2016). Once erecting the foundation, Esther must examine the motivation of her adversaries, the King and Haman, and recognize their need for honor and praise (Brison, 2018). Then she creatively and charismatically develops a plan to walk the line of self-promotion to influence King Ahasuerus to take her side and cancel the edict to eradicate her people (Davidson, 2014; Rudman, 1998). Esther also shows great courage in accepting the mantle of the Jewish people and acting on her counterculture motivations to manipulate the circumstances in her favor (Brison, 2018; Davidson, 2014). Esther exhibits the self-promotion and social sensitivity needed to have the courage to lead the Persians from an anti-Semitic state to an environment where the Jewish people could prosper.

## 6.4 GENDER-SPECIFIC TENDENCIES

While the intention of this chapter is not to be a feminine statement on women in the workplace and their capabilities, documented studies have shown that men and women think and address problems differently; they also are perceived differently when addressing those problems (Cumming et al., 2015; Dainty et al., 2000; Elias, 2018; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). While many differences have been studied, self-promotion in work settings and social sensitivity arise as critical areas where women and men diverge (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Rudman, 1998). Whether due to historical stereotypes of gender roles or ingrained gender behaviors, both men and women must exhibit skills in both areas, as both are valued leadership characteristics. While individuals have different innate abilities for exhibiting these traits, the diversity in expression adds a depth of capability within an organization, and organizations that add the diversity of women into leadership will have the ability to take advantage of these differences and achieve higher levels of performance.

### 6.4.1 *Self-promotion*

Everyone has experienced where others in a room have more expertise. Some choose to stay quiet, while others engage in the discussion. Self-promotion encompasses more than pushing for a higher salary or asking for a promotion (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). Instead, opportunities for self-promotion often occur in the workplace, whether expressing

an opinion at a meeting or ensuring one's knowledge is added to a scenario discussion (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). Self-promotion represents an essential skill for women toward gaining acknowledgment of their value and often provides a differentiator in the workplace (Rudman, 1998).

One common misconception of self-promotion is equating it to narcissism. While narcissists also engage in self-promotion, it generally has a harmful component, such as exploiting or damaging others (Den Hartog et al., 2020). At its core, self-promotion is managing others' impressions of oneself by pointing out accomplishments or sharing their expertise on a subject (Den Hartog et al., 2020; Rudman, 1998). My father always told me to dress for the role I wanted and not the role I had as an attempt to teach me to manage people's impressions. It was a helpful advice and a first lesson in impression management. Because leaders in organizations impact various aspects of our lives, including salary, position, and promotion, ensuring acknowledgment of accomplishments gives employees influence on the leader's impression of them (Den Hartog et al., 2020). Employees risk becoming undervalued and passed over without some attempt to manage their impression through self-promotion.

Women, in general, undervalue themselves and fail to self-promote in the workplace (Exley & Kessler, 2022). Instead of sharing their knowledge in an area in concrete terms, they will often say they have "some" experience and leave a vague impression of competency (Exley & Kessler, 2022; Rudman, 1998). They fear the repercussions of concrete self-promotion, as social norms among women are to downplay their abilities (Rudman, 1998). In Exley and Kessler's (2022) study of females and males of equal competence, females were less likely to engage in self-promotion behavior even at the ages of eleven and twelve. Baldiga (2014) posits risk aversion causes a lack of self-promotion in females, as they are unwilling to guess or overstate answers to questions. However, even when performance is measured and communicated, females' self-evaluations are significantly worse than males (Exley & Kessler, 2022). This evidence points to a natural difference between men and women where women must consciously choose to self-promote to ensure their opinions and competencies are known.



### 6.4.2 *Social Sensitivity*

Throughout history, humans have banded together to combine their skills into groups, creating a higher level of performance than individuals could achieve alone. A team dynamic forms, which includes consideration and adaptation to others in the group (Lacher & Biehl, 2019). This ability for individuals to adjust to the team dynamic and accommodate others is called social sensitivity (Lacher & Biehl, 2019). Critical attributes associated with social sensitivity include empathy, collaboration, and strong communication skills (Bozdog & Bozdog, 2021; Lacher & Biehl, 2019). The great basketball coach, John Wooden, said it best, "A player who makes a team great is more valuable than a great player."

Regarding leadership, social sensitivity is an essential skill for success. Today's workplace does not have the same characteristics as past workplaces; instead, it is changing from a transactional base to valuing transformational leadership traits of communication and cooperation (Cohen, 1992; Eagly & Carli, 2003). Influential leaders have characteristics such as admitting they make mistakes and accepting employees without expecting them to change (Lacher & Biehl, 2019). These qualities provide an indication of leader effectiveness (Vecchio & Anderson, 2009). Contemporary corporate structure also moves away from hierarchy and pushes leaders to mentor and coach teams to attain better results (Eagly & Carli, 2003). As women tend to be less autocratic in their leadership style, these behaviors tend to be consistent with the gender role of a female, with a focus on support and consideration of others (Carli et al., 2014; Eagly & Carli, 2003). Self-control combined with social sensitivity also becomes an indicator of effectiveness, where the empathy and humility women stereotypically exhibit translates to positive organizational outcomes (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Sosik et al., 2019). It is important to note that while gender-related behavior does flex and is not concrete to birth gender, patterns exist that show women are equipped to exhibit the positive character traits necessary for leadership (Deaux & Major, 1987; Eagly & Carli, 2003).

Beyond positive leadership, women's natural aversion to risk and heightened sensitivity can create a more ethical environment (Cumming et al., 2015). In general, leaders who create an environment of belonging and collaboration and those with higher levels of empathy and integrity build communities and teams with higher ethical standards (Ramachandran et al., 2017). When paired with self-control, these traits lend themselves to a leader with moral courage and the propensity to avoid

making decisions that jeopardize the organization (Sosik et al., 2019). This advantage has become apparent in recent years as organizations with a diversity of gender among their leadership have a lower rate of fraud when compared to their homogeneous male board counterparts (Cumming et al., 2015). When women ensure their voice is heard, their leadership qualities of social sensitivity and moral courage move organizations to higher levels of integrity and performance.

## 6.5 ESTHER'S LEADERSHIP AS AN EXAMPLE

With Esther's leadership qualities outlined and her critical leadership characteristics identified and defined, the next step is to walk through Esther's story and show her as an example of using these traits to be an effective leader. As previously discussed, Esther does not start as the leader in the story. With King Ahasuerus as the stated leader and Mordecai as the figurehead for the Persian Jews, Esther fills the role of the Queen. As a reminder, Queen in this culture and time did not imply authority; instead, women were possessions of men, meant for enjoyment, not leadership or partnership (Davidson, 2014). For Esther to take the mantle of leadership in the Persian culture would have been outside the cultural norm, highlighting her counterculture motivations. She found the courage to use her social sensitivity to self-promote and gain a higher level of esteem with the King, attaining the ability to manufacture results that freed the Jews of Persia from persecution.

While not a part of the highlighted pericope, the book of Esther contains another example of the self-promotion of a woman, an example with different consequences. Vashti, King Ahasuerus's previous wife, also takes an opportunity to self-promote her worth. On the seventh day of a feast in the harem, the King calls his wife to him to show off her beauty to his chamberlains (Esth 1: 10–11). Vashti took this opportunity to point out her value is more than her looks and her disdain for his drunken state. She refused the King's request, disrespecting the King in front of seven other males (Esth 1:12). As honor stood as a primary social motivator at this time, this dishonor angered the King, and he disavowed himself from Vashti from that point forward (Candido, 2013; Esth 1: 12–19).

To be fair to Vashti's story, it must be pointed out that Vashti was summoned when additional men were present versus Esther, who began her self-promotion campaign with the King in a one-on-one scenario. This difference, while possibly only a coincidence, could also be attributed

to Esther's social sensitivity to life in the Persian court. The people in the court viewed Esther as one of them, part of the dominant culture (Pierce, 1992). As part of this social group, she understood her role and inability to address the King directly on his plan to eradicate the Jews as she had no authority or leadership (Davidson, 2014). Instead, she was able to take advantage of an environment where she could begin to build a rapport with the King, where she could self-promote and share her desires without affronting the King's honor.

Additionally, Esther understood she must choose her moment and prepare an environment where her request to save the Jewish people of Persia would be well received. By first ensuring her outward appearance aligned with the dominant culture's expectations (Esth 5:1) and setting a banquet for only her husband and Haman, Esther used her skills of impression management to build an atmosphere that would accept her walking beyond the line of social norms and invite her to make a request (Esth 5:7-8). This social sensitivity extended to the banquet itself, where she serves Haman and the King instead of making her request to erase the petition to destroy the Jewish people. Her willingness to self-promote, despite the challenges in front of her, allowed her to start the process to reach her goal. She continues her demonstration of self-promotion and social sensitivity by inviting them to a second banquet, building a rapport, and easing them into a comfort level that facilitates the King inquiring for her request instead of agitating cultural sensibilities by just asking for the Jews freedom (Candido, 2013; Esth 7:1-4; Pierce, 1992).

One additional example Esther provides is having the self-control to use her abilities of impression management and sensitivity even when her life is in danger. Esther does not just run to King Ahasuerus and make her case; instead, she understands the need to prepare for the danger ahead. Ancient Jews often undertook a period of cleansing and penance before facing adversaries (Candido, 2013); however, it also gives Esther a chance to center herself, reaffirm her place and duties from God, and approach the difficulties ahead with self-control. The evenness that she takes into the initial discussion with the King and the first banquet paves the way for the second banquet request to stay the execution of the Jewish people (Esth 7:1-4). If she had immediately reacted in the way Vashti had before her, without considering her place in the court, the outcomes could have been very different. This self-control gave Esther the courage she needed (Sosik et al., 2019) to approach the situation calmly and use her skills to make the decision to work to save the Jewish people of Persia.

## 6.6 CONCLUSION

Analysis of the book of Esther results in a variety of interpretations: an example of patriarchal suppression, a warning of the secularization of the Jewish people, and a model for daughters to follow with practicing the Jewish faith (Bock & Harnick, 1971; Pierce, 1992; Zucker, 2018). While all these assessments are feasible, Esther also provides an example of a woman's ability to lead in an organization through adverse conditions with courage and sensitivity. Esther's example of self-control to develop mental strength gives women in leadership a role model of walking the delicate line to apply their innate skills of self-promotion and social sensitivity to situations, even when they have no authority. In today's workplace, the skills of self-control and social sensitivity also lead to teams that achieve higher performance by creating an environment where employees feel their feedback is valued and collaboration is encouraged (Ramachandaran et al., 2017). When these teams begin to function as a unit, avoiding reactionary decisions, they perform at higher ethical levels and achieve results (Ramachandaran et al., 2017). By applying the innate female traits of social sensitivity (Carli et al., 2014; Eagly & Carli, 2003) and developing their self-promotion ability, women can lead an organization to ethical, positive outcomes.

## 6.7 RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To provide additional role models for spiritual woman leaders of self-control enabling the courage to apply social sensitivity and self-promotion under challenging situations, additional studies of leaders related to Esther need to be completed. For example, there are parallels between Ruth's decision to remain with Naomi and Esther's decision to approach King Ahasuerus (Davidson, 2014). The commonality between the situation of these two women could further the justification for the application of these skills. Additionally, Zucker (2018) surmises that the "capable wife" of Proverbs 31:10–31 is another statement of the story of Esther. A historical study of the two pericopes would determine the viability of using the "capable wife" as additional evidence for the expansion of the spiritual leadership qualities of women. Finally, if, as Bennis (2009/1989) suggests, outspoken followership is critical to successful leadership, there is a potential for expanding the secular definition of transformational leadership, a leadership style that highlights the collaboration

and communication social sensitivity fosters. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire is the current standard for measuring transformational leadership (Northouse, 2019). Research to devise additional questions for that instrument to determine the viability of social sensitivity should be developed. Once completed, the revised questionnaire should be administered to a significant population of male and female leaders to determine if social sensitivity is an additional transformational leadership characteristic or if the original definition already encompasses this trait.

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# Esther and Mordecai: Leadership Lessons from an Unnamed God

*Eva Christine Sorrow*

## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

Many consider the Scriptural story of Esther one of the most explicit examples of God's leadership, providential protection, power, and grace. Oddly, His name is never mentioned, and only implicit reference is given to Him. Two leaders, Mordecai and Esther, emerge in this story, even though this book bears only Esther's name. Although God is never named or mentioned, it becomes evident that He powerfully impacted Esther's and Mordecai's lives, circumstances, and leadership. The leadership principles they exercised point contemporary Christian leaders toward a godly model to emulate.

This chapter conveys an attempt to use inner texture analysis on the Esther pericope with special emphasis on Esther 4:1–17, a critical point in this extraordinary story. Based on that analysis, leadership principles exhibited in the behavior of Mordecai and Esther will be highlighted.

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Specifically, this chapter will compare these principles to the contemporary model of servant leadership. Finally, the author will seek to stipulate practical methods and actions that Christian leaders can apply, regardless of the setting in which they work and minister. The desired goal is to make known the God who is never mentioned, but ever-present in Esther's and Mordecai's story. Additionally, the hope is to point to God, whose transforming Presence can also be clearly evidenced in the reader's own leadership story.

## 7.2 INNER TEXTURE ANALYSIS

This look at the story of Esther uses inner texture socio-rhetorical analysis to uncover its meaning and application for servant leaders and their work and ministry. While it gives analysis to the entire story, specific emphasis is placed on Esther 4:1–17, a critical juncture in the overall story. The first portion of inner texture analysis will discuss textual units within Esther 4:1–17. Later, attention will be given to the Sensory-Aesthetic Patterns and Progression Development of that same pericope. Additional analysis will be applied to the Opening-Middle-Closing (OMC) Pattern within the entire book. Finally, there will be an analysis highlighting the Repetitive Pattern of providential timing which permeates the entire book of Esther. The desired outcome is to build a foundation upon which contemporary leaders can glean lessons they can apply as they lead and serve those to whom God has called them.

### 7.2.1 *Textual Units*

Within the Esther Chapter 4 pericope, textual units seem to align with which actor or actors are involved in the action. The first unit contains the public mourning of Mordecai and the Jews throughout the Persian provinces (4:1–3). The following unit indicates Esther's response when she was informed, specifically, that Mordecai was mourning, and then her desire to investigate (4:4–5).

The next four units consist of alternating messages couriered back and forth between Mordecai and Esther. Hathach, the king's eunuch who attended Esther, and others referred to only as "they" or "them" served as couriers. These units progress as follows:

- Mordecai explains Haman’s plot to annihilate the Jews is his reason for mourning and urges Esther to “make supplication” and “entreat” the king on behalf of their people (4:6–8).
- Esther responds with a reminder of the life-and-death risk involved in approaching the king unsummoned and informing Mordecai she had not been summoned in 30 days (4:9–11).
- Mordecai replies with a chilling caution that if she remains silent, deliverance will come, but she and her “father’s house” will perish and asks the heart-penetrating “for such a time as this” question (4:12–14).
- Esther concludes the couriered conversation by calling for a fast and expressing her willingness to approach the king even if she must “perish” (4:15–16).

Following the couriered conversation between Esther and Mordecai, one final unit can be noted. The final textual unit reveals Mordecai going to do everything Esther “ordered” (4:17). The textual units of the Esther 4:1–17 pericope reveal a conversation that becomes the catalyst for a plot change, but more importantly, an exercise of leadership which results in the saving of a nation.

## 7.2.2 *Opening-Middle-Closing Pattern*

Most stories, like the Esther narrative, have an opening, a middle, and a closing. The opening often reveals a time of peace or innocence—“shalom”—in which the plot begins. The middle often presents a scene in which the innocence and peace, or “shalom,” is shattered and efforts are made to seek a return of “shalom.” The closing in a narrative often involves “denouement,” or a loosening of the tension, even though it may not result in total restoration or reversal of all that has gone wrong (Henson et al., 2020, p. 92). Readers can clearly see this opening-middle-closing pattern evident in the Book of Esther.

### 7.2.2.1 *Opening*

The opening of Esther’s story might first appear as a fairy tale beginning. Readers see a king looking for a queen. Then, they read how a displaced, orphaned, but beautiful girl, Esther, is chosen from among hundreds of candidates to ascend to the throne. Esther happens to be at the right place at the right time. Her beauty and demeanor catches the

attention and favor of the king, and, of course, he chooses her. All may seem well and good as if shalom prevails. With a deeper look at Esther's story, however, it becomes clear that some hard details are also part of this fairy tale beginning.

Indeed, Esther was given the chance of a lifetime when chosen to be part of the harem from which the king would choose his new queen. However, the vacancy on the throne resulted from a scandal. Although summoned by the king to show off her beauty, Vashti, the previous queen, refused to appear before her drunken husband, his princes, and all the people. Her refusal to appear enraged and shamed King Ahasuerus. On the advice of his princes, he discarded Vashti and proclaimed that all men be "lord in his own house" (1:10–22, RSV). It was this controversy that opened the way for a new queen to be selected. This was not the fairy tale-like young prince looking for a bride.

Esther's path to the throne was not necessarily easy or romantic either. Both of her parents were dead and Mordecai, her relative, had adopted her. He had been "carried away from Jerusalem among the captives" to Susa, the capital city of the Persian Empire, during King Nebuchadnezzar's reign (2:6, RSV). Esther lived there in Susa with Mordecai. She was *gathered* with all the other prospective queen candidates and put "under custody" of the eunuch in charge of the women (2:3, RSV). Additionally, Mordecai instructed her not to reveal her ethnicity as a Jew (2:10). Although the circumstances leading to her positioning as a queen-candidate might not have been ones she chose—nor were they particularly romantic or easy—the beautiful, orphaned girl possessed a chance at becoming queen.

The period of preparation and waiting to go before the king for his approval was not easy either. It involved at least a year of preparation. Once prepared, she had to wait for her turn to go into the king. Then, she had to wait for his decision of approval. Esther, however, found favor with the eunuch in charge and he extended her special treatment—even moving up the time of her appearance before the king (2:9). No doubt, this was also a difficult waiting period for Mordecai, as well. Daily he walked near the court of the harem so he could learn how Esther was doing (2:11). Yet, even with some difficult events in the background, the opening of Esther's story seemed to go well for both Esther and Mordecai. King Ahasuerus was so impressed with Esther that he made her his queen. He loved her more than all the others and she "found grace and favor in his sight" (2:17, RSV). The beautiful exiled, orphan

girl had become queen. Mordecai continued to remain close, often sitting at the king's gate (2:19, 21). It was there that he happened to hear and uncover a plot to kill Ahasuerus. He told Esther about the plot, and she told the king. Upon investigation, the plotters were executed, and the event recorded in the king's chronicles (2:21–23). Ahasuerus was safe, Esther was queen, and Mordecai stood nearby watching the story unfold.

For the opening of the story, shalom existed. However, the middle of the story was about to unfold. The peace of the king, the new queen, and her faithful relative was about to be shattered.

#### 7.2.2.2 *Middle*

This incredible, historical, and scriptural account of Mordecai, Esther, and the saving of the Jewish nation comes to a crucial point in chapter four. This portion of the pericope would probably serve as the middle—where “shalom” is shattered, then its restoration sought (Henson et al., 2020, p. 92). The evil plot by Haman resulting in the king's decree to annihilate all Jews in the empire has shattered any peace they may have known as exiles in Persia. The pericope begins by showing the effect this decree has on Mordecai and the Jews. They wail, cry bitterly, fast, weep, lament, don sackcloth, and cover themselves in ashes—typical indicators of mourning due to death, trouble, or affliction (Seidler, 2017). After his public display of mourning in the “midst of the city” (4:1), Mordecai positions himself at the “entrance of the king's gate” (4:2). His choice to go there may prove to be a strategic move in seeking restoration of their shalom.

Mordecai's public display of mourning at the king's gate did not allow him to enter the gate (4:2), but it did attract the attention of Esther's maids and eunuchs (4:4). They then informed Esther of Mordecai's behavior; thus began the interchange of communication between Mordecai and Esther through the messengers. Esther's concern and curiosity is piqued when Mordecai refused the clothes she offered to replace his sackcloth. She insisted on knowing why (4:4–5). Back and forth they, through Hathach, communicated the reality, risks, and the remedy for their dire circumstances (4:6–16). They began their search for resolution and the preservation of their people.

This portion of the pericope does not reveal the final outcome, or the closing of the OMC pattern. It does, however, reveal the critical conversations that lead to crucial decision-making and necessary actions that would initiate the closing. This portion of the pericope ends with a movement from conversation to committed action. Esther committed herself

to approach the king, even if it meant her death (4:16). Additionally, she called Mordecai to gather all the Jews in Susa for a fast before she went to the king. Furthermore, she committed herself and her maids to do the same (4:16). Mordecai also committed to action and “went away and did everything,” as Esther ordered (4:17).

The reader might also consider the action in the three succeeding chapters a continuation of the middle of the story. Esther did indeed act on her commitment to try to save her people. At the risk of her life, she prepared to approach the king. When Esther moved toward the king’s inner court, he saw her and granted favor to her by extending his scepter (5:1–2). He promised to grant whatever request she was bringing “even to the half” of his kingdom (5:3). She did not tell him all of her petition at first; rather, she invited him and Haman to a dinner banquet she had prepared (5:4). At that dinner, the king again asked Esther about her petition and again promised he would grant it—even if it involved up to half of his kingdom. Yet again, she opted not to reveal the details of her request. Instead, she invited him and Haman to another banquet she would prepare for them the following evening at which she would reveal her request (5:5–8).

The intensity continued to grow as the story progressed. In fact, in the 24 hours or so that elapsed between Esther’s first dinner and the beginning of the second one she prepared, much transpired. Mordecai again refused to bow to Haman. Haman’s egotistical joy at being privy to the king’s and queen’s invitations turned to “wrath” against Mordecai and he constructed gallows to execute him (5:9–14). Ironically, that same night the king could not sleep. He called for a reading of his chronicles. As they were read, he was reminded that Mordecai had previously saved his life by exposing an attempted murder plot. Since nothing had previously been done to honor Mordecai, the king sought advice—from Haman, nonetheless—on how best to do that. Since the king did not mention the name of the person he wished to honor, Haman’s narcissistic response assumed the honor would be for himself. Haman, therefore, suggested the most lavish gestures of honor should be extended. In another irony-packed turn of events, the king designated Haman to perform the elaborate expressions of honor for Mordecai—the same man Haman had planned to murder that very night (6:1–11).

Finally, as evening approached, Esther’s second dinner was prepared just as she planned. With Haman also present, the king again asked Esther to tell him the nature of her petition. For a third time, he promised to

grant it to the extent of half his kingdom. Ultimately, she revealed her ethnicity along with her request for the king to save her people from annihilation. She explained the plan to eradicate her people, which, of course, would also result in her own death, if the evil plot came to fruition. When asked by her husband to name the person responsible, she quickly pinpointed Haman. In his fury, the king went to the palace garden; when he returned, he found Haman lying across the couch where Esther was. Immediately, the king ordered Haman's execution and was told of the gallows Haman had built to kill Mordecai. Irony prevailed yet again when the king demanded those gallows be used for Haman's execution (7:1–10).

### 7.2.2.3 *Closing*

While much of the Esther narrative makes up the middle of the OMC pattern, there is a closing. The actions described in the closing of this story ushered in the “denouement.” It is important to understand that in some narratives, the denouement does not always mean a complete restoration of “shalom.” It may not mean the reversal of all the actions that “shattered” innocence and peace in the first place. However, it does loosen those tensions (Henson et al., 2020, p. 92). Certainly, that is what readers notice in this story.

With Haman dead, the king granted Mordecai the position and power Haman previously held. Additionally, Esther dared to approach the king again to formulate a plan to save the Jews. The king's original decree could not be rescinded. However, Esther worked with the king to initiate a new decree. This new decree would allow the Jews to survive. It encouraged them to arm, defend, resist, and avenge themselves from those who would try to come against them (8:1–17). As a result, on the day designated in the original decree, the Jews were able to rise against any remaining enemies who dared to carry out Haman's original plot. The Jews were overwhelmingly victorious. Furthermore, their victory included the death of Haman's ten sons (9:1–16). Esther, Mordecai, and even King Ahasuerus played a pivotal role in loosening tensions and restoring a great measure of the shalom shattered by Haman. The Jewish people were spared of annihilation, and Esther and Mordecai assumed positions of even greater influence in the kingdom.

### 7.2.3 *Sensory-Aesthetic Patterns and Progression/Development*

Obvious emotion, speech, and action patterns exist in this pericope. All three zones of “interacting with one’s environment” are evident: “emotion-fused thought,” “self-expressive speech,” and “purposeful action” (Robbins, 1996, p. 30). In response to the king’s first decree, deep emotion pours from Mordecai and the Jews. This is evidenced by their rent clothes, sackcloth, ashes, “a loud and bitter cry” (4:1), weeping, and lamenting (4:3). Esther was “deeply distressed” when she heard of Mordecai’s mourning (4:4). The expressed emotion leads to conversation. Since the majority of the passage consists of that back-and-forth exchange, clearly, each is able to express themselves to one another, even though done via messengers (4:5–16). Finally, in this pericope, it becomes evident that their speech results in a mutual commitment to action (4:16–17). Thus, a natural progression and development is noted in which emotion instigated conversation, and those conversations produced action by both Esther and Mordecai.

To summarize, the analysis of this pericope reveals a progressive pattern in the interaction between Mordecai and Esther. More specifically, it shows development in which a theme takes on new meaning (Henson et al., 2020). In this case, mourning over the impending destruction of the Jewish people develops into not just a call to action, but actual behavior to prevent such destruction. Both Mordecai and Esther play key roles in that progression.

### 7.2.4 *Repetitive Pattern: Providential Timing*

Readers of the book of Esther throughout the centuries have noted the lack of explicit reference to God within its pages. Yet, that point has also served as the hook that has drawn so many readers to its message. So many seeming ironies, subtleties, and coincidences exist within this story. Readers must decide if they attribute all these to “mere happenstance” or if they can see and attribute the events and timing to the hand of God (Arnold & Beyer, 1999, p. 272; Geisler, 1977). Much of this intrigue centers around timing. Certainly, a pattern exists that reveals a significance to the timing of events. This pattern only makes sense if attributed to the providence of God.

Two aspects of providential timing become clear from the verses highlighted in Table 7.1. First, the timing on some of the events listed is



clearly beyond the control of human beings. For example, there is no way Mordecai, Bigthan, nor Teresh could or would have orchestrated Mordecai's being at the right place at just the right time to overhear the assassination plot against King Ahasuerus (2:21–23). Additionally, no one involved orchestrated Ahasuerus' night of insomnia, nor that the portion of the chronicles read that night was the story of how Mordecai had saved his life (6:1–3). Likewise, no one planned for Haman to be the person in the court from whom the king sought advice on how to honor Mordecai—the very man Haman was planning to execute that same night. As a result, two choices exist for readers of these accounts. They can chalk these incidents and their timing to irony or coincidence or see the hand of God providentially orchestrating what human beings cannot.

The second aspect of timing readers might notice in these events does involve human choice. The timing choices made, however, are acted upon following a period of prayer and fasting. This is illustrated by Esther's choices on when and how to approach the king and how much information to reveal each time the king asked her about her petition. Even though it was clear that she had been granted favor by the king and he was willing to grant her request up to half his kingdom, she chose not to reveal her petition immediately. Instead, she requested he and Haman join her at a meal she had prepared. Again, at that meeting, she decided not to reveal the full measure of her request. Rather, she invited them both to yet another banquet the next evening. Interestingly, it was the night between the two banquets when Ahasuerus was unable to sleep and was reminded of when Mordecai saved his life. Had Esther not exercised wisdom and restraint, things might have turned out much differently. The story of Mordecai might not have been fresh on the king's mind. As a result, the king might have been more willing to hear Haman's plan to execute Mordecai that evening. Because Esther exercised wisdom and restraint in timing, God's providence was again clearly displayed.

A repetitive pattern of unique and timely events throughout this story causes its readers to wrestle with the reason behind each irony and seeming coincidence. They can dismiss these amazingly-timed series of events as an intriguing narrative of happenstance. On the other hand, those who read Esther's and Mordecai's story can see the hand of an unnamed, powerful, and mighty God working through both godly and ungodly human beings to accomplish His plan and purpose.

**Table 7.1** Providential timing

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2:8–9	<i>When</i> the king’s order and edict (to search for a new queen) were proclaimed, <i>Esther also was taken</i> into the king’s palace
2:16–17	<i>When Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus</i> , the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found grace and favor in his sight
2:21–23	<i>As Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate, he heard</i> the assassination plot of Bigthan and Teresh; he told it to Queen Esther who told the king
4:14	“And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom <i>for such a time as this?</i> ”
4:16	“...hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink <i>for three days...</i> ”
5:1–2	<i>On the third day</i> , Esther stood in the inner court, <i>and when the king saw her</i> , he held out the golden scepter
5:4	Esther said, “...let the king and Haman come <i>this day to a dinner</i> I have prepared.”
5:5–8	The king and Haman came to the dinner, but Esther said, “...let the king and Haman come <i>tomorrow to the dinner I will prepare...and tomorrow</i> I will do as the king has said.”
6:1–3	<i>On that night</i> the king could not sleep and he ordered the chronicles be brought and read, and it was found written how Mordecai had uncovered the murder plot against the king
5:14–6:4	Realizing nothing had been done to honor Mordecai, the king sought to rectify the situation. He asked who was in the court. Haman <i>had just entered the court</i> to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows Haman had <i>just finished building</i> . Instead, the king asked him for advice on how to honor Mordecai. Haman assumed the honor was for himself
6:5–11	The king told Haman to “ <i>make haste</i> ” and do for Mordecai what Haman assumed was intended for himself
7:1–10	<i>On the second day</i> , the king and Haman came to Esther’s second banquet at which Esther revealed Haman’s plan to annihilate all her people, the Jews. Haman is ordered to be executed on the same gallows he built for Mordecai
8:1–14	<i>On that day</i> the king gave to Esther and Mordecai all of Haman’s house and position. Although the king could not rescind his previous decree Haman influenced, he issued a new decree that the Jews could defend themselves against it
9:1	<i>On the very day</i> their enemies were supposed to defeat them, the Jews mastered their foes

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### 7.3 LESSONS FOR LEADERSHIP FROM MORDECAI AND ESTHER

If readers hope to learn lessons in leadership, specifically, servant leadership, from this pericope, they must look at both leaders mentioned. The following discussion attempts to draw those lessons to the forefront

and connect them to the principles and contemporary model of servant leadership. Finally, it offers suggestions on how these principles can then be applied by Christian leaders regardless of the setting in which God’s calling places them.

One cannot read this passage of Scripture regarding a crucial point in Jewish history and Esther’s life without also seeing Mordecai’s role in the same. In fact, in some traditions, Mordecai might be considered the “protagonist” or main character, and some even refer to it as the book of Mordecai (Thambyrajah, 2019, p. 479). Josephus, the first-century historian, believed Mordecai authored the book (Arnold & Beyer, 1999, p. 166). Regardless, this pericope clearly reveals two leaders who lead well, and provide lessons for contemporary leaders.

Although not an exhaustive list, this article will focus on four specific lessons gleaned from Mordecai and Esther:

- relational leadership expressed in *agapao* love, empathy, and healing;
- stewardship;
- courage, wisdom, and timeliness fueled by prayer;
- the identity and Presence of the unnamed God who orchestrated events to accomplish His purpose in their lives.

### ***7.3.1 Relational Leadership: Agapao Love, Empathy, and Healing***

It is noteworthy that this passage opens with Mordecai “wailing with a loud and bitter cry” in the “midst of the city” (4:1), but then goes to the “entrance of the king’s gate” (4:2). His positioning is both interesting and familiar. When Esther was taken to the king’s palace, Mordecai “walked in front of the court of the harem” daily to check on her welfare (Esther 2:11, RSV). It was also there he uncovered the assassination plot against the king (2:21–23), and where he refused to bow to Haman (3:2–6). Due to his faithful care and concern expressed in just showing up daily (Wallis, 1987), Esther would, therefore, expect to see him there. When, on this day, her servants noticed something unusual (4:4), it was certain to gain her attention. As soon as Esther learns Mordecai is obviously mourning, she responds to him as he had to her every day when he checked in on her. She was “deeply distressed” (4:4) and sent someone to him to find out why he mourned. This speaks to the relationship of *agapao* love, empathy, and healing they shared.

Leadership requires relationship. It is not imposed, but formed, and is demonstrated through “interdependence, mutuality, respect, and care” (Bell, 2014, p. 342). *Agapao* love is the source of each of these demonstrations of relationship. Additionally, it causes leaders to sympathize, empathize, and effectively communicate as they both listen and speak to others (Patterson, 2003, p. 3). Empathy and healing are also characteristics exhibited by relational servant leaders. The leader hopes to understand what others are going through and help them heal and achieve wholeness (Greenleaf, 1970/2008; Reilly & Spears, 2018). Both Mordecai and Esther exhibited relational leadership. As noted in this pericope, there was mutual care and concern. They expressed sympathy, empathy, a desire for the other’s well-being, and a willingness to both speak and listen out of their *agapao* love for one another. It is that communication with each other, as evidenced in this passage, that will reveal additional lessons in leadership.

### 7.3.2 *Stewardship*

As previously stated, the emotion expressed by Mordecai and acknowledged by Esther instigated a conversation between them. Though couriers were involved, for the purpose of this writing, the focus will be on their messages, as though communicated one on one. The conversation consisted of Mordecai’s response to Esther’s inquiry of why he was mourning—the king’s decree regarding the annihilation of all Jews in his kingdom. Mordecai also issued a charge to Esther to approach the king on behalf of their people (4:7–8). Esther responded with a chilling reminder of the law which would mean risking her life if she approached the king unsummoned. She also expressed the realization that it had been 30 days since the king last called for her (4:11). Mordecai’s response, perhaps the most familiar and thought-provoking portion of the conversation, was a challenge of Esther’s stewardship. Basically, he wanted to know if she would remain silent, or be a good steward of what had been entrusted to her care. He wanted to challenge her to think of the unnamed “Who” that positioned her in the kingdom “for such a time as this” and could afford her the opportunity to save her people (4:13–14). Her final response in this dialogue indicated that she would rise to the challenge, and exercise stewardship of what had been entrusted to her, even if it meant her death (4:16). Both leaders provide indicators of stewardship being an essential quality of their leadership.

Good leaders are responsible stewards. Leaders exercise good stewardship when they take what someone entrusts to them—property, rights, another’s well-being—and accept the responsibility of caring for and protecting it (Hays, 2008; Matt. 25:14–30; Lk.41–43, RSV). Specifically, stewardship stands as one of the characteristics servant leaders exhibit (Greenleaf, 1970/2008; Reilly & Spears, 2018). Both Mordecai and Esther are examples of servant leaders who exercise good stewardship.

Though not articulated in this pericope, it is important to remember that Mordecai had been entrusted with caring for and protecting Esther. From the time he adopted her when orphaned by the death of her parents (Esther 2:7, RSV), Mordecai’s stewardship of her well-being is evidenced in various ways (2:11, 20). Perhaps his stewardship is most evident in this dialogue exchange, and specifically, in the challenge he makes to her own stewardship (4:14). He is aware, and wants her to be aware, that her well-being is also dependent on her degree of stewardship. If she chooses to exercise appropriate stewardship in her role as queen and act to save her people, she might also be spared. If she did not, her life would also be in danger. In this case, Mordecai’s care for Esther means challenging her to think of others’ well-being above her own. In turn, Esther accepts that challenge and chooses others’ care and protection at the risk of her very life: “If I perish, I perish” (4:16, RSV). Both Esther and Mordecai provide contemporary leaders with a model of stewardship to be emulated.

### 7.3.3 *Courage, Wisdom, and Timeliness Fueled by Prayer*

A display of emotion developed into a conversation which sparked action. The challenge of stewardship had been accepted, and both Mordecai and Esther knew it was time to act. She would go before the king to make an appeal to prevent the destruction of the Jewish nation. However, before Esther’s life-or-death act of courage, one thing remained—prayer. She told Mordecai to gather together all the Jews in the capital city and fast; she and her maids would, likewise, fast for three days and nights (4:16).

Throughout Scripture, fasting clearly involved much more than just abstaining from food or water (Lev. 23:27; Deut. 9:9; 2 Chron. 20:1–4; Ezra 8:21–23; Dan. 10:3; Joel 2:15; Lk. 4:2; Acts 9:9). There was always a spiritual purpose in effect. Its intended purpose was, and always must be, to focus on God (Foster, 1978). Fasting was an indication of utter dependency on Him (Bream, 2022). If Esther, therefore, called for a fast, her intention was to look to God. She never mentioned His name, nor

did this story's author; yet her call for a fast recognized God's existence and her reliance on Him at this critical moment in history.

Mordecai did exactly what Esther asked and initiated a fast—an indication that he also recognized and relied on this unnamed God. With continued reading of just one more verse, the result of the fast became evident. “On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace...” (Esther 5:1, RSV). Prayer to the God whose name was never mentioned in this story had embedded in her whole being the courage to act on all she had been challenged to do.

### 7.3.3.1 *Courage*

Courage is fueled by prayer. It is in prayer that we become aware of God's Presence and can then take courage knowing He surrounds us. “Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9, RSV). Prayer fortifies and offers the courage needed to carry out the next right move to full completion (Blanchard et al., 2016). Prayer fueled the courage Esther needed to go before the king (Davidson, 2014). It was Mordecai's relationship with God that gave him the courage to stand when everyone else bowed before Haman (Esther 3:2, RSV). Mordecai and Esther, both, are exemplars of leading with courage fueled by prayer.

### 7.3.3.2 *Wisdom and Providential Timing*

Prayer also resulted in Esther's and Mordecai's wisdom in the timeliness of revealed information and their exercise of further action. A good leader must know when it is time to back away from the intensity of the matters at hand and pray. This is not intended to be a time of retreat due to fear. Rather, this should be a “strategic withdrawal” or “tactical time-out” in which the leader prays and waits before taking further action (Briner & Pritchard, 2008, pp. 35–37). Wise leaders opt to back off for the sake of the bigger picture. After a time of prayer and evaluation, they will know when the timing is right to re-engage to accomplish the most good. Similarly, effective leaders know the timing for the release of information is also crucial. For the sake of context, understanding, and orderly response or reaction, leaders must wisely control when they release critical communication (Briner & Pritchard, 2008). This leadership principle cannot only be seen in the story of Esther and Mordecai, but Jesus also illustrated this point.

Throughout Jesus' earthly ministry, He often moved away from the crowd and His work to pray. These moments resulted from intentional, strategic, and tactical decisions He made to seek the will of His Father before proceeding further (Matt. 14:23, 26:36; Mark 1:35, 6:46, 14:32; Lk. 22:41). There were also times when He controlled the timing on the release of information about who He was and what He had done (Matt. 12:16, 16:20, 17:9; Mark 3:12, 8:30, 9:9; Lk. 9:21). The release of this information required proper context and understanding; therefore, timing was crucial (Briner & Pritchard, 2008). The example Jesus set for leaders regarding prayer, waiting, and timely action and communication is also evident in Esther's and Mordecai's leadership.

At some crucial points in Esther's and Mordecai's story, readers can see the wisdom and providential timing they exhibited in their leadership—especially concerning critical information. It is important to note, however, that prayer played a key role as these decisions unfolded. One example of this involved Mordecai's instruction to Esther that she should not reveal to the king her ethnicity as a Jew (2:10, 20). Esther submitted to his wisdom. It was only after their period of fasting and prayer (4:16–17) that Esther initiated a process of timely revelation. This occurred as she made her petition to Ahasuerus to save her people. She purposefully and strategically refrained from explaining her petition when she first approached his throne (5:4). In fact, she also chose not to reveal her ethnicity or the nature of her request at the first banquet she invited the king and Haman to attend (5:7–8). Somehow she must have sensed the timing was not yet right. It is not coincidental that these meetings with the king were immediately following that three-day period of fasting (4:16–5:8). She exercised both wisdom and restraint that were no doubt fueled by prayer. Then, when she did reveal all the facts and her petition, the timing was absolutely providential considering all that transpired from one night to the next (5:9–6-14). Intentional time for prayer resulted in wisdom and providential timing. This is a crucial leadership lesson illustrated in Esther's and Mordecai's story.

Following the examples of Jesus, Esther, and Mordecai, wise leaders will practice intentional time-outs to step back and pray before proceeding with plans or communicating crucial information. Fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit, accessed through prayer, these leaders can know what to say, when to say it, how much information to reveal, and the most effective method by which to reveal it. This is a lesson the unnamed God

of Esther's and Mordecai's story revealed to them. Likewise, the same God wants to convey this principle to today's Christian leaders.

### 7.3.4 *“And Who Knows Whether You Have Not Come to the Kingdom for Such a Time as This?”*

This question became the impetus for the fourth lesson Mordecai and Esther learned from the unnamed God in their story. Readers can only imagine the bone-chilling, gut-wrenching effect these words from Mordecai must have had on Esther. Mordecai, overwhelmed by the desperate situation he, Esther, and their fellow Jews faced, prodded Esther to contemplate the question's answer. She needed to consider all the circumstances that led her to her current influential position as queen.

Interestingly, the question asked was not a “why” question, or a “how,” “when,” or “where” question, but “*who...*” “And *who* knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (4:14, RSV). Mordecai's rhetorical question to Esther pointed her to *someone*—someone who would know the why, how, and when of these extraordinary circumstances. Esther had to dig deep and find an answer to Mordecai's question, and apparently, she did just that.

Esther responded with bold, decisive, courageous action. By her actions she identified Who. She first called for a three-day fast (4:16–17), indicating that the One to whom they prayed during the fast (Foster, 1978) was the One who knew why these events had unfolded as they had (Bream, 2021). Though the One to whom they prayed still remained unnamed, Esther must have believed that He was the One who had orchestrated these circumstances and the providential timing. The One to whom they prayed would also be the One to whom they could entrust whatever was ahead—favor with the king, the saving of her people, or death. She conveyed her ultimate expression of that trust with this, “... if I perish, I perish” (4:16). By her responsive actions, Esther declared she knew Who had brought her to the kingdom. She realized the timing of her reign as queen was providential. Esther understood that the God never named in this story had positioned her as queen, at that specific time, for the purpose of saving the lives of all the Jewish people.

Regardless of whether leaders find themselves serving in the pulpit, on the mission field, in a classroom, courtroom, boardroom, throne room, nursery, or city landfill, they must answer the same question posed to Esther. “And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for



such a time as this?” (4:14, RSV). As Esther did, leaders respond to this question through their daily choices and actions. If leaders first think to pray to God about challenges and decisions, they declare that they know He is the One who brought them to that position of influence at that moment in time. As they pray, leaders proclaim their belief that the One who brought them to their position—in His providential timing—will work through their challenges and decisions to accomplish His purpose. Ultimately, leaders answer this question by acting in courage, wisdom, and providential timing that is fueled by prayer.

Esther and Mordecai learned some crucial lessons concerning leadership from the unnamed God whose Presence, work, and timing are evidenced throughout their story. They learned about relational leadership that required *agapao* love, empathy, and healing. Esther and Mordecai also grew to understand the importance of stewardship as they led others. They discovered how to care well for the people, resources, and positions entrusted to their care. Additionally, they learned that prayer fuels courage, wisdom, and providential timing, and that prayer should be the first thought and course of action for effective leaders. Finally, Mordecai and Esther learned the answer to the profound and pivotal question which permeated their lives and story: “And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (4:14, RSV). They came to understand that the God who is never named in their story positioned them in a significant place of influence at a critical point in history for a lifesaving, God-honoring purpose. These same lessons can, should, and must be learned by today’s Christian leaders. Even more, Christian leaders must learn to successfully apply these lessons if they hope to be effective in changing the world for the glory of God.

#### 7.4 PRACTICAL APPLICATION FOR WORK AND MINISTRY

Wherever God’s call directs an individual, He will present opportunities for that person to both serve and lead. Therefore, He has provided exemplary leaders throughout Scripture to model leadership principles to emulate. Mordecai and Esther are two such leaders. From them leaders can see how to lead relationally with *agapao* love, empathy, and healing. Leaders can learn from the example of Esther and Mordecai how to exercise godly stewardship of those entrusted to their care. Because Esther and Mordecai opted to first pray about their dire situation, leaders can learn from them how courage, wisdom, and providential timing are fueled

by the power of the Holy Spirit accessed in prayer. Additionally, leaders can learn from Esther and Mordecai's story to see God's hand working through both godly and ungodly people, as well as challenging, dire events others intended for evil. Even through these, God providentially orchestrates His plan and purpose in the leader's life.

However, no one should think they can just decide or will these behaviors into existence. These behaviors proceed from a transformed heart. Only God can do that (Bell, 2014; Crowther, n.d.). God implants *agapao* love, empathy, and the desire to heal in one's heart (John 17:26; Rom. 5:5, RSV). Only God can place within leaders' hearts the desire to faithfully steward, care for, and protect those He has called them to serve (Matt. 25:14–21, RSV). It is only God who assures leaders He is always present so they can courageously step into the day-to-day and life-or-death moments to which He has called them (Josh. 1:5–9, RSV). Only God can move leaders onto His agenda (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011) in His timing (Esther 4:14, RSV) by granting wisdom and discernment (James 1:5, RSV) to accomplish His will (James 4:13–17, RSV). So, it is to Him persons must go for changed hearts and the ability to practice godly leadership behaviors.

With that understanding, the first practical step for leaders who desire to serve is to go to God in prayer. The Christian leader's first thought and action should always be prayer (Sorrow, 2021). It should never be considered a last-ditch effort (Blanchard et al., 2016). Through prayer leaders access the forgiveness, healing, and transformational power of God (2 Chron. 7:14, RSV). Before trying to fix the issue or change the circumstance, pray! Before the anxiety ramps up, pray (Phil. 4:6–7, RSV)! Along with Esther, pause before speaking, remaining silent—or even worse—quitting, and pray (Sorrow, 2021)! Leaders who desire to love, empathize, and promote healing should pray for God to transform them into loving, empathetic, healing leaders and then surrender to His work. Those who hope to lovingly steward the human resources God has entrusted to their leadership must pray for God's transforming wisdom to know how best to care for their people. Leaders who strive to lead wisely and courageously within God's providential timing must pray first. Without prayer, they can never fully access the promised power of the Holy Spirit to guide decisions, plans, and efforts. Prayer is the leader's most powerful, useful, and "immediately accessible" resource (Blanchard et al., 2016, p. 102). Finally, leaders, who hope to know the God who orchestrates their lives with perfect timing and powerful precision to accomplish their best and

His glory, must prayerfully seek Him. Pray first; then, keep praying (1 Thess. 5:17, RSV)!

As difficult as it may seem to practice, waiting falls hand in hand with prayer. Leaders must wait with faith until they receive God's answers. Knowing God's answers, however, requires recognizing God's voice. Consequently, one cannot recognize the voice of God without cultivating a relationship with Him (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011). Thus, leaders must commit themselves to the time and effort necessary to grow in their personal relationship with God.

As the relationship with God matures and His voice becomes more clearly recognizable, leaders become more attuned to God's answers and direction. It then becomes time to walk obediently, but only when God's answers are clear. Think, speak, and move on His timetable as He reveals it. Know His peace and leave the results to Him (Blanchard et al., 2016). In response to His voice and in His timing, leaders must step forward courageously to serve others.

If, like Mordecai and Esther, the God-ordained courageous action is at the risk of the leader's life, step forward anyway. Love, empathize, and extend His healing to others. Care for and protect them. Point them to the unnamed God of Esther's and Mordecai's story, who you know has also orchestrated your life. Who knows whether you, too, have been called to your place of work and ministry for "such a time as this"?

## 7.5 CONCLUSION

An inner texture analysis of the scriptural story of Esther revealed a crucial point in the life and leadership of Mordecai and Esther, and in the history and preservation of the Jewish nation. The relationship of love, empathy, and healing between these two leaders led to a critical conversation that challenged Esther to steward those who had been entrusted to her care, even if it meant risking her life. With courage fueled only by prayer, she committed to respond and act. This pericope and Mordecai's and Esther's exemplary leadership offer contemporary leaders lessons in relational leadership characterized in love, empathy, and healing. It calls Christian leaders to faithful stewardship of those entrusted to their care. It challenges leaders to courageous service fueled by an acknowledgment of the Presence and power of God through prayer. It acknowledges the God whose name never appears in the story, but whose power and handiwork

is written on every page. He is the same God who transforms contemporary Christian leaders and likewise reveals His power and handiwork on every page of their own leadership stories.

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# The Impact of Women in Leadership: Headship vs. Lordship; Position vs. Power; Honor vs. Submission; A Cultural Analysis of 1 Corinthians 11:1–16 and 1 Peter 3:1–6

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## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

Leadership defined has a distinctive root in the process of influence and values that advances a goal or attributed actions made by others (Nort-house, 2019). Leadership as a spectrum yields terms such as authenticity, management, visibility, power, and authority (Keohane, 2020). Leadership involves social identity and the art of engaging, mobilizing, directing, and helping others finds a vision for themselves (Barentsen, 2011, p. 56;

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Cole, 2010, p. 87). Leaders clarify goals for a group and bring together the energies of members of that said group to pursue the defined goals (Keohane, 2010, p. 23). However, leadership has been closely associated with masculinity and men as natural-born leaders throughout the centuries (Keohane, 2020, p. 238).

Leadership studies do not generally embrace theology in the process of research (Ayers, 2006). Understanding the need for women in leadership is vital to the approach of this chapter, and their involvement is essential to elements of social growth and organizational success (Chand, 2015). The focus on women's issues and rights brings to the forefront of history the role women play daily throughout human society (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Keohane, 2020). Yet it is an aged-old cultural context and conversation that in modern day brings tension within the faith and corporate communities is the social convention (or construct) of womanhood in society, and even furthers the discussion of women in leadership. Hence the implications for biblical foundations will shed light on and connect the impact of women in leadership.

This chapter considers two specific biblical texts that contribute to the nuances that impact women leaders, specifically women serving in leading roles within professional workspaces, family structure, and institutions of faith. Through an analysis of 1 Cor. 11:1–16 and 1 Peter 3:1–6, the chapter will highlight some of the cultural, social, and ethical challenges about headship versus lordship, position versus power, and honor versus submission as it relates to women leaders. These two biblical texts contribute to the culturalization of the twenty-first-century leading woman who impacts, inspires, and compels her identity, her behaviors, her actions and reactions, and her leadership within home, community, and faith. Through the cultural analysis, this chapter identifies six principles from the two chapters that intersect within sectors of profession, family, and faith for women in leadership. The principles include moral agency, alignment, interdependence, honor, vision, and organizational stewardship. Each of the six principals will be examined after the social-cultural analysis of each text.

## 8.2 BIBLICAL IMPACT ON WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

The role of women is part of every culture, within every profession and during every era. Women have a place, space, and role for humanity, yet despite many global advances, women's position as leaders has been

challenged due to stereotypical expectations, gender bias, and social characteristics that shape perceptions (Diekman & Eagly, 2000; Northouse, 2019). Baker (2009) reminds that analysis of biblical text through, “new research, new eyes and new minds” is crucial to the narrative of women (and leadership) and discerning the complexity of such issues “to advance the place of women in global societies” (p. ix).

Christian beginnings are understood from a monolithic perspective (Fiorenza, 1985, p. 68). Moreover, historical interpretation of the biblical text has shaped theological location of women against the backdrop of roles, responsibilities, and the ability to lead within the Christian faith. However, cultural and historical research that considers the biblical woman disentangles ingenuous perceptions and ideologies of women in the Scriptures and provides context towards her points of view (Bradley & Muller, 2016). Many contemporary biblical scholars maintain a complementarian, yet traditional, perspective in the roles of women and would find it sacrilegious to question or critique interpretation of final authority of the text (Kostenberger & Schreiner, 2016). Furthermore, emerging scholars advocate for a tenable divine revelation that approaches the text through a reframing of perspectives and a rhetorical lens of faith that avoids offensive theology of gender roles (Peppiatt, 2018; Wire, 1990). As a principle of scholarly argument, the forementioned theological views give way for discussion of the juxtaposition of headship versus lordship; the spiritual art of position versus power; and the grace of honor versus submission—as it relates to the impact of women in leadership.

All cultures make social distinctions between men and women and place importance of identity and roles in some form of social hierarchy (Harris, 1991, p. 67). The introduction of charismatic customs, commonly referenced as household codes, appears in literary writings when Judaism engages the Greek worldview (Jobes, 2005). Moral household codes during the early century church were a government response to the diverse Greco-Roman culture. The ground basis of household management codes in the Greco-Roman culture was acknowledged and addressed by numerous philosophical and religious leaders, including Paul and Peter; however, neither of the two apostles simply affirmed Greco-Roman expectations (Jobes, 2005). The codes had a direct impact on growing communities in surrounding social structures of influence. In addition, the household codes served as a distinction between the new Christian identity and the Roman-Greco society that many were living among. These codes had an impact on marginalized groups, including



women of all socio-economic demographics, in leadership and community roles. Code development formed a defense strategy, a cultural norm, that marked a centripetal direction (Malina, 2001) between men and women roles as it relates to headship versus lordship; position versus power; and honor versus submission. This calls attention to understanding that the established household coded system of the early church offers some insight into the cultural behavior of women in leadership through the lens of these three dichotomies: headship versus lordship; position versus power; and honor versus submission.

### 8.3 I CORINTHIANS II:I-16

Commentators attribute the authorship of the Corinthian epistles to Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 16:21), affirmed with amanuensis assistance from Sosthenes (1 Cor. 1:1), and further edited with Paul's parenetical commentary (Fotopoulos, 2010, p. 421; Malcolm et al., 2012, p. 65). Paul communicated through correspondence on numerous occasions to the people of Corinth (1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Cor. 2:3-4, 7:8-9); however, survival of the historical canonical texts is lost (Bray, 2009; Keener, 2014). The occasion for 1 Corinthians reveals factors for Paul's communication with his first-established church to resolve community dissension reported to him while he was in Ephesus (1 Cor. 1:11, 11:18, 16:8) and for Paul to address moral and ethical issues that raised concerns of spiritual formation and community worship (7:1-40, 81-11, 12:1-14).

Cultural analysis supports that Corinth was a Greek-speaking, Roman-settled colony, suggesting that it was influenced by both dominant cultures. Corinth was strategically significant due to its extensive Greek history, multi-cosmopolitan culture, and its Roman government influence (Brown, 1997). This would make sense, considering the settlement and geographical make-up of Corinth. Julius Caesar settled and modeled the city of Corinth in 44 BC as a Roman colony with the proconsul presence at the center of the province (Acts 18:22). Corinth's geographic land-mass conventionally provided for dock, port, and harbor of the Saronic and Corinthian gulf coasts that created an economic trading trough for the city (Fotopoulos, 2010).

Rhetoric is the science and art of speaking well. Apostle Paul lived in a rhetoric-saturated environment because it was the primary education discipline during the Roman Empire (Witherington, 2011, p. 22). Scholarly suggestion implores Paul's interest in persuasion was "more

than mere ornamentation or simply speaking eloquently” in his communication with the leadership (Witherington, p. 23). Cultural and social intertexture is dominant rhetoric throughout 1 Corinthians that suggest Paul’s adherence to traditions of honor and shame regarding women roles by means of analysis. 1 Corinthians 11:1–16 has often been identified and referenced by scholars to suggest or renege Paul’s complex persuasion of women serving in ministerial leading roles (Gench, 2015; Keener, 1992; Wire, 1990). In addition, scholarly interpretation contends 1 Cor. 11:1–16 as one of the lengthiest ambiguous, complex, and contrary to mutuality discussions of gender within the Pauline corpus (Gench, 2015, p. 37; Lee, 2021, p. 114).

Cultural elements and patterns that develop into behaviors within a culture were the basis of formed structures of the early church (Malina, 2001; Meeks, 2003). Examination of 1 Corinthians 11:1–16 reveals elements of cultural and social intertexture such as allusions and echoes over ecclesial attire. Progressive patterns and repetitive text reveal pronouns and derivatives that suggest cultural themes of honor and shame that, “pervade the text with rhetorical language such as praise, commendation, glory, shame, disgrace, propriety and dishonor” (Gench, 2015, p. 45). However, Hawkins (2004) references Paul’s approach towards the Corinthian community as a premise towards women submission. Such an argument would be compelled to societal and cultural norms of which Castelli (1999) referenced as Paul’s ongoing cultural reception and authority interwoven with concern for social relations and identity within the Greco-Roman community (p. 229).

Progressive texture and patterns emerge within the text firstly with Paul’s “I” commendation of tradition (11:2) offset by the word “head” metaphorically referenced three times (11:3) to reflect man/Christ, man/woman, and Christ/God relationships. Lee (2021) characterized this descending pattern as a standout reflecting a form of order in lordship. The progressive texture of *head* eight times in the text is a part of Paul’s theological framework that connects the passage, to why men ought not have anything on the head and why women should be covered (Gench, 2015; Payne, 2009). The metaphorical use of head for the man would bring shame upon Christ and the community if something was hanging down the head, juxtaposed the woman, if she were to prophesy with an uncovered head would bring shame. Gorman (2017) recognized this as an affirmation of three headship relationships—Christ, man, and woman—understood in hierarchal progression representing authority or

general relation in nature. Nonetheless, an alternative viewpoint that Paul articulated to the community of Galatians contradicts his statement to freedom in Christ in whom “there is no longer male and female” (Gal. 3.28).

The anomalies of “disgraces his head, disgraces her head” and shaved, cut, and veiled (4–7) illumine as progressive textual rhetoric form regarding men. Payne (2009) opined Paul’s reference of “disgraces his head” (11:4) and “ought not have his head veiled” (11:7) as an awareness of long effeminate hair cultural influences, yet an advocacy for gender differentiation in his concluding argument, “Does not nature itself teach, if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him” (11:14). Of note, 11:4–5 calls out men and women, yet 11:6 places formality on woman only. Payne suggested that Paul’s intent is to focus on both men and women leaders of the Corinthian church (p. 115). In a similar indication, Vander-Stichele and Penner (2005) identified 11:5–7 as the critical lynchpin of Paul’s argument where irregularities are connected to shame for both occasions (p. 292). Progressive text pattern is also observed in 11:8–9 revealing a sequence of man–woman, woman–man, and the purpose of woman’s creation. This progressive pattern outlines a relationship between man and woman and the appeal to draw a connection to the creative narrative text in Genesis 2:4–25. A similar progressive pattern is observed again in 11:11–12, but in reverse order of woman–man, man–woman, and the purpose that “all things come from God.” Fee (2014) considered the paired verses as “a perfect double chiasm,” nonaccidental on the rhetoric’s part yet affirmation that God arranged as believers, man and woman, mutually dependent on one another (pp. 578–579). The progressive pattern observed throughout 11:8–12 is noted by some scholars as a contrast of gender hierarchy and tension between mutuality and equal dependence (Gundry-Volf, 1995; Peppiatt, 2015). Malcolm (2013) placed emphasis of the rhetoric in both 11:3–5 and 11:11–12 and Paul’s insistence of God-dependent mutuality and that there is no position or independence from the power of the Lord (p. 196).

In view of all the Pauline versatility regarding women’s roles, Paul is the first New Testament leader to address women serving within a leading role in the church. Four areas emerge concerning the women in Corinth in 1 Cor. 11:1–16. Firstly, women were involved in prayer and prophesy as leading roles within the Corinthian church. Honor versus submission aligns in agreement with Schreiner (2016) who suggested that women

with the gift of prophecy could exercise honor and respect the organizational culture in a way that did not subvert leadership but allowed them to function in the gift equally as the male leadership (p. 194). Second, men and women leaders set the example for the Corinthian church. 1 Corinthians 11:1–16 holds to the theme of Paul’s demonstrated leadership example that the church should “be imitators” and follow, concerning how Christians should live during internal group controversy (Barentsen, 2011). Paul’s appeal to the Corinthian congregants to imitate him is reflective of an alignment towards leadership social identity. This includes a process of self-sacrifice and setting a personal example for followers to learn directly or vicariously from the leader within an ecclesial setting.

Third is an interdependence of man and woman serving “in the Lord.” Paul formed his entire discussion throughout 1 Corinthians on expectations regarding the functioning of the church leadership surrounding controversy in support of roles. This includes Paul’s commitment to cultivate community in the context of Christian social identity within Corinth. There is no doubt that women are serving alongside and independently of men in the text; however, there is the reminder that all beings come from God who serves as head of both men and women, as precedence in Pauline theology and imitated by both men and women leaders, using Paul as the example. Integration of these power relations within a marginalized community may cause for rejection and tension; however, this analysis reflects Paul’s narrative and attention to his position on in support of women roles. Lastly, it is meaningful to point out the magnitude of diversity of women’s engagement in the text. Likened to Livermore (1824), an advocate contended biblical restrictions against women’s leadership (p. 70) and defended that women be able to speak and labor for the discipleship of all men and women in public settings, as the witnessing of Paul’s writings support (pp. 95–97).

#### 8.4 OVERVIEW OF 1 PETER 3:1–7

Historically, 1 Peter has been studied for theological, ecclesial, and gender-contextual issues (Greene, 2007; Jobes, 2005; Witherington, 2007). Contemporary Petrine exegetes explore the text for its cultural dynamics, rethinking center and marginal audiences and their social context (Kaalund, 2020; Smith, 2016). Crowther (2012), however, examined 1 Peter for a deeper analysis and insight through the lens of

authentic leadership. Crowther (2018) would further identify the story of Peter as a case study in leader transformation through wisdom, counsel, and servant leadership. Viewing Apostle Peter through both contemporary leadership theories makes room for organizational complexity, while addressing issues of “self, motive, and the proper use of divergent areas such as authority and ethics” (Crowther, 2018, p. 159), and in the case for this work, headship vice lordship; position vice power; and honor vice submission.

Placing the epistle in a chorological perspective, archeological research suggests 1 Peter was written after Paul’s letter to the Romans, yet before the burning of Rome in 64AD. A wide degree of scholarly consensus attributes the penmanship of First Peter to an author after Peter’s time, pseudonymously a Petrine group in Rome or one of the apostolic teachings to a later generation (Best, 1971; Elliott, 1990; Kittredge, 2012). First Peter is mostly important because of its prominent role in the history of the first-century church (Elliot, 2007). It is expressly written to a marginalized community of believers in which Apostle Peter would have had direct influence and impact. Also, although it was addressed to a community to prevent the loss of faith, the same community was socially and religiously estranged, dispersed throughout the Roman provinces of Asia Minor and living under ubiquitous conformity of societal norms.

Kittredge (2012) suggests that 1 Peter is written with an awareness of moral codes of conduct and the activity of cultural accommodation (p. 617). During the latter of the first century, women and leadership became a controversial concern within the Christian church. Household churches came under scrutiny to conform to Roman social and political structures. Prevailing order of household codes would become a relational norm within Christian communities, specifically as it relates to male and female roles (Russell, 1993, p. 62). This conformation represented one leader’s attempt to manage diversity within a marginalized culture, while exhorting a microculture to maintain peaceful community balance (Kaalund, p. 207; Witherington, 2007, p. 25).

Throughout the 1 Peter epistle, the author is addressing three groupings of people: slaves, wives, and husbands. The author’s communication is to a diasporic people, all—slave, wife, and husband—destined and given a new birth, a chosen people, to do and declare the works of the One who called them. This call is of a mutual service for both woman and man, independent of one another, yet unified to show others as an example and model. This would suggest that 1 Peter speaks directly to leaders about

leadership much like Paul speaks to leaders in the Pastoral Epistles, yet the Petrine texts have not been mined for an understanding of leadership in relation to Paul (Crowther, 2012).

Twenty-first-century contemporary exchange and discussions about woman's roles and responsibilities from a biblical perspective fall within the margins of 1 Peter 3:1–7. "Wives in the same way accept the authority..." (3:1a) serves as a follow-on explanation of the previous discussion. However, the author draws a great deal of suspicion on gender roles from the very beginning of the sentence. The exhortation to be submissive was presented within a culture where conventional wisdom was acceptable as an integral part of societal order (Christensen, 2016). During the early Pauline Christian church women had some sense of equality and were treated as individuals in their own right. Women found an expressive freedom within the "new creation paradigm," which granted women new responsibilities in the community of faith that they could not experience elsewhere in society (Davids, 1990; Witherington, 1988). Yet political authorities were adamant about religious movements and the effects of the orderly functioning of households (Van Rensburg, 2004, p. 255). However, the radical undertone of 3:1 tells wives they can evangelize their non-Christian husbands without a word, and later in the text (3:15) be prepared to verbally express a public word about their faith (Smith, 2016, p. 79).

However, Peter addresses women as independent moral agents, with a conscious decisiveness of faith and attitude to win their husbands over, contrary to cultural belief and household codes set in place by an estranged society. There is also a rhetorical of brevity for women to remain committed to their faith and committed to their husbands, through submission of the heart and submission to the development of the inner person (Crowther, p. 103). Peter's appeal to inward vice, outward adornment, and inner self (3:3–4) reflects an alignment with God and self. The inward-outward metaphor places an emphasis on being and reflects an ongoing inner transformation of the heart, that negates position and power that is normalized in a patriarchal organization. As a principle, 3:4–6 supports women to use their gifts and talents to steward in leadership and power paradoxically, not as in dominance but even in weakness (Crowther, p. 165), for in His perfect weakness women are made strong.

There is a rhetorical strategy that God transforms shame into honor through the Christian community's relationship to the larger community

(Elliot, 2007). The affirmation that wives are “heirs with you” implies woman’s equitable and honorable standing and not subordination (Payne, 2009, p. 276). It debunks the academic teachings of Augustine who referred to women as the weaker being, lesser, and second in creation (Ruether, 2014, p. 85). Instead, woman is made in the image of God aligned with man, a new relationship marked with equality and service (Bekker, 2007). Another aspect within the text is the role of women in positions of leadership vice power. Keck (1998) points out that a dramatic feature is the image of strong, courageous women displayed in a healthy and positive image (p. 782). One can envision an image of the women of Corinth exercising in leading roles of worship, engaging in prayer and prophecy along with men as courageous and positive. Another aspect of power is the displacement of honor. It is a reversal of power from its traditional masculine ideal context versus the feminine aspect in the same regard. This would be germane to the point of view of women having the same level of leadership and recognition in abilities and to work ethically alongside the male counterpart. Lastly, the social and cultural context of 1 Peter 3:1–7 is a culture of honor and submission. A progression of integrative themes, such as the behavior of slaves, wives, and husbands, serves to indicate that all, in every society or grouping, must submit to and honor one another (Dinkler, 2007, p. 11). Society throughout the globe has changed since the first century, due to the power of the Gospel. As a result, a distinctive identity has emerged that provides for community and a place of belonging.

In summary, although twenty-first-century women are not subject to the same cultural constraints that influenced the doctrine of early century leaders and thinkers of the church, women in leadership remain a delicate conversation in the company of professions and occupations. 1 Peter offers an example through which an appreciation and understanding of authenticity and partnership for women in leadership can be gained. The analysis of 1 Peter regarding the biblical narrative about women and women’s place in society from a cultural posture debunks the theologies of position vice power because women were empowered to influence household dynamics and relationships by their leading character.

## 8.5 THE IMPACT OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Societies have changed drastically since the first few centuries when the formation of Christendom was being established. The enforcement of early century cultures onto modern societies would be unrealistic and contrary to the power of the Gospel (Gonzalez, 2010). However, the takeaways from the two passages present some measure of principles for women in leadership within the twenty-first century. There are six principles gleaned from 1 Corinthians 11:1–16 and 1 Peter 3:1–7 that impacts, inspires, and compels the identity of the twenty-first-century leading woman—her behaviors, actions, and reactions, and her leadership within home, community, and faith. The analyses in the preceding sections communicate principles such as moral agency, interdependence, alignment, honor, vision, and organizational stewardship that are particular to women in leadership in the twenty-first century.

## 8.6 PRINCIPLE ONE: MORAL AGENCY

Paul addressed the early churches in an effort to create a pattern of leadership behavior and moral efficacy. Peter’s communication to wives suggests that women had (and still have) a measure of moral responsibility and choice (Crowther, 2018, p. 102). Paul and Peter ascribed a degree of agency and influence on women in the area of individual and familial faith through leadership inside of the household. Throughout today’s society, it is needful as a leader to maintain a spirit of consciousness, moral agency, and resilience in order to respond to adversity in ways that protect the organizational fabric of the home, the community, and her faith (Elkington & Breen, 2015, p. 96). For as often as women leaders are exposed to a greater level of consciousness—through reflection, prayer, and meditation—their paradigm of leadership will evolve, shift, and grow (Elkington & Breen, 2015). For women in leadership, moral agency is the triune balance of peace, self-awareness, and resilience that provides meaning to challenge and wonder of purpose. Moral agency is the threshold whereupon identity is negotiated for women in leadership and the distinguished characteristic of being called out of oneself for the sake of communal work.



Principle One: Moral agency is the triune balance of peace, self-awareness, and resilience that provides meaning to challenge and wonder of purpose.

## 8.7 PRINCIPLE TWO: INTERDEPENDENCE

Passages such as 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Peter 3 point to men and women serving “in the Lord.” Paul formed his entire discussion throughout 1 Corinthians on expectations regarding the functioning of the church leadership surrounding controversy in support of roles. This includes Paul’s commitment to cultivate community in the context of social identity. There is no doubt that women are serving alongside and independently of men in the text, yet there is the reminder that all beings come from God who serves as head of both men and women. Peter addressed women specifically, as an encouragement to them to remain focused on your interdependence to your faith. Women were expected to independently manage their households. Stepping into a woman’s household was to step into women world. The analysis advocates for a leadership model that embraces interdependence and mutuality of and for women and men. This responsibly bears weight on women’s leadership at large, minimalizing binary views of women in leadership and supporting an interdependence with others while adopting a trajectory towards unity.

Principle Two: Women in leadership supports interdependence with others and adopts a trajectory towards unity within an organization.

## 8.8 PRINCIPLE THREE: ALIGNMENT

Julia Foote’s comments that women during the first century church, “did more than to pour out tea” (p. 209), speak to Apostle Paul’s guidance to leaders in the community to align with women who labor in the Gospel (Phil. 4:3). Paul’s direction to the Corinthian congregants to imitate him is reflective of alignment towards leadership and social identity. Peter’s appeal to the wives also represents a showing of alignment in relationships with others. This includes a process of self-sacrifice and setting a personal example for followers to learn directly or vicariously from the leader within. For the woman as leader, a balanced and stable mind makes room for peace and exercises alignment with the body that will follow to the soul (Ortberg, 2014). This analysis supports that women in leading

roles encourage harmony with moral and ethical alignment of conviction of community and service to others.

Principle Three: Women in leading roles encourage harmony with moral and ethical alignment of conviction of community and service to others.

## 8.9 PRINCIPLE FOUR: HONOR

The context of 1 Corinthians and 1 Peter is set in a society of honor, which would have caused the example of women in leading roles to be countercultural as well as counterintuitive (Crowther, 2012, p. 64; MacDonald, 2014, p. 272). Even as such honor towards the household codes emerge against the backdrop of cultural resistance to the extent that gender plays a role in cultural compliance. The honor of male and female, towards male and female, is a responsive trait in leadership. Honor connects to respectability, both in the eyes of self and in the eyes of others (Malina, 2001). As a key practice and principle of women in leadership, honoring the belief, skillset, and ability of others elicits trust and integrity in others. This considers the distinguishing characteristic within both contexts, specifically for women, whereby women in leadership present a perspective of giving honor where and when honor is due and recognizing that honor is consequential to horizontal and vertical leadership relationships.

Principle Four: Women in leadership present a perspective of giving honor where and when honor is due and recognizing that honor is consequential to horizontal and vertical leadership relationships.

## 8.10 PRINCIPLE FIVE: VISION

Without vision an organization will perish. Vision shapes the present and influences the future (Crowther, 2012). Successful leadership takes into consideration an organizational vision that is inclusive of diversity of thought and intellect. The early church nurtured a vision for women and men to lead. Gleaned from each biblical text is a vision and a promise of a world where the humanity of every person will be fully valued (Weems, 2021). The study of the two biblical texts demonstrates a model for structured formality of organizational vision that included women as a center

piece and leadership. A developed vision communicated to others is a key ingredient in leadership (Yukl, 2013). Leadership involves social identity and the art of engaging, mobilizing, directing, and helping others find a vision for themselves. Paul and Peter communicate directly to women in both instances. Women have a vision that is authentic to their leadership style and approach to organizational structure and a vision that enables everyone within communities providing order and stability. This further suggests women's capacity for a vision that includes healthy relationships, safe workspaces, organization of family structure, and connection in community.

Principle Five: Women have a vision that is authentic to their leadership style and approach towards organizational structure and vision that includes healthy relationships, safe workspaces, organization of family structure, and connection in community.

## 8.11 PRINCIPLE SIX: ORGANIZATIONAL STEWARDSHIP

Crowther (2012) identified steward leadership as one of the principles in the Petrine leadership model. A steward leader is one who serves by overseeing and using gifts and resources wisely in the community not for gain of honor or status. Organizational stewardship nullifies the exchange of position vice power and allows for relationships based on equity and service.

Where and when women lead there is a propensity for stewardship. Statistically, women-led organizations embody a culture of participation, collaboration, egalitarianism, extrinsic reward, and interpersonal relationships (Maier, 1999). Where and when women's leadership is present, the organizational structure contributes to cultural values, emotional intelligence, and authenticity in leadership style (Walker & Artiz, 2015). The above analysis suggests that the ability of women to negotiate on behalf of others demonstrates the value of stewardship and a capacity to handle difficult situations.

Principle Six: The ability and capacity of women to handle difficult situations and negotiate on behalf of others demonstrate the value of organizational stewardship.

## 8.12 CONCLUSION

Ideas, inspirations, and imaginative originate within social and historical contexts that shape and define them. Peter and Paul were two biblical leaders who mostly shaped early Christianity (Witherington, 2007). The two leaders represent different functions in the building and the development of the first-century Christian leader, yet their messages work in tandem in situating the discussion of women in leadership and the impact of contemporary leading women within sectors of profession, family, and faith. Through the cultural analysis of 1 Corinthians 11:1–16 and 1 Peter 3:1–7, this chapter identified six principles that intersect women and leadership roles. Women were expected to be leaders of their households during the early Christian church. Even as a diasporic people—presumably in public as much as private—women, as a marginalized group, were called upon to demonstrate principles of ethical leading behaviors modeled for a communal sect.

In addition, this chapter situated that honor and submission were paramount values for the Greco-Roman world, that lordship and headship represent an affirmation of relationship to, and order within community; and there is no position from the power of God. The prevalence of Greco-Roman ethical codes carried weight of significance and relevance for leaders during the early century church. However, whether such codes fit within a broader symbolic reference for the twenty-first century or whether such doctrine has passed away, the principles shaped from the cultural analysis within this study, bring to the forefront a way to see the text and its relevance for women in leadership within today's societal context (Table 8.1)

**Table 8.1** Principles that support women in leadership in the twenty-first century

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Principles that support women in leadership in the twenty-first century include</i>
One	Moral Agency	Moral agency is the triune balance of peace, self-awareness, and resilience that provides meaning to challenge and wonder of purpose
Two	Interdependence	Supports interdependence with others and adopts a trajectory towards unity within an organization
Three	Alignment	Encourage harmony with moral and ethical alignment of conviction of community and service to others
Four	Honor	A perspective of giving honor where and when honor is due and recognizing that honor is consequential to horizontal and vertical leadership relationships
Five	Vision	A vision that is authentic to their leadership style and approach towards organizational structure and vision that includes healthy relationships, safe workspaces, organization of family structure, and connection in community
Six	Organizational Stewardship	The ability and capacity of women to handle difficult situations and negotiate on behalf of others demonstrate the value of organizational stewardship

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# Women and Servant Leadership: Truths and Misconceptions About Submission

*Carlo Serrano*

## 9.1 INTRODUCTION

I served in the US Army, including a combat tour in the Middle East. I enjoyed most of my time in the Army, earned more money than I ever did as a retail clerk, and got to travel the world. Thus, I find it awkward when someone says, “Thank you for your service.” I understand the nuance of that well-intended sentiment. However, the logic of receiving thanks for something that I chose to do and received compensation for just never made sense to me. This feeling grew when I left active-duty military life for full-time vocational ministry. I thought that being a pastor would come with perks, honor, and freedom from the “grunt work” I experienced as an enlisted soldier in the US Army. I quickly learned that service involves sacrifice, humility, and sometimes rejecting the easy road. During my months of vocational ministry, I painted a parking lot, vacuumed floors, cleaned bathrooms, stacked and unstacked hundreds of chairs, and

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137

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easily worked 60 hours a week. My boss then shared with me a word of wisdom encapsulating the complexity of servant leadership and the concept of service: Everyone wants to be a servant until you treat them like one.

Do we need another discussion on servant leadership? The concept of service intertwines with sacrifice, selflessness, and submitting oneself to processes or persons for the sake of something (or someone) greater. The topic is well-researched, its effectiveness empirically supported, and its proponents widespread. Servant leadership is an appealing and biblically supported antidote to the dark side of leadership (Crowther, 2018). Servant leaders produce healthy teams and high customer and employee satisfaction (Hwang et al., 2014; Jit et al., 2017; Shi & Zhou, 2023). Servant leadership aids in conflict resolution, spiritual well-being, enhanced job performance, and healthy organizational culture (Harwiki, 2016; Lemoine & Blum, 2021; Obi et al., 2021a, 2021b). Studies suggest that the leadership of women entrepreneurs reflects the traits of servant leadership (Cater & Young, 2020).

Moreover, research shows that women are authentic in their application of servant leadership (Sims & Morris, 2018). However, within this strong theory lies a word that in many cultures may be loaded with the baggage of oppression, struggle, and in some cases, dehumanization. Within the theory of servant leadership, one must answer two critical questions: What is a servant, and what does it mean to serve? Everyone wants to be a servant until you treat them like a slave.

## 9.2 SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND SUBMISSION

A careful reading of the Christian Scriptures reveals a connection between the word servant and the word slave, especially within the Pauline corpus (Asumang, 2011). However, the Apostle Paul's teachings on service and submission do not undermine the teachings of Jesus, the ultimate servant leader (Mark 10:45). In fact, it is the Apostle Paul who says that in Christ, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Since the Christian Scriptures provide a level field for men and women regarding salvation, access to church life, and societal standing, then scholars in the field of Christian leadership need to engage and challenge theoretical assumptions continually.

Scholars accept servant leadership as an ethical and virtuous theory (Patterson, 2010). Nevertheless, there is a gap in the literature regarding the implications of the word “servant” for historically underrepresented or oppressed people groups. Some argue that the notion of a historically oppressed people group is too controversial or even a false premise. Others argue that representational intersectionality is at the core of all issues related to the marginalization and mistreatment of certain people groups, especially women (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). As a Christian biblical leadership scholar, building perspectives based on what the Scriptures say about humanity is essential. I intend to keep intersectionality in its proper place as insight and not elevate it to an ideology (Carter, 2017). It is possible to recognize injustice and structural sin without forsaking a worldview centered on the authority of Scripture, the reality of sin, and the redemptive hope of the Gospel. The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures demonstrate that God created men and women in His image, that humanity exists in a fallen state due to sin, that humans are capable of cruelty and immoral behavior, and that Jesus came to restore God’s original design for humankind (Genesis 2:4–25, 3:1–24; James 4:1–17; 1 John 3:8). Thus, it is reasonable to consider the reality of historically oppressed and underrepresented people groups. Moreover, the literature clearly demonstrates that women, especially women of color, fall into the historically oppressed and underrepresented category in leadership and business spaces (Reynolds, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the interplay between servanthood, the concept of submission, and the vital role of servant leadership concerning women in leadership.

### 9.3 BIBLICAL WORDS MATTER

The existence of slavery is arguably one of the worst realities of the human experience throughout history, especially for enslaved women. Although comparative suffering is seldom productive, it is crucial to understand that there were and are differences between enslaved men’s and women’s experiences. For example, women were often used for domestic labor, sexual exploitation, and forced pregnancy and suffered the loss of their children, while men served as the primary workhorses. These horrors associated with slavery are not limited to the Atlantic slave trade, nor did they disappear at the end of the US Civil war or Bolivar’s triumphs in Latin America. The ripple effect of slavery touches much of women’s lived experiences worldwide. Thus, it is helpful to explore the biblical words

associated with slavery and submission and what those words mean for Christian women in leadership today.

Proof-texting is taking a verse or entire passage of Scripture out of its original context to prove a point or validate a doctrine (Osborne, 2006). A simple example of proof-texting would be using John 11:35 (“Jesus wept”) to establish a doctrine that claims only authentic Christians weep. Proof-texting flows from several semantic fallacies, such as the misuse of subsequent meaning, misuse of etymology, assuming that the root of a word implies a definition, and using word studies to settle theological arguments (Osborne, 2006). Some of these semantic fallacies have had lasting cross-cultural implications, especially the misuse of subsequent meaning wherein one defines words by secondary and tertiary interpretations instead of the original meaning. Thus, before we unpack the word submission found in Ephesians, we must first start at the beginning with the first mention of the word “servant.”

The word “servant” and its variations appear in 929 verses in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. The word “submit” and its variations appear in 13 Hebrew and Christian Scripture verses. The word “submit” first appears transliterated as *anah* in Genesis 16:9 and means to be bowed down or afflicted. The word “servant” first appears as *ebed* in Genesis 9:25–26. In these verses, the word *ebed* means “a person who is legally owned by someone else and whose entire livelihood and purpose was determined by their master” (Bible Sense Lexicon, 2023). Not only does the first mention of “servant” match the definition of the word “slave,” but these verses are also historically linked with the infamous “Curse of Ham.” The semantic fallacy associated with the Curse of Ham has negatively impacted African Americans and the African sub-continent for generations. A fifth-century Midrash placed Moses’ curse of Ham’s son Canaan directly on Ham (Genesis 9:18–27; Ukpong, 2000). The fifth-century Midrash refers to Ham’s descendants as black and ugly (Ukpong, 2000). The sixth-century Talmud also states that “the descendants of Ham are cursed by being black and are sinful by nature” (Ukpong, 2000, p. 8). Genesis 9:25 reads, “Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.” Nowhere in that text can one extrapolate that “black” skin color is cursed. However, this text’s misuse of subsequent meaning led to the justification of slavery and other atrocities against people of dark skin color (Harris, 2020). Fast forward to the Christian Scriptures, and the same fallacies are employed against women via the word “submit.”

## 9.4 THE BIBLE, SUBMISSION, AND SLAVERY

“Submit” first appears in the Christian Scriptures in Paul’s letter to the Romans. The word Paul used means to obey or to be under the control of that to which you submit (Bible Sense Lexicon, 2023). There are two important Greek words, among others, translated as “servant” in the Christian Scriptures. The word *doulous* first appears in Matthew 8:9 and means slave. This is a term often used by the Apostles Paul and Peter and even James, the brother of Jesus, as a title. The early church leaders wore the title slave of Christ as a badge of honor. The other word, *diakonos*, means minister. This is an important distinction for servant leadership theory because the theory draws from Mark 10:43–45:

But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (English Standard Version, 2001/2016).

Jesus uses both words in that passage to essentially state that greatness comes from being a minister and a slave to all. No serious scholars believe Jesus endorsed slavery, especially the chattel slavery of antebellum America. However, the misapplication of the biblical words translated as servant, slave, and submit are far too often used as weapons of oppression. To overcome the multi-faceted obstacles of hermeneutics, some postmodern exegetes make the critical error of ignoring the author for contemporary relevance, while others overemphasize linguistics at the expense of culture (Blue, 2002; Schneiders, 1981; Vanhoozer, 2009). The inclusive culture of postmodern twenty-first-century America makes it very easy to view the writings of Paul through the lens of “acceptance.” For example, it is impossible to accurately interpret a passage such as Romans 1:18–32 without first grasping the culture, language, and in many ways, the mindset of Paul unless one engages with semantic fallacies regarding words like “homosexual,” “natural relations,” or “shameless acts.” Since meaning is foundationally a philosophical construct, one should not view hermeneutics as a simple matter of word study, although the study of words is an essential element of hermeneutics.

On the contrary, one must evenly apply biblical exegesis and existential analysis to both the text and the reader (Malbon, 1983). However, the

former should only occur after first examining the world and the author's words. In the same way that we should avoid reading the present into the past or anachronism, we should be mindful of katachronism, which is the projection of ancient practice into the modern world (Punt, 2014). The good news about the Christian Scriptures is that love, unity, service, sacrifice, and the *imago Dei* in humanity are clearly concepts built for eternal practice and not limited by the culture of the ancient near east.

“The status of slaves in the Roman society was the lowest of the low,” yet, the Christocentric behavioral ethics in Ephesians and the Gospels demonstrate an *upside-down* way of living for followers of Christ (Adewale, 2022, p. 3). Although the slavery mentioned in the Bible is not necessarily synonymous with antebellum slavery, that does not mean we should sugarcoat the power of that word in its original context. Likewise, it is a disservice to the world of the New Testament authors and the original audience to equate the slavery mentioned by Paul with employment in the twenty-first century (Webb, 2001). To do so may cause us to rush past the weight of terms such as slave, servant, and submit. Historically oppressed people may struggle with the concept of submitting to authority as if submitting to a master (Ademiluka, 2021). However, a deeper explanation of Paul's use of the word “submit” reveals an empowering truth about Christian servant leadership.

## 9.5 EPHESIANS 5 IN CONTEXT

Most scholars agree that Paul wrote the letter during his first imprisonment in Rome. Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus is unique in that it is arguably the only letter in which the apostles made no explicit correction in matters of doctrine. Although full of instruction about life in Christ, Paul offered no rebuke against false teaching as per his signature in much of the Pauline epistles. One could argue that Paul wrote the letter of Ephesians to encourage a group of believers for whom he had deep affection and shared his longest stretch of ministry in one location. Ephesus was a major political, commercial, and cultural center and one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire. Located on the western coast of modern-day Turkey, this ancient Greek city played a central role in the rise and spread of the early church. The Christian Scriptures locate Ephesus as one of the seven churches of Asia (Revelation 1:11), as the location of a significant early Christian community, and as the location of the temple of the goddess Artemis (Diana in Roman mythology). It is not

a coincidence that some of Paul's most explicit language toward women comes from a letter written to a Christian community heavily influenced by the worship of Diana, the goddess of fertility. Legend suggests that Diana was the mother of all living things. It is no wonder that the early church in Ephesus faced opposition from the city's non-Christian population and those who made their fortunes from idol-making. Although later recognized for their patience, perseverance, and discernment, something happened between Paul's letter and John's Revelation that caused the believers in Ephesus to turn away from their "first love" (Revelation 2:1–7). Paul wrote the letter of Ephesians with the intent that it would circulate throughout the churches in Asia minor. In many ways, Ephesus was the "mother church."

Although this chapter deals primarily with Ephesians 5 and married women, it is crucial to recognize that unmarried women also wrestle with service, submission, and biblical leadership concepts. While this may seem obvious to some, it is essential to acknowledge that unmarried women can and should lead, are of equal value to married women, and are worthy of consideration whenever one engages in topics that speak to the treatment (and mistreatment) of women (Archer & Archer, 2019). Paul does not mention single mothers in Ephesians 5, yet they existed in Greco-Roman households, and all biblical texts regarding human relationships imply their fair treatment (Iliya, 2022).

The first three chapters of Ephesians move between Paul's prayers for the church and profound doctrinal statements related to the believer's position with Christ, salvation by grace alone, and availability of salvation to Jews and gentiles (Ephesians 1:3, 2:8–9, 3:7–10). In Chapter 4, Paul transitions from his prayers and theological statements and begins to outline the practical implications of the lived-out Christian experience. Chapter 4 hinges on a central Pauline proposition: Love, unity, and humility are the chief markers of Christianity (Ephesians 4:1–7). Simply put, one should not read Ephesians 5 without considering the tone and purpose of Ephesians 1–4. Ephesians 4 ends, and Ephesians Chapter 5 begins with a simple summary of what Christian relationships should look like:

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (English Standard Version, 2001/2016, Ephesians 4:32; 5:1–2).



The next section of Chapter 5 (verses 3–20) contains more directives on sexual purity, wise living, and the Christian witness. These verses are like Colossians 3:18–4:1 and 1 Peter 2:18–3:7, wherein Paul and Peter give Christian context to the household codes already practiced by the original audience of these texts (Foulkes, 1989). Verse 21 summarizes virtually everything said by Paul so far. It sets the tone for what comes next: “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). In the same way that Chapters 1–4 frame Chapter 5, verse 21 frames the infamous “wives submit to your husband” text (Ephesians 5:22). There is some controversy over this position. Complementarian versus egalitarian interpretive approaches also complicate the connection between verses 21 and 22 (Perry & McElroy, 2020). Some scholars argue that verse 21 does not connect to verse 22 but only supports the previous section and should not inform Paul’s discourse on husbands and wives, children and parents, and masters and slaves (Biblical Studies Press, 2006). However, others suggest that in verse 22, Paul continues to zoom in on the practical ways one can live out Ephesians 3:17–32, or the new life in Christ (Miles, 2006). I believe the latter approach is the wisest approach to this text. The life and teachings of Jesus modeled a consistently counter-cultural approach to everything, especially family and relational dynamics (Knowles, 2001). Jesus broke cultural boundaries, challenged societal norms, and elevated the status of women amid Greco-Roman patriarchy. According to Brown et al. (1997), “Those subject ought to submit themselves, of whatever kind their superiors are. ‘Submit’ is the term used of *wives*: ‘obey,’ of *children* (Eph 6:1), as there is a greater equality between wives and husbands, than between children and parents” (Chapter 5, section 22). Thus, one must take a giant leap to infer that Paul’s “submit” implies that women should be slaves, doormats, or even blindly obedient to their husbands.

To take that leap is to disregard not just the life and teachings of Jesus but also the practical guidance shared throughout the epistles by the most-respected followers of Jesus. Plus, some early manuscripts translate verse 22 as “wives submit to your own husbands,” which removes this verse as a catch-all for female submission to all that is male (Brannan & Loken, 2014). More importantly, the submission (wives to husbands) and obedience (children to parents, slaves to masters) are all subject to the premise of Paul’s directives: mutual submission as unto Christ (Barry et al., 2016). For Paul, mutual submission must stay connected to slavery to Christ. Paul does not ignore the biological differences between males

and females. Instead, Paul challenges men and women to fulfill their God-given gender roles with Christ, the selfless servant, as their example and not the typical rulers of the day (Wright, 2004).

Stott (1979) argued that one should never disconnect Ephesians 5:22 from God's original design in creation. Moreover, Stott taught that the abolition of slavery in Western civilization did not negate the submission mandates of Scripture. However, biblical submission models the willing sacrifice of Jesus, who laid down his life for the world, not the dehumanization and evil associated with our standard definitions of slavery (Mangum, 2020). Fletcher and Fletcher (2015) argue that Paul's command for wives to submit and husbands to love is more about respecting and cherishing one another than anything else. The goals of New Testament submission are the glorification of God and the edification of one another. The secret to biblical service via submission is that it creates a "win-win" economy wherein everyone experiences the realities of a new life in Christ. This is easier said than done.

## 9.6 SERVANT LEADERSHIP, WOMEN, AND THE WAY FORWARD

Contrary to popular belief, the life and teachings of Jesus and His followers attack the very nature of domineering and abusive patriarchy (Miles, 2006). Tönsing (2020) says, "Just as Paul and his co-workers did not have the power to push for an end to slavery and settled on trying to limit its misuse, they were not able to push for full equality between men and women" (p. 91). However, the Christian Scriptures clearly denounce the mistreatment of other human beings, especially when done so in the name of Christ (Matthew 7:12; Ephesians 4:29–32, 1 Peter 3:8–12). Like us, the New Testament authors had no control over their cultural realities. However, like us, they did everything in their power to model the way of Christ, a better way, to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. History also clearly demonstrates that humans ignore the council of Scripture.

Thus we must acknowledge the misuse of the term submit, the baggage associated with slavery and servanthood, and provide opportunities that empower women to lead from a place of freedom. This is especially true for women of color. Black American male leaders have a track record of demonstrating the various dimensions of servant leadership (Prieto et al., 2018). However, black women are historically praised

for their *superwoman* capabilities while simultaneously being treated as a threat for being too angry, loud, or strong (Bankole-Medina, 2021). This should not be. In sub-Saharan Africa, society expects women to blindly submit to the will of men, particularly husbands, regardless of how the husband behaves. I witnessed this firsthand in 2022 when I spent 30 days working with Christian leaders in Rwanda. Domestic abuse, tokenism, and the mistreatment of women remained a constant refrain in every seminar, coaching session, and conversation.

Nevertheless, I am encouraged by the efforts made by Christian institutions in Rwanda to reverse the negative trends while staying true to a biblical understanding of Ephesians 5. Moreover, the data shows that the “gravity of Christianity has shifted from the Global North to the Global South” and that “because of the active leadership of female pastors, many churches have grown” (Mati, 2022, p. 5). Thus, there is proof that healthy hermeneutics, coupled with mutual submission and built on a foundation of unity, can produce a thriving biblical community wherein men and women lead together as each submits to the lordship of Christ. Bissessar’s (2018) application of Hofstede’s cultural dimension suggests that since “women tend to be more interested in cultivating relationships, nurturing others and are more people-oriented,” female servant leaders may find success regardless of cultural issues related to power distance (p. 12). A focus on the participatory nature of servant leadership and a reframing of task-oriented leadership may also bridge modern concepts of service back to the biblical concept of service.

The Apostle Paul, when speaking about a woman named Phoebe, chose to elevate her by calling her sister and *diakonos* (Branch, 2019). Some believe Phoebe was a servant leader who served as Paul’s ambassador and as biblical evidence that service in the context of mutual submission empowers rather than enslaves (Branch, 2019; Perry, 2010). Since the biblical definitions of service and submission do not always match those words’ modern definitions and applications, it is paramount for Christian leaders to elevate servant leadership beyond clichés and cultural insensitivity. For far too long Christian language has been used to perpetuate abuse, excuse discrimination, and undercut the role of women in leadership (Westenberg, 2017). It is the duty of the Christian leader not to bend Scripture to the culture but practice a form of incarnation that brings the word of life to the location of those in need. This means building bridges of reconciliation in contexts where the terms “servant” or “submit” carry the baggage of the past. We must continue working

hard to practice mutual submission in a way that elevates the importance of healthy biblical womanhood and healthy biblical manhood, especially in the context of leadership.

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# Great Women in Early Kingdom Work: A Cultural Contextual Analysis of Romans 16:1–16 and the Applicability of Women in Leadership in the Twenty-First Century

*Ca-Asia Lane and Joshua Henson*

## 10.1 INTRODUCTION

*Leadership* can be defined as the display of verbal and nonverbal communication to achieve group goals (Diggs, 2011). Contemporary leadership research suggests that the emphasis on one's ability or influence through word gestures and behaviors is a common data point within the study of women in leadership (Adams & Galanes, 2009). Women's leadership is researched and defined as a standalone lack of the quantitative and

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qualitative theoretical framework necessary to identify it as a leadership theory. Historically, researchers have focused on describing women in leadership with a point of view in which gender differences are ascribed (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Albeit women in leadership is a developing approach that gives persuasion to a style, novice representation, contextual to authenticity yet, undefined as it relates to theory (Lane, 2022).

The beginning of an analysis starts with insight. The understanding of one's own perspectives, dispositions, presuppositions, and values allows for a deeper understanding contributory to emerging viewpoints, perspectives, and insight (Robbins, 1996). Insight of leading women or women in leadership roles speaks to a growing yet steady change in the number of advances in executive and management positions within corporate, political, and technology industries worldwide (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Schock et al., 2019). Women across the globe have authoritative positions as prime ministers and political legislators, heads of universities, presidents of nonprofit organizations, and bishops in Protestant denominations (Keohane, 2020).

Another insight is that women were reported to demonstrate higher enrollment in educational opportunities and invest more in career preparation (Schock et al., 2019). Although studies reflect that women score higher on scales that test contemporary leadership characteristics and circumstances compared to men (Eagly et al., 2003), differences in leadership emergence are induced by gender roles. Despite such advances, women serving as leaders remain underrepresented in government, politics, business, and academia.

## 10.2 BIBLICAL WOMEN IN LEADING ROLES

The portrayal of women leadership in the Bible can appear complex (Classens, 2013), impartial towards women (Bristow, 1988), and conflicting interpretations of women roles in a dominate patriarchal system (Osiek & MacDonald, 2006). Yet, in understanding the sensitivity of the discussion of women in leadership within the Scriptures, Fiorenza (1985) notes that the Bible is a theological sound interpretation, set in a time when controversial concepts of power and authority of leaders as it relates to women leading others become difficult to define, including the differences between authority and positions verses roles and responsibilities. The Old Testament lends itself to women-centric vignettes during

the early years of Israeli society (Ackerman, 2003, p. 175). Old Testament heroines such as Deborah (Jud. 4–5) and Huldah (2 Kings 22; 2 Chron. 24) give perspective into the insight of the biblical woman’s character, strength, wisdom, fortitude, and influence within the Hebrew culture.

The inclusion of women in leadership roles during the early church community represents a break from Jewish tradition and gender culture and unfolds conversations centered around how women helped construct the growing Christian movement during the early church (Cohick & Brown-Hughes, 2017; Russell, 1993). Throughout the New Testament appear countless examples of leading women such as Lydia, a skilled market dealer (Acts 16:14–15, 40); Nympha, a gatherer of others in her home (Col. 4:15); the four daughters of Phillip who did prophesy (Acts 21:8–9); and Tabitha the disciple (Acts 9:36–38). Their narratives speak to diversity in skill, accountability for others, business acumen, resourceful in intellect—women working contrary to their traditional biblical foremothers, in their efforts to spread the gospel during the early Christian church (Muir, 2019).

Nonetheless, focused questions remain among contemporary studies regarding the culture of the New Testament derived from conflicting interpretations of women roles in a male-dominate system, specifically during the early Christian communities (Osiek & MacDonald, 2006). Unfolding over the recent years is a more liberating scholarly approach that Scripture placed no limitation on women in ministry during the early church (Kostenberger & Schreiner, 2016). Notwithstanding, it is plausible to imagine a continuum of women leadership during the first-century church (Lane, 2022). A phenomenon where the embodiment of leading women in roles and representation in the early Christian history of the first-century church, in Rome and, identified by the Apostle Paul is present within the pages of the New Testament.

This chapter will examine leading women during the first-century church through a cultural context and social analysis of Romans 16:1–16. Women such as, Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Junia, the sisters Tryphaena and Tryphosa, and Julia—all mentioned by the Apostle Paul, for their work and advancement of the Christian faith. This specific chapter will highlight Paul’s observation of women as major participants and contributors in the building of the early church. The cultural analysis for this chapter identifies six characteristics concerning each of the aforementioned women and their leading roles and how they apply to women in leadership within the twenty-first century. Each characteristic identified—exemplar, mutuality,

resilience, trailblazer, sisterhood, and community-builder—is associated with each woman respectively and further connects as leadership acumen principles for women serving in leading roles within a contemporary context.

### 10.3 PHOEBE: EXEMPLAR

The opening of Romans 16 embodies a unique welcoming directed to a community of Christian believers Paul had not yet visited (Moo, 2018). Phoebe, the first woman mentioned, is exhorted as sister, deacon, and benefactor. Affirmation of Phoebe, being the first woman and only named deacon mentioned by Apostle Paul during the first-century church, has historically created interpretative consensus and debate. Argumentatively, the forthright recommendation, *I commend to you*, assumes Phoebe as the deliverer, conveyer, and interpreter of Paul's letter to the people of Rome (White, 1986). Paul's instruction to welcome Phoebe indicated that he knew her, possibly meeting during his time in Cenchræe (Acts 18:18). Paul entrusted her with delivering the epistle to the Roman community and wanted the Christians in Rome to know they could trust her (Fraday, 2021). Described as "a praiseworthy exemplar of a woman minister," Phoebe was serving in an official community role capacity (Clark, 2019). What is compelling in the text, yet often overlooked is Paul's familial word choice of Phoebe as sister. This is the first time in which Paul refers to a woman as sister and again, the same reference for Apphia (Phlm. 2). Chrysostom (1841) notes Paul's distinguished honor of Phoebe as no slight thing. Punt (2014) points out that sibling terms used in describing a personal relationship indicate great respect and a kinship through spiritual adoption (Rom. 8:15).

Paul highlights Phoebe's service, presenting her as an exemplary model (Perry, 2010). Of note is the term descriptive of Phoebe's role as *διάκονος* (deacon) of the church at Cenchræe (Clarke, 2008). It is concrete to the same identification of Paul himself (1 Cor. 3:5–6; Eph. 3:7), Apollos (1 Cor. 3:5), Tychicus (Eph. 6:21), and Epaphras (Col. 1:7). The term served an ecclesial office that was to be taken seriously, "not double tongued, no indulging in much wine; not greedy for money" (1 Tim. 3:8). Although historical differences of gender bias may have impacted exegete positions regarding Phoebe's role, it is necessary to consider Paul's high regard for Phoebe as benefactor, "a woman who is set over others," involved a history of leadership of other male disciples

(Pederson, 2006). Dually noted, leadership and benefaction went hand in hand in the Greco-Roman culture (Cohick, 2009).

If Phoebe was the letter carrier of Romans, it is plausible she also was the expositor of the epistle. Phoebe as the woman-lead is crucial because it establishes an exemplary characteristic for how women modeled the creativity of leadership during the early church (Clark, 2019). Phoebe's leadership has set in motion an intergenerational discussion about women in leading roles of authority and recognition, within and outside the four walls of the church. It is the pushback against attempts to relegate Phoebe to the common, yet honorable title of servant which juxtaposes with the assumption that her role was comparable to biblical male counterparts. The leading presence of Phoebe in Romans 16 establishes that women were serving in leading roles and that Paul supported their spiritual formation as leaders (Lane, 2021).

#### 10.4 PRISCA: MUTUALITY

Paul's reference of Prisca and her husband Aquila as *risked their necks for my life* (16:4) represents a colloquialism for alluded death and speaks to the high social status of the couple (Jewett, 2007). Prisca—her formal name used in Pauline epistles—and Aquila had a long-standing relationship with Paul that began as a disciple maker and teacher of the way of God to Paul (Acts 18:26–28). The risking of their lives extended during their missionary partnership with Paul from Corinth to Ephesus and Rome. Risk-taking involves taking an unsure action compared to a sure way or taking an action that puts one in a vulnerable position (Colquitt et al., 2007).

Paul's intentional yet strategic mentioning of Prisca first in Romans 16:3 possibly served as motivation to other women in Rome, likened to Paul's explicit warm greetings sent by Prisca to the women in Corinth (1 Cor. 16:19). Prisca's life represents a theme in Paul's letters in the connection of friends to build a bridge of confidence between people who may not exactly have known each other yet had the same commitment of faith (Lampe, 1991). Prisca also represents a theme of mutuality. Mathew's (2013) perspective of mutuality supports the affirmation of women like Prisca leading in roles that were responsible to a group, such as the Christian community in Rome, without limitations on women in roles of leadership (pp. 18–19, p. 161). Attributes of mutuality created a network of relationships for discipleship opportunities for men and women in

their respective spheres of influence (Lane, 2022). Prisca and Aquila's cross-gender partnership reflected in their husband-and-wife relationship ascribed to attributes of unity, humility towards others, and use of gifts and skills relative to their gender (Sharma, 2020). Despite gendered division within the Greco-Roman culture, mutuality also ascribed to Prisca and Aquila's profession and trade who worked together as tentmakers. Consideration of Prisca as a leading woman merits a closer look because it undercuts a hierarchy based on gender and presents evidence of women in leadership (Hansen, 2001).

### 10.5 MARY: RESILIENCE

Romans 16 offers evidence of women working for the sake of the gospel without specific partners (MacDonald, 1999). Mary is strategically positioned between two women who were co-partners in the faith with male companions. This strategic positioning is evidence to note that women without martial designation conducted authentic work independent of male counterparts (Lane, 2022). This is a testament that even as leaders, women were found doing *the work that their souls must have* regardless of marital or social status. This Mary could have been any of the creditable women witnesses during the resurrection of Christ (Luke 24:10), and therefore, "worked very hard among you" (16:6) is recognized as an honorable descriptive of worth and value.

Mary represents a feminine element in the Christian faith and was a common Jewish name mentioned throughout the New Testament. However, Mary in Romans 16:6 is the only Mary Paul ever mentioned. The Orthodox Church believed Paul was referring to Mary Magdalene who resided in Rome (Pederson, 2006). Regardless, this Mary's roll-call position in the text is an indicator of her significant Christian role model in the early house churches in Rome (Fellows, 2011). This Mary concludes and supports the notion that women such as Mary were provided a platform to publicly contribute to the resilient work among other leaders in the Roman community. Furthermore, as a benefactor, this Mary had an authoritative role granted without consideration of gender (Cohick, 2009).

## 10.6 JUNIA: TRAILBLAZER

Honor along with purity codes are common social and cultural topics prevalent throughout the Book of Romans. Christian converts in Rome during the first-century church lived in a Greco-Roman world based in a culture where honor and patronage defined how others acknowledged those in leadership roles (Clarke, 2000). Romans 16 is of critical importance in determining women in leadership roles in the early Christian church (Epp, 2005). It is here where the acknowledgment of honor in the role of apostle is placed aside a woman. (Some scholars do not believe Junia was an apostle, see Chapter 2 of this book for more information on these conflicting views.)

The introduction of Junia in Romans 16:7 presents rationale in the text that suggests affirmation of legitimacy of the apostle couple, Andronicus and Junia. Identified by Jewett (2007) as a four-point progressive, the text suggests kinship to Paul, shared incarceration with Paul (Mounce, 1995; Pederson, 2006), prominence among other apostles, in Christ before Paul, and possibly present during Christ's resurrection (Pederson, 2006). Like Prisca and Aquila, the two apostles were co-partners in the ministry of the faith. But unlike Prisca the scholarly debate centered around Junia is the culmination of her name, gender, and authority given to her as an apostle in the text. Paul's relationship with the term apostle is not taken lightly as it was the most common in how he used the term to affirm the apostles of Christ, or witnesses of the resurrection and ascension (Matt. 28: 18–20; Acts 1:6–14) or apostles commissioned by the Lord to share the Good News (Witherington, 2004).

Enough hermeneutical clarity cannot be given to understanding Junia's role as apostle. Whether Junia witnessed Christ's resurrection and ascension or was designated an apostle by divine appointment (Gal. 1:1), she would have been pivotal pre-Paul in spreading the gospel. As an apostle, Junia would have been an authorized leader of the Christian faith, with leadership and capacity. This would further suggest that Junia represented leaders of the apostolic community with authority and applied instruction and spiritual value to disciple making based on her spiritually lived experiences (Lane, 2021).

## 10.7 TRYPHAENA AND TRYPHOSA: SISTERHOOD

What is reflected particularly during the Pauline mission is an abundance of women narratives in leading roles quintessentially positioned within the text that exposes an impact towards other women (Lane, 2021). Tryphaena and Tryphosa, possibly sisters, are recognized by some scholars as slave names meaning dainty and delicate (Witherington, 2004). However, Paul's abolition text in the letter to the Romans would have served as a reminder to Tryphaena and Tryphosa that they "did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but have received a spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8:15). Although minimal is known about Tryphaena and Tryphosa, Paul's frequent emphasis on greeting women who "*work*[ed] with me" and "*worked* very hard among you" and "*workers* in the Lord... who *worked* hard" is recognized as honorable descriptions of woman worth—Tryphaena and Tryphosa included—and their work in the Roman community. Hays (2004) posited that the prominence accorded to them in the letter suggests these women's important leadership role in the Roman community at large. Rehman (2004) connected the theme of such forementioned women to rhetoric imagery of hard work, suffering, and labor of the present time working "together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). An indication that they are identified together shares that Tryphaena and Tryphosa may have worked together, shared proximity with each other and, as MacDonald (1999) suggests, were women missionary partners.

Lastly, Romans 16 is elaborate of Paul's repetitive emphasis on *greet*—a word that is rooted in Paul's ideology of the new life of Christ. Greet is the core of the gospel expressed 16 times through second-person plural introduction of each individual to the Christians in Rome (Schreiner, 2018). Jewett (2007) suggested that Paul's use of second-person form of salutation was intentional as it extended the mutuality of greetings across the Christian congregation, beyond the Christian leaders, and inclusive of women such as Tryphaena and Tryphosa (p. 952). *Greet* connected directly to their names presented a chipping away of oppressive cultural structures and celebrated their identity and belonging to community. Together as sisters, they had a voice and each was doing their part, together as a result of their sisterhood.

## 10.8 JULIA: COMMUNITY-BUILDER

The cultural analysis of the apostle Paul and his relation to groups demonstrates a model for organizational leadership through the house church formality (Barentsen, 2011). The witness of house churches mentored and coached throughout the early church experience includes the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:15), the house church of Nymphas (Col. 3:16; 4:15), and the first house of church of Aquila and Prisca (Acts 18:2). The names in Romans 16 suggest at least five to seven house churches functioning throughout Rome, one such house church being that of husband-and-wife partnership, “Philologus, Julia... and all the saints who are with them” (16:15). The building of religious community reflected in tenement churches such as Julia’s is a testament to the gospel reaching a diverse household membership (Lampe, 1991; MacDonald, 2012). It also represents a traditional communalism model whereby there is exercised support for the whole community; not taking from but bringing it to others when in need. Paul’s repetitive pattern of kinship designation throughout the text transformed familial meaning to match the fact that the early church operated with a different set of relational norms (Pederson, 2006, pp. 22–25). Paul’s reference of Julia no doubt conveyed an aspect of trust, confidence, and faith in her commitment towards building a community of like-minded believers.

## 10.9 APPLICABILITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Weems (2023) examines questions that appear in front of the text as a biblical hermeneutic method that asks questions in front of the text. Weems suggests that this interpretative method considers questions that can be gleaned from the text and what the text means for the present context. This demonstrates bridging the gap between what a text originally meant and what its function is for a reading community today (Carvalho, 2009). There are six principled characteristics gleaned from Romans 16:1–16 that shape supportive context applicable to women in leadership in the twenty-first century. The characteristics detailed in the preceding sections include exemplar, mutuality, resilience, sisterhood, trailblazer, and community-builder.



## 10.10 WOMEN LEADERS AS EXEMPLARS

Buoyed by the Shirley Chisolm effect, of *unbought and unbossed*, women in leadership in the twenty-first century exemplify the importance of genuine and diverse leadership representation. The woman-leader exemplar within modern culture opposes unjust rules or standards which lessen women in society (Cannon, 1988). The exemplar's heart is going for the love of neighbor and interrelation with the community (Guy, 2004; Rousseau, 1994). It requires a lived experience that moves among an unfamiliar culture despite one's fear and reluctance to embrace the hardship of the compelling call (Kolodiejchuk, 2007). The scholarly ground is fertile for the exploration of Phoebe as an exemplar to consider as a reflection of and for women in leadership within the twenty-first century. Lastly, exemplar is the core component of a leader's role in creating, defining, and embodying clear structures and processes for everyone around to know what is next, with agility and contribution (Owens-Parker, 2022).

Characteristic One: Women as exemplars working towards positions with voices that are heard and respected in the twenty-first century.

## 10.11 WOMEN LEADERS WORKING TOWARDS MUTUALITY

There is an old African proverb that states if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together. Going together implies the work and support of two, mutually equal, and together heading towards the same goal. It is a demonstration of partnership not based on equality of gifts but on a relationship of mutuality inclusive of trust. Paul's introduction and greetings of ten women throughout Romans 16 implies a model of leadership mutuality within the community of Roman Christian leaders (Mathew, 2013). Recent studies suggest that women in leading roles are more likely to assume risk in promoting equality and empowering and assist others in improving quality of life (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). The aspect of mutuality creates a network of relationships needed to reach the masses and provide opportunities in their respective spheres of influence (Lane, 2021). Mutuality serves as a shared responsibility in the role of leadership for leaders who are dedicated to action and involvement (Packard & Hope, 2015). Mutuality is practiced in communities where

people come together around mutual engagement for a common purpose, and where practices emerge for joint activity and maximum affirmation.

Characteristic Two: The aspect of mutuality for women in leadership creates a network of relationships and provide opportunities within respective spheres of influence.

## 10.12 WOMEN LEADERS AS MODELS OF RESILIENCE

Respectability nurtured through maturity and wisdom is necessary within any leadership role or discipline. Historically, women in leading roles had to be mindful of the social norms, polite behavior, and femininity in order to gain respectability within their position of influence (Twigg & Bernstein, 2016). Resilience is the cornerstone in navigating external and internal biases that have typified barriers imposed on women in leadership or women pursuing leadership. Resilience is a form of measuring that fortifies respectability. Resilience invokes seriousness in consideration when looking beyond social norms and processes in order to understand the rigor of perseverance. The relative success of women leading in moments of crisis is a result of competencies such as initiative and agility built on resiliency in extreme moments of challenge and decisive hardships (Boorstin, 2022). As more roles for women in leadership become the norm over the exceptional, it becomes needful for women to maintain a spirit of moral consciousness and resilience in order to respond to adversity in ways that protect the fabric of the organization and identity (Elkington & Breen, 2015). For as often as women leaders are exposed to a greater level of consciousness, their paradigm of leadership style will evolve, shift, and grow (Elkington & Breen, 2015).

Characteristic Three: The success of women leading in moments of challenge and difficulties is a result of competencies such as initiative and agility built on resiliency.

## 10.13 WOMEN LEADERS AS TRAILBLAZERS

An aspect of leadership is charting unknown paths, creating novel approaches, appropriating what can be included, and determining what to discard while moving forward (Owens-Parker, 2022). This is trailblazing

at its core. Foremothers such as the *sisters of the spirit*, Lee, Elaw, and Foote during the nineteenth century extenuated the character of trailblazer at a time when conformity to the politer standards of societal norm conflicted with extraordinary female experiences (Andrews, 1986). Shaping woman leadership includes reviewing attributes and characteristics in which women leaders engage and exert influence within groups; this is key in illustrating the unique contemporary leadership opportunity for twenty-first-century women. Historically, trailblazing by breaking the glass ceiling for women in emerging fields was an honorable factor that buffered against experiences of isolation, disruptive behavior from male colleagues, or memories of being professionally discounted (Newman & McGinn, 2012). The future of women leadership will require women to trailblaze through doors, which in turn creates space for soul work, affirmation of creativity, and advocate for opportunities for all (Owens-Parker, 2022).

Characteristic Four: Women will trailblaze a path that creates novel approaches through open and unopen doors while creating spaces for opportunities in emerging fields of leadership.

## 10.14 SISTERHOOD

A takeaway from Romans 16:1–16 is that women impact other women in leadership. The connection to and with each other is what is witnessed with the women in Rome. Research studies suggest that perceived leader characteristics affect perceptions of leadership potential and often women are expected to enhance their self-awareness in or adopt communal behavior strategically used within the organization (Schock et al., 2019). However, the sisterhood aspect challenges perceptions of expectation. Instead, it supports that women in leadership are likely to provide a nurturing space for and with other women to succeed because of the direct effects that women in leadership project in their spheres of influence (Arvate et al., 2018). Women leaders forge alliance as they strive to make a difference (Sims, 2022). The ability of women leaders to outperform their male colleagues when negotiating the behavior of others ties to the value of microenvironments (Boorstin, 2022).

Characteristic Five: Women will embody communal relationship in their leadership style and will forge alliances that will impact other women in leadership roles.

## 10.15 COMMUNITY-BUILDING

Leadership in and with a community is a prescriptive element that presses boundaries of humanity (Townes, 2011). An organizational principle throughout the Roman epistle is the notion of unity and working together within a community. Just as the first-century church, the concept of community starting within homeplace is relevant within the twenty-first century where we find women performing their community building leadership tasks from homebase. The inside of houses was the main domain for women, where all that truly mattered in life took place—shelter, the feeding of bodies, and the nurturing of souls. The homeplace was the center where integrity of being, dignity, and faith was learned and where community building began (hooks, 1994).

Homeplace also represents a perspective of dignity of humanity towards your neighbor in community through accessibility. Access to people, places, and things has traditionally been a barrier that precluded women from advancement within traditionally male-dominant leading roles. Access within a community increases the ability to influence others. A contributory factor to barriers of societal past has been organizational structures and support to male-dominant experiences (Bailyn, 2006). However, traditional communalism counters societal barriers because it supports the whole community by bringing, doing, and being to someone when in need. Women in leadership should understand the need for balance in the preservation of community. As demonstrated by Ella Josephine Baker, the architect of the Civil Rights Movement, a trifold sense of human dignity, pragmatism of community value and material well-being for all, is a model for community building work, consistent with the principle of homeplace as center.

Characteristic Six: A trifold understanding of human dignity, pragmatism of community value and material well-being for all, is a community building model for women in the twenty-first century.

## 10.16 CONCLUSION

Historical interest in leaders, leadership styles, and effective leadership processes have dominated the discipline and study of leadership. Traditional scholarly models of leadership have been predominately male-centered. Among its traditional facades, women have been related to the margins of leadership. Despite the substantial body of leadership research, the notion of women leadership as theory remains a phenomenon that requires further investigation, deeper research, and diverse lens that help shape an all-encompassing expression of leadership (Henson, 2020) and contributes to exploring leadership in a contemporary organizational context. Leadership involves a process of social observations that can emerge from individual prototypes and contextual elements that in the case of organizational leadership can shape context towards women in leadership (Lord et al., 2001). Women have always been multifaceted serving in roles across the septum of human experience. Going forward into the twenty-first century, it will be imperative to unearth what is being said about women (Cannon, 1985) as *a way* to critique the academic discipline and professional design of leadership.

The references to women in Romans 16 bring into the discourse the prevalence of women in leadership in the early church. This chapter identified six principled characteristics from the text that shape supportive context applicable to women in leadership in the twenty-first century. Books in areas of women's development are tremendous, but research and analysis will better assess women in leadership in the twenty-first century. Examining leadership for women in the twenty-first century through the lens of Romans 16 presents an artistic view that leaders are fallible. How leaders manage through discipline, study, and obedience considers the revelation of God's will and grace of leadership for all humankind. After all, if three years can grant a leader such as Paul the time to contour opinions of women's contributions after seeing numerous women leaders working for the good of all, so can modern research focusing on women in leadership (Table 10.1).

**Table 10.1** Characteristics applicable for women in leadership in the twenty-first century

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Characteristics for women in leadership in the twenty-first century include:</i>
Exemplar	Women as exemplars working towards positions with voices that are heard and respected in the twenty-first century
Mutuality	The aspect of mutuality for women in leadership creates a network of relationships and provides opportunities within respective spheres of influence
Resilience	The success of women leading in moments of challenge and difficulties is a result of competencies such as initiative and agility built on resiliency
Trailblazer	Women will trailblaze a path that creates novel approaches through open and unopen doors while creating spaces for opportunities in emerging fields of leadership
Sisterhood	Women will embody communal relationship in their leadership style and will forge alliances that will impact other women in leadership roles
Community Building	A trifold understanding of human dignity, pragmatism of community value, and material well-being for all of humanity

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# Where Are Women Today in Leadership

*Steve Firestone, Doris Gomez, and Kathleen Patterson*

## 11.1 INTRODUCTION

Women throughout history have struggled and excelled at the same time, they have risen up and through the ranks and simultaneously slid back down, women have proven themselves to be resilient, formidable, capable, and even amazing leaders along the way. And while the narrative of women in leadership and business is still being written, there is great hope that the foundations from which we came will forge the path forward. This chapter lays a foundation by looking at some of the great women in history, some of the challenges women faced and continue to face, and as this chapter unfolds, we hope it provides clarity on the realities

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for women in leadership and business today. The path forward is illuminated by looking at the past—our collective history, as well as seeking to understand the current realities—a present snapshot, we hope this understanding deepens and provides a glimmer of hope to show us all the way.

## 11.2 THE HISTORY OF WOMEN AS LEADERS

Women have, no doubt, served as important leaders since the beginning of time. This is clearly demonstrated by the numerous accounts of influential women leaders we find in the Bible and other historical documents. Women's leadership history mirrors that of men in some respects, but there is a great deal of difference when we compare the history of men as leaders and that of women. Several researchers are reticent to use the term "women leaders." Klenke went as far to say she avoided this term because it "implies that women in leadership roles are women first and leaders second. The 'women leader' combination still represents an exception that is distinguished from leaders in general" (Klenke, 1996, p. xi).

There is no disputing that history shows that women were kept out of many leadership positions by society, in general, and by men, specifically. Many of the examples we see in history of great women leaders are examples of women who led in spite of the circumstances and obstacles placed in front of them. Women have been, due to social, cultural, and political constructs and constraints, expected to serve in a position as a woman first and anything else second. This has caused women to be excluded from much of the historical writings on leaders and from almost all of the discussion of leadership theory. There are some researchers who, given this argument, want to remind us that throughout history women led in different ways (Rhode, 2016). On this point, Klenke (1996) wrote:

Women leaders have led (or led on) many great men acting as illustrious wives or notorious mistresses, courtesans, and concubines. Women accorded a leadership role in history often illustrated the statement made by the German poet Schiller who said that beside every great man, we can expect to find a beloved woman. (p. 28)

This reiterates that a discussion of women leaders or women in leadership needs to account for a variety of factors that many times are glossed over by historians. While women leaders today may have an easier time

serving in roles like their male counterparts, we should not neglect the valuable contributions they made in leadership roles in previous eras nor the challenges they still face.

Many leadership researchers have come up with different definitions of leadership. Here is a sampling of what researchers have written about what leadership is:

the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal achievement. (Rauch & Behling, 1984, p. 46)

about articulating visions, embodying values, and creating the environment within which things can be accomplished. (Richards & Engle, 1986, p. 206)

the ability to step outside the culture...to start evolutionary change processes that are more adaptive. (Schein, 1992, p. 2)

a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. (Northouse, 2022, p. 5)

These definitions are presented to demonstrate that leadership applies equally to women as it does to men since in these basic definitions there cannot be seen a distinction between the two, but we need to be cognizant of the history of women in leadership and of their treatment by researchers. While there are hundreds of definitions of leadership that could be included here, Klenke (1996) reminds us that, “Historically, however, leadership has been narrowly studied and interpreted through the lenses of great men cast as political actors” (p. 18). Instead of being focused on narrowing down the definition of leadership to one sentence, we should work to understand that there are numerous variables that affect this definition and that, as we see when we study leadership theory history, there will be a shift in what we view as the key tenants of leadership theory, and by association the definition, as it evolves over time.

This section on women’s leadership history will concentrate on leaders of the last 150 years, though it must be stated there were transformative, effective, and contributory women leaders well before this time. Leaders such as Joan of Arc, a religious and military leader, and Catherine the Great, who built Russia into a large centralized nation, are just two such examples. There are many more women historical figures who could be included, but for our purposes, we will concentrate on those women

who led since the creation of the leadership theory, which began roughly around the time of the industrial revolution.

In addition to a discussion of biblical examples of female leaders and a discussion of women who paved the way for future leaders, several modern era leaders will be presented to show how there were differences in the leadership experiences for women. There are some historians and leadership scholars who may argue that instead of discussing the history of women leaders we should talk about all leaders and include how women fit into this history. There certainly is value in discussing the history of leadership in this way, but it is also very important to key in on certain categories of leaders and so we can better understand issues that they had to overcome and how they were able to use their differences to lead more effectively.

### 11.3 BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF WOMEN LEADERS

The Bible provides with numerous examples of successful women in leadership roles. One of the best-known examples we see is Queen Esther, the Jewish queen who played a vital role in saving her people from genocide by convincing the king that his adviser planned to kill all Jews in the Kingdom. Esther took it upon herself to inform the king of this plan at much risk to her life (Esther 4:8). Another example we see comes from the Old Testament. The story of Miriam is one of a woman caring for those around her while also being brave in her leadership role. Miriam was the older sister of Moses and Aaron and, in addition to watching over Moses as he lay in a basket on the banks of the Nile, she also played a major role in the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Miriam is an excellent example of a woman who led with compassion and precision but was also not afraid to bring “truth to power” with bravery that one must have to tell a leader news that may not be well received (Exodus 15:20, Williams, 2019).

Arguably the best example of a woman who was entrusted to serve as a leader by the highest authority was Mary Magdalen. In the New Testament, we see Mary Magdalen as one of Jesus’ first followers and also the first to see when Jesus had risen. More importantly, it was Mary Magdalene who was given the task of spreading the word of His resurrection. In John 20:16–18 it is we see, “Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Robboni!’ (which means ‘Teacher’). Jesus said, ‘Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.

Go instead to my brothers and tell them.” These are just three examples of women leaders from the Bible intended to represent how women did serve as leaders in biblical times, but they did so in a distinctive manner, teaching us many leadership lessons along the way.

## 11.4 WOMEN WHO PAVED THE WAY

Women have had to overcome countless obstacles to obtain equality and rights and to achieve leadership positions in their respective fields. When we look back at history 50 years ago and before there are numerous women who served as trailblazers for women in leadership. Chief among these in the areas of politics, social causes, and in business, were Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Jeannette Rankin, Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Marjorie Merriweather Post.

Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were pioneers in the women’s suffrage movement in the United States. They fought tirelessly for women’s right to vote. They co-founded the National Women’s Suffrage Association and tirelessly campaigned for women’s suffrage for over 50 years. Their leadership and activism paved the way for the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution, granting women the right to vote in 1920 (Klenke, 2017). Jeanette Rankin was the first woman to be elected to the US Congress in 1916. She was a pacifist who opposed both World War I and World War II. She paved the way for future women politicians and proved women could hold their own in the male-dominated field of politics (Rhode, 2016).

Indira Gandhi, the first female Prime Minister of India, served for 15 years and faced numerous challenges ranging from economic crises to political unrest. Her leadership was characterized by her determination to advance India’s interests, specifically in the areas of national security and social justice (Rhode, 2016). Golda Meir, the fourth Prime Minister of Israel, and its first female leader, led her country through one of its most challenging periods. As a staunch defender of Israel’s security and sovereignty, Meir worked tirelessly to strengthen her country’s economy and military capabilities. Her leadership during the 1973 Yom Kippur War was instrumental in securing Israel’s survival (Rhode, 2016).

Eleanor Roosevelt was a key figure in the negotiation and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. She served as the elected chair of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and played a crucial role in ensuring the declaration was adopted by the

United Nations General Counsel. She based her negotiations on her belief in the power of collaboration and consensus building. This was especially difficult during this period just after World War II with many competing factions and different cultures being represented in an uneasy post-war environment (Bejarano et al., 2016). Marjorie Merriweather Post was a businesswoman and philanthropist who inherited the Postum Cereal Company which later became General Foods. She was the first woman to serve as a board member of a Fortune 500 company and the first woman to head a national charity organization, the American Red Cross (Rhode, 2016). These women, along with others unmentioned here, set the foundation for our successes as women leaders of the past 50 years and for those in the future.

### 11.5 MODERN EXAMPLES OF WOMEN LEADERS

Many examples of women in the past 50 years have broken barriers and proven themselves to be great leaders in politics, technology, and business. The best indication of the impact of the “women who paved the way” mentioned in the previous section is that in the last 50 years women as leaders are no longer considered an anomaly or something out of the ordinary. Women such as Angela Merkel, Margaret Thatcher, Carly Fiorina, Sheryl Sandberg, and Mary Barra are seen more as leaders as opposed to “women leaders.” These women stand out by the way they were able to garner support for their careers and for the manner with which they served.

One of the most iconic women leaders of the past 50 years was Margaret Thatcher, the first female British Prime Minister. Known as the Iron Lady, she was a tough and decisive leader who transformed the British economy and played a key role in ending the Cold War (Rhode, 2016). Another prominent political leader is Angela Merkel, the first female Chancellor of Germany. Merkel’s leadership has been marked by her commitment to human rights, democracy, and her ability to navigate numerous complex global challenges. Under her leadership, Germany has emerged as a global economic powerhouse and a major influencer of global political-economic thought (Klenke, 2017).

In the business and technology worlds, women leaders such as Carly Fiorina, Sheryl Sandberg, and Mary Barra have made significant contributions to their respective organizations and industries. Fiorina was the first woman to lead a Fortune 20 company when she became CEO of



Hewlett-Packard. Sandberg, the COO of Facebook, has been an advocate for gender equality in the workplace, and her book “Lean In” has inspired women around the world. Mary Barr, the CEO of General Motors, is the first woman to lead a major global automaker and has inspired her company to make significant strides in innovation and sustainability (Rhode, 2016).

This is just a small sampling of recent women leaders in the political, business, and technology sectors, and yet it shows a few of the current women leaders who were able to build upon the success of the great leaders, both men and women, who went before them. These women leaders will undoubtedly serve as examples for those who follow them.

## 11.6 THE MODERN TIMES

And while we have seen women making strides in leadership roles, our modern times have modern challenges. The glass ceiling, the concrete ceiling, the glass cliff, and the glass slipper—it can be confusing to understand the nuances of women in leadership and business today and yet the conversation must happen as women are still underrepresented in leadership positions. According to Ryan et al. (2007) this is, and remains, disproportionate, while Turban et al. (2017) show gender inequality “remains frustratingly stagnant” and the reason typically given is men and women are different. Specifically men and women act or behave differently—but Turban and colleagues show there is little to no evidence in this assumption, and in fact their study revealed men and women had the same number of contacts with senior leadership, spent time with senior leaders, had access to informal networks, and their actions/behaviors were the same—so why the differences in outcomes became their guiding question. The answer “our analysis suggest that the difference in promotion rates between men and women... was due not to their behavior but to how they were treated” in other words it came down to bias. We all would like to think we are non-biased but keep in mind bias is a subtle thing and we are often not aware of any bias influencing us, be it in small or large ways. Smith et al. (2019) promote objectivity but show “leadership attributions” specifically in performance evaluations are “powerful” as men and women are often described as leaders quite differently.

## 11.7 UNDERREPRESENTATION IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership and business arenas (Soklaridis et al., 2017). The role of women has cycled through many evolutions over the years, decades, and even generations. And while we assume pure motives from most, the reality is that this cycle continues. According to Addison-Lavelle (2016), although larger numbers of women are in the workplace, this has not impacted larger numbers of women being in leadership roles.

The reasons vary as to why women are underrepresented in leadership roles, most commonly noted is gender bias (Soklaridis et al, 2017), gender stereotypes and expectations, and outright prejudice, which can be perceptions of “what women are like” or descriptive prejudice, or “how women should behave” or prescriptive prejudice. These can be seen in the hiring process, the promotion realities, and even in the day to day of workplace cultures. Unfortunately, gender bias, according to Soklaridis and colleagues, can be acknowledged and ignored, or denied altogether. The scarier reality is when it is ingrained so deeply in the “assumptions, values, policies, and practices” that it can be unseen and unknown, leaving women also unseen and unknown.

Today a reality check reveals women and men are engaging the workplace in fairly equal numbers, according to Addison-Lavelle (2016), but there is a vast void of women “at leadership levels” and this remains a “significant issue” for women. And when they achieve these roles, according to Addison-Lavelle, they are often underpaid earning 22% less than men, they experience conflict over their defined roles, and there is an expectation to have more masculine traits while at the same time exhibiting more feminine traits. Leadership scholar Ronald Riggio (2013a) provides the masculine leadership prototype as assertive or agentic and the feminine as more communal or supportive.

Another vast void is the pay gap, which has according to Smith (2023) “hardly budged in 20 years.” Women today are making 82 cents for every 1 dollar men earn, and it is even less for women of color; Smith iterates this is partly due to women having to choose flexibility (mostly due to childcare) and the perceived “backlash” if they ask for better compensation. And while pay inequities exist women still want to lead! And yet there seem to be barriers to doing so. To understand the reality of women in leadership we must also understand the glass ceiling, the glass cliff, and even the concrete ceiling—a reality of the day-to-day life of many women

in leadership roles today. In contrast, others within healthier environments may only experience these challenges minimally.

To understand the past and current state of women it is helpful to know certain terms that find their way into this conversation. The “glass ceiling” (Ryan et al., 2007) is the “invisible barrier” that “prevents women climbing the corporate ladder” while the “glass escalator” (or “glass elevator”) “accelerates men up the organizational hierarchy” quite rapidly. The concrete ceiling is being both a woman and a minority—imagine breaking glass and then only to find concrete.

Then the “glass cliff” is “a relatively subtle barrier that women face, such that they are more likely than men to occupy precarious leadership positions” (Ryan et al, 2007) which increases the potential for failure as the risks are much higher. Addison-Lavelle (2016) adds the glass cliff happens often during corporate crisis or downturn and unfortunately this is when organizational failure is at its highest. Ryan et al. (2007) use the word “danger” when it comes to the glass cliff—as it has negative implications for women in leadership in the organization, for the woman and her career, and in the media and stock market—and the impending spotlight on the woman herself as a poor performer even if was contextual and pre-existing factors. In spite of this the women receive “criticism and blame” often not given to male counterparts in such positions. The irony is women will take these roles in order to have opportunity or a seat at the table.

Hatfield (2002) proposes an interesting view on dilemmas women face, the context is legal but extrapolated widely providing a lens to see forward. First is the contradictory expectations women face, “to pursue conciliatory types of leadership practice and not be too interested in particular types of power” and be caring, and demonstrate “female sensibilities” and to “preserve the values of family life and be instrumental in raising of children”—which as Hatfield iterates are deeply different than the standard views of success measured by “position, power, assertiveness, financial success and ambition.”

This contradiction of success is binding for women. Add to these contradictions the potential to be what Hatfield (2002) calls the token label rather than being respected for their leadership skills has left many with an identity they are left to create beyond the perceived norms of leadership roles. Keep in mind this in addition to the leadership role and all the responsibilities one has. If women are not seen and known as having leadership potential by others there is also the binding of how a woman

may see herself—her own identity. Her own self-perception of who she is as a person and who she is, or may become, as a leader—her leadership identity.

## 11.8 LEADERSHIP IDENTITY REALITIES

Women often do not arrive in the workforce with their own leadership identity and then are not afforded the opportunity to build or foster this identity (Hogue, 2016), and without the leadership identity—women seeing themselves as leaders or with leadership potential—the reality is they will often not pursue leadership roles as options. The lack of leadership identity may be cultural or contextual and this bias may or may not be confirmed in the workplace setting. Hogue provides how “self-concept” plays into the willingness to lead in that one’s “mental representation of one’s understanding of oneself” may determine if a woman actually thinks she has leadership potential. This self-concept can be both an individual perception and a group perception.

The self-identity, how a woman sees herself, can be kind or unkind, and according to Soklaridis et al. (2017)

when a woman ‘fails’ to be promoted, it is easier for her to attribute this failure to other factors, such as lack of grant capture, lower publication records, perceived lack of previous experience, professional discipline, educational achievement, or interpersonal style because she is bound to differ from the norm on at least one of these dimensions. Cognitively, it is easier to blame the self for failures than to attribute them to gender discrimination because of the fundamental beliefs underlying the structure of our organizations.

The power of the lens in which a woman sees herself can determine her viability in the workplace and her overall reach toward a leadership position; in other words how she sees herself and how her leader sees her determines her future. Adding to the complexity of this design, a woman may find herself in a “hostile” environment, which according to Hogue (2016) may have others holding onto their power with even greater velocity. And yet leader identity can be changed with time and intention. Hogue (2016) details that as leadership roles are assumed, and success is watched or viewed, identity can begin to change; while this takes time and intentionality, women see and feel the movement.

The way a person sees themselves can inflate or deflate who they are and their potential. Riggio (2013a) states “some women’s progress toward the top is stalled by their own lack of belief in their abilities and/or their lack of persistence in driving toward top positions”—they just feel it is not worth their efforts. If a woman typecasts herself, or others do, it can make the differential in their doing and being, and ultimately in their potential and leadership identity.

Adding to the leadership identity piece is the perception of what makes a leader—a leader—and the research shows this is typically the masculine traits (Soklaridis et al., 2017), who state women “diverge from the qualities expected of leaders” and that stereotypes have remained the same even with some progression of women in leadership roles. The masculine traits, typically noted as “dominance, intuitiveness, and emotional stability,” are often seen out of the grasp of a woman leader (Soklaridis et al., 2017) even because both men and women can make great leaders or even dismal leaders. If a woman cannot see herself as a leader or in a leadership role, and her leader does not see this nor do her peers, then what?

## 11.9 THE PATH FORWARD

You may notice the path forward is familiar as it is not new or novel, what needs to be new is the impetus to live these out in actuality, for you see the ideal is only possible if committed to and lived out. Only this will forge the path for women in leadership roles whereby women as leaders become the norm, where we do not think or see the label of women in a leadership role—we just see leader. This is consistent with what Soklaridis et al. (2017) indicate in their study where women in senior roles report the rarity of gender bias toward them, rarity in discrimination, and working in gender neutral workplaces, allowing them to move up in leadership, and even more interesting these women worked in women-friendly places, appreciation of professional dominance, and workplaces which took “deliberate action” systematically to give women leadership opportunities.

Taking ownership of one’s own leadership journey seems to be a common theme, not easy but doable. Women report (Soklaridis et al., 2017) “each person must personally manage and overcome the problem through conformity with the status quo” and while this is agreeable it is

adamantly not an easy path specifically in a culture, workforce, or otherwise, where deep values are held which may be non-inducive to women as leaders.

Becoming trained and educated, with the focus on providing an expert or specialist, sharp interpersonal skills, mentor and networking with others, support other women, and engaging the community are all skills Hatfield (2002) advocates—with the focus being on supporting other women. She notes how some women who have “made it” often can forget other women and see themselves as a “Queen Bee” and not see younger women needing to learn or have opportunities provided. This chapter highly advocates reaching back, seeing others, and taking the role of being a door opener for others.

Let us also consider God made women too—and women are needed just as men are needed—women are capable just as men are capable—women can lead just as men can lead—we need one another and we all have a place and function to contribute to one another, to organizational life, and to society. Riggio (2013b) provides some interesting points about why women need to be “in” leadership roles. The first matter advocated is a “greater focus on childcare, healthcare, and education” which women typically are more prone to advocate for. Second, Riggio (2013b) iterates women are more prone to be ethical, and therefore women in leadership might equate to less corruption, workplace bullying, and workplace misbehavior. Riggio goes on to suggest more stability in markets, fewer government shutdowns, and are more peaceful world; while these claims seem idealistic, he is clear to state this is a “starter” for a needed conversation.

## 11.10 THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

While great strides have been made for women in the workforce, historically and globally, we cannot negate the need for more work and advancements to be done. Women and men are both of great value—can lead, can follow, can serve, can contribute, and can transform. While there may always be underlying bias or perceived limitations, let these limitations and biases not reside within us—let us be the very ones who open doors, create and give opportunities, and believe in the women entering into and moving up in the ranks of leadership and business. We hold great power in the words we speak over the lives of others, let these words be

affirming, encouraging, and uplifting, as we may be the ones to see leadership in someone who cannot see it inside of themselves. And just as Mordecai told Esther (Chapter 4) we may just be living in such a time as this.

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# Female Leadership in Intercultural Contexts

*Cassi Sherley Krei*

## 12.1 INTRODUCTION

Women who serve in intercultural leadership roles encounter a multitude of complex issues that create potential barriers to effective gospel-centered leadership. Factors that influence these issues are globalization, conflicting cultural frameworks, expectations around gender norms, and others. Therefore, identifying, accessing, and utilizing creative bridges to address the intricacies of intercultural leadership is key to the success of any woman wanting to have a global impact.

Globalization has led to increased complexity—defined by lack of predictability, interdependence, ambiguity, and change—and increased demand for qualified global leaders who function successfully in traditional leadership roles and also possess the added “secret sauce” of global leadership-specific competencies (Lane et al., 2004; Mendenhall et al., 2018). The intersection of multiple cultures (national, organizational, religious, or other) brings differing social and leadership expectations, gender stereotypes, and behavior norms that produce profound challenges

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for leaders to navigate (Lederleitner, 2018; Lingenfelter, 2008; Tannen, 2013). A global leader's gender plays a significant role in how followers conceptualize key leadership traits and their subsequent expectations for leaders (Domina, 2009). Therefore, learning to understand the intersection of cultural leadership norms and how gender impacts follower expectations is key for a global leader's strategic effectiveness, particularly if they are female. Leadership expectations due to gender stereotypes can vary from culture to culture, but the commonalities among culture groups can provide helpful insight for effective communication (Domina, 2009; Mendenhall et al., 2018; Tannen, 2013).

The context in which a woman leads is also an important factor in the process of her leadership, shaping the expectations and outcomes of leadership, as Klenke (2018) notes, "change the context and leadership changes." For the intercultural leader, building contextual intelligence is key to navigating the complexity, ambiguity, and flux of global leadership. Stories provided by female leaders serving in intercultural contexts provide helpful insights that can help maneuver through cultural and religious stereotypes to meaningful application.

Examining intercultural leadership through a biblical, Christ-centered lens can offer a hope-filled path to effective ministry, whether in a business, nonprofit, or ecclesiastic setting. Lingenfelter (2008) argues that "all Christian leaders, regardless of their cultural background, carry their personal histories and cultural biases with them wherever they serve. [The inability to] see how their histories and culture shape their ministries [blinds] them to the unintended consequences" (15). Overcoming these challenges requires embracing Kingdom values, creating trusting teams, continual awareness and learning, exemplifying trustworthy leadership, and empowering others (Lingenfelter, 2008). The goal of this chapter is to explore the concept of female intercultural leadership, the challenges women face in the pursuit of effective leadership, and the bridges that can lead to meaningful global impact.

## 12.2 THE NEED FOR GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

Globalization and the advent of multinational organizations, interconnected societies, and interdependent economies have created the need for new skill sets among leaders in the twenty-first century. "The term *global* encompasses more than simple *geographic* reach in terms of business [or ministry] operations. It also includes the notion of *cultural reach* in terms

of people and *intellectual reach* in the development of a global mindset” (Osland et al., 2006).

Multi-national organizations that can successfully navigate the complexities of globalization and the impact of various cultures on the organizational leadership, structure, and direction are the ones that can fully benefit from the fruits of globalization (Domina, 2009). Effective global leadership is key in an organization’s success or failure in multinational and intercultural contexts, a concept that Mendenhall et al. (2018) argue must be understood distinctly from notions of traditional leadership. The authors offer a distinct definition for the global leader that goes beyond the competencies required for traditional leadership to something distinctly more and different:

*Global leadership is defined as the processes and actions through which an individual influences a range of internal and external constituents from multiple national cultures and jurisdictions in a context characterized by significant levels of task and relational complexity* (Mendenhall et al., 2018).

Global leadership is characterized by increased complexity, shown in four different aspects (Lane et al., 2004):

1. Multiplicity: With globalization, the models for organizing and conducting business exponentially increase, creating a plethora of variations in the competition an organization faces. Additionally, “executives deal with more organizations, governments, and people [...] many of these entities are also different from the executive’s own organization, government, and people, and from each other as well. [It] is not just about ‘more’; it’s about ‘more and different’” (9, emphasis added). The multiplicity effect can be seen in the varied types of competition, customers, values, governments, and stakeholders that an organization must contend with on a global scale.
2. Interdependence: With the fast and easy movement of capital, information, and people, relative isolation has been replaced with growing interdependence that can be seen in global economies, supply chains, and organizational alliances. Organizations “are finding that they must enter into interdependent arrangements through outsourcing, alliances, and network arrangements related

to their value chains in order to stay price-competitive or continue to create value” (12).

3. Ambiguity: With the presence of multiple cultures and ways of perceiving, the conditions for ambiguity rise. Although there may be plenty of information, the ability to accurately interpret the meaning or implications of the information is more difficult. “Situations intentions, corporate actions, and individual behaviors can be interpreted in many different ways, and implications for action are confusing” (14). Ambiguity displays itself in three ways: lack of information clarity, cause-effect relationships, and equivocality (the potential of multiple interpretations).

These aspects of complexity combine to be what the authors call “dynamic complexity”; each of the individual concepts contributes to exponential increases in the other concepts on an ever-increasing scale.

Subsystems are interconnected in such a way that cause and effect are no longer easy to determine. The effect of multiplicity is a greater issue because it is accompanied by an increase in interdependence. The increase in interdependence and multiplicity leads to more ambiguity. Ambiguity makes understanding multiplicity difficult. And so on. (Lane et al., 2004)

4. Flux: Adding to the nature of dynamic complexity is the notion that “the whole system is always in motion, always changing. And it seems to be changing faster all the time” (17). Flux functions as the “ever changing meta-context” in which the dynamic complexity takes place. It is a non-linear, ongoing shift “in terms of system dynamics, values, organizational structure, industry trends, and socio-political stability” (Mendenhall et al., 2018).

Despite such high levels of complexity and change, global leaders must “build strategic diplomatic, talent across cultural and political boundaries, as well as coalitions that span multiple cultural and organizational boundaries, ultimately creating a shared vision toward an organizational outcome” (Klenke, 2018). In order to meet these challenges, female cross-cultural leaders must also have a firm grasp of cultural frameworks, leadership expectations, and gendered social dynamics.

### 12.3 THE IMPACT OF CULTURE

Living and working in the complexities of an intercultural context and experiencing the intensity of cultural differences of perception and social expectations produce “powerful transformational or crucible experiences” that shape changes in a leader’s worldview, mindset, perceptions, and perspectives; these changes would “simply not exist within people who have not gone through such a set of experiences in a global context” (Mendenhall et al., 2008). These changes result from necessity due to a leader’s need to make sense of multiple competing viewpoints and value systems. A complex and multi-dimensional concept, culture has been studied extensively, and definitions abound. In its broadest sense, culture is the collective way that humans make meaning in the world (Crouch, 2008). In the context of national cultures and intercultural leadership, Hofstede (2011) defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others,” which includes notions of the symbols, behaviors, value system, beliefs, and worldview that form the “lens” through which a person interprets and makes meaning of the world around them.

Eugene Bunkowske (2011) breaks down culture into several layers and illustrates this cultural framework through what he aptly terms the “Cultural Onion.” These layers illuminate collective questions about the nature of the world around us such as what is true, what is enjoyable, and what is real. Culture goes much deeper than behaviors and observations to the most subconscious parts of the human psyche.

National culture impacts all levels of human functioning and is a “pervasive unconscious influence” that shapes an individual’s interpretation of their reality, both internal and external (Domina, 2009). Several prominent studies have been done to examine how national cultures differ and offer frameworks for understanding cross-cultural differences. Hofstede’s research (1980, 2001, 2011) among 88,000 employees of IBM in 66 countries has proven foundational to understanding the various dimensions of culture. Widely studied and replicated over the years, the initial four dimensions (1980) have been expanded by Hofstede to the following six cultural dimensions:

- Power Distance is related to the various issues and solutions surrounding human inequality. Members of high-power distance cultures see inequality as a normal part of life and usually have a high

value for hierarchy while low power distance cultures value equality and more horizontal leadership structures.

- Uncertainty Avoidance connects to the level of stress a society deals when facing an unknown future. Groups with high uncertainty avoidance place a priority on stability and feel more threatened by unstructured situations. Low uncertainty avoidance signifies the toleration of higher degrees of chaos and lack of structure in daily life.
- Individualism versus Collectivism impacts how individuals are integrated/relate to the primary group. Individualism, according to Domina (2009) refers to one's preference for defining their own identity through personal choices as opposed to collectivism which emphasizes group-oriented identity and decision making. Hofstede (2011) notes that the spectrums of individualism and collectivism within culture are "strongly correlated to national wealth" leading to the belief that wealth leads to a heightened sense of individualism.
- Masculinity versus Femininity relates to the division of emotional roles between genders. The extent which a culture is considered more "masculine" or "feminine" is determined by the degree to which they emphasize concepts like competition, power and success, stereotyped "masculine" values, over those like service, interpersonal harmony, and quality of life, stereotyped "feminine" values (Domina, 2009).
- Long Term versus Short Term examines how people focus their efforts, whether to the future or present and past. Cultures with high short-term orientation place most value on life events taking place now or in the past, traditions are revered, and there are universal guidelines about what is good and evil. Cultures high on the long-term end of the spectrum are future oriented. Higher value is placed on future life events, traditions are malleable, and good and evil are circumstantial (Hofstede, 2011).
- Indulgence versus Restraint is the degree to which members will choose to gratify or control human desires related to enjoying life. This dimension is the newest added to Hofstede's model (2011) and is based on happiness research around the globe. High indulgence cultures allow for "relatively free gratification" of human desires related to how they enjoy life while higher restraint cultures control the gratification of those desires through "strict social norms." Hofstede (2011) notes that North and South Americans, Western

Europe, and parts of sub-Saharan Africa are higher on the indulgence spectrum while “restraint prevails” in Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Muslim world.

While Hofstede’s initial research has received criticism for focusing solely on one multinational corporation (Domina, 2009), the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior research (GLOBE) investigated data from 17,000 managers from 951 organization in 62 different countries over 10 years (House et al., 2004). The researchers examined how “nine dimensions of culturally implicit leadership theories (CLTs) are viewed across cultures” in terms of what “should be” (Domina, 2009). Table 12.1 shows the dimensions or “cultural constructs” that were investigated by the GLOBE researchers and corresponding questionnaire item (House et al., 2004).

National, organizational, and religious culture significantly impacts a global leader’s ability to assess their leadership context and effectively influence their followers toward mutual and organizational goals. Lingenfelter (2008) asserts, “the complexity of leading cross-culturally lies in the challenge of building a community of trust among people who come from two or more cultural traditions that provoke a clash of worldviews.” While referencing a cross-cultural clash of worldviews alludes to national cultures where concepts like language, race, geography, and shared history create distinctions among people groups, other cultural frameworks also strongly influence leaders and followers. Klenke (2018) notes, “Culture is a complex and multifaceted construct which may include leadership culture, business culture, national culture and world culture.” Cultural distinctions of religion, race, gender, and family also play a part in creating diverse interactions of increasing complexity along the different levels of an organization.

The notion of “personal default culture” (the unique cultural patterns and biases that people learn from their parents and peers from birth) becomes applicable when groups of two or more traditions are attempting to work together (Lingenfelter, 2008). Personal cultures bring with them varying values, expectations, and social biases of the larger culture(s) to which the person belongs, which then informs how they understand social roles and process behavioral cues. Lingenfelter (2008) argues, “Although every person can employ new values social roles and forms of communication, when people find themselves in a crisis situation, they ordinarily default to the values, roles and ways of organizing things that they learned

**Table 12.1** The GLOBE study

<i>Cultural construct definitions</i>	<i>Sample questionnaire item</i>
<i>Power Distance</i> : The degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally	Followers are (should be) expected to obey their leaders without question
<i>Uncertainty Avoidance</i> : The extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate predictability of future events	Most people lead (should lead) highly structured lived with few unexpected events
<i>Humane Orientation</i> : The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring, and kind to others	People are generally (should be generally) very tolerant of mistakes
<i>Collectivism I (Institutional Collectivism)</i> : The degree to which organizational and societal practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action	Leaders encourage (should encourage) group loyalty even if individual goals suffer
<i>Collectivism II (In-Group Collectivism)</i> : The degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations and families	Employees feel (should feel) great loyalty toward their organization
<i>Assertiveness</i> : The degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in their relationships with others	People are (should be) generally dominant in their relationships with one another
<i>Gender Egalitarianism</i> : The degree to which a collective minimizes gender inequality	Boys are encouraged (should be encouraged) more than girls to attain a higher education
<i>Future Orientation</i> : The extent to which individuals engage in future-oriented behaviors such as delaying gratification, planning, and investing in the future	More people live (should live) for the present rather than for the future (Scored inversely)
<i>Performance Orientation</i> : The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence	Students are encouraged (should be encouraged) to strive for continuously improved performance

House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., & Gupta, V. (Eds.). (2004). *Culture Leadership and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

growing up” (71–72). When an intercultural group experiences conflict, confusion and misunderstandings arise due to subconscious “defaults” found in the deeper layers of a person’s individual cultural framework.



These mismatches in worldview, values, and belief systems can leave leadership floundering to understand the true nature of an issue and respond contextually.

### Leading Multi-Cultural Teams

Rose<sup>1</sup> founded a small e-commerce business from her home in 2020. Over the last few years, she has built a small team of talented designers, customer support representatives, and managers that she hopes to scale as the company grows. The tricky part? Her team is located all over the world. By leveraging her small budget with growing globalization in the tech and design spaces, Rose can provide work to people in developing nations at fair rates while growing her business. In addition to project deadlines and product launches, Rose has built close relationships with her team, providing mentorship and support as they navigate often challenging situations in their home countries.

With designers in Lithuania, Finland, Bosnia, the Philippines, Ukraine, and Moldova, and customer support specialists in Kenya, Rose is continually faced with the challenge of evaluating her own leadership and communication styles in relation to the varied needs of her team. Awareness of the cultural frame works of each of her followers is critical. Rose often considers how she might best communicate based on the recipient's background, gender, and culture. Does she need to be direct or indirect? Gain buy-in or give clear orders? Would it be more effective to share the vision again with a struggling team member, or hold them firmly accountable?

Deborah, one of Rose's employees in Kenya and a key part of the customer support team, has been a particular puzzle. Rose would love to see Deborah take more leadership within the team and eventually move into managing the other customer support specialists. Deborah is diligent in her role and excellent with customers. She has expressed interest in taking on more leadership within the company and Rose has been mentoring her in the added responsibilities of a management role. The problem? Every time Rose gives Deborah more weighty responsibilities or asks her to take ownership of a project, Deborah stumbles. She stops communicating, does

not complete assigned projects, and does not prioritize the leadership activities Rose gives her over the day-to-day work of customer support. Deborah says she wants to grow as a leader and step into more responsibility, but her actions do not seem to line up with that desire.

Without a clear understanding of her own default culture or that of her employee, Rose will struggle to find a path through the miscommunication and confusion and toward a vision for Deborah's growth and leadership. Weekly mentoring calls, structured accountability, and increased training opportunities are just some of the ways that Rose has worked to integrate Deborah into a new role and prepare her to take on more responsibility. However, a question remains, is Deborah a good fit for increased leadership in a multicultural team?

## 12.4 THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER

Gender issues bring with them many complications for cross-cultural female leaders. Gender contributes unique aspects to culture and can augment cultural frameworks. Conducting gender-centered research, Klenke (2018) argues, requires an acknowledgment that gender is not simply a facet of being men and women, but brings with it a “complex of perceptual, interactional and micro-political activities that cast particular as expressions of masculine and feminine natures.” Gender and culture are tightly interwoven and coexist in a reciprocal relationship (Klenke, 2018).

The global leader not only confronts differing cultural frameworks around concepts, like power distance and uncertainty avoidance, but also deeply held (often subconscious) beliefs around socially appropriate gender roles, gendered expectations for communication, and whether one gender over another has potential for leadership. Gender stereotypes influence how men and women are expected to communicate, the personalities they are expected to exhibit, and the types of leadership roles they are expected to inhabit (Furst & Reeves, 2008; Klenke, 2018; Tannen, 2013). Lederleitner (2018) notes that “gender significantly affects leadership. Many women's lives are a balancing act of navigating power in

different spheres and roles, and this becomes most noticeable in their leadership trajectories” (24).

#### 12.4.1 *Social Role Theory*

Social role theory is used to explain the ways in which gender stereotypes influence how men and women interact with one another. It forms a foundation for many of the gender conversations within domestic and global leadership studies. At its core, social role theory speculates that women and men behave in socially conscripted ways due to the positive and negative feedback loops around accepted behavior for each gender (Eagly & Steffan, 1984).

The stereotypes of gendered behaviors, personalities, and leadership potential are culturally bound and vary based on the geographic and cultural makeup of a group. In the West, for example, “the leadership role is often colored by a stereotype of a leader as a ‘hero.’ Leaders are expected to be decisive, tough, competent, and action-oriented – the traits that are traditionally associated with male stereotypes” (Domina, 2009). Baily (2006) termed this concept “heroic individualism,” indicating the fascination in western, democratic culture with the “hero” and his journey to self-actualization and destiny.

In contrast to male-centric leadership stereotypes in the West, “the prevailing stereotypes of females portray women as warm, nurturing, and interdependent. Females are said to be more communally oriented, valuing relationships and social connectivity” (Domina, 2009). Women are seen as more participative and relational with some researchers arguing that there is a “female advantage” in organizational settings where inclusive and empowering leadership is valued (Klenke, 2018).

*Agency* and *Communion* are concepts that have long been used to discuss differences in male and female stereotypes (Gerber, 1988). Men are often described with agentic qualities (influential, confident, take-charge, etc.) while women’s descriptions usually fall along communal lines (relationship oriented, accommodating, caring, etc.). In connection to concepts of leadership, “Gerber found that leaders were seen as more agentic and less communal, while followers were seen as more communal and less agentic, [concluding] that implicit views about [the] Leader–follower dichotomy are related to perceived agency and communion” (Domina, 2009, p. 26).

Having a clear view of the cultural environment (context) becomes key in understanding the potential effects of gender stereotypes on female leadership, particularly in intercultural situations. Klenke (2018) makes the argument for context as a moderator for gender differences. Some environments are more favorable (congenial) to female leadership than others:

Eagly and her collaborators (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly et al., 1995) examined gender congeniality in several meta-analytic studies and found that a context is increasingly uncongenial for women leaders if it is male dominated, if the woman is a token or solo, if the task is masculine stereotypic, and if hierarchy and power are stressed over egalitarianism and influence (Klenke, 2018).

Feminine characteristics of leadership are seen to be an advantage to women particularly “where more democratic and participatory styles in contemporary organizations are favored” (Klenke, 2018). Environments that require leaders who communicate openly, encourage collaboration, share burdens with their followers, and demonstrate integrity may favor the emergence of female leaders (Furst & Reeves, 2008). In organizations with less hierarchy and a “flatter” structure, women succeed as “consensus builders, conciliators, and collaborators. They are transformational leaders who are motivational and flexible in their leadership style who transcend their self-interests for the good of the group or organization” (Klenke, 2018).

#### *12.4.2 Strategic Accommodations*

In intercultural contexts where female leadership is not appreciated or encouraged, the cultural conflicts around gender can hinder effective leadership and make it necessary for the female leader to find strategic “work arounds” to achieve organizational objectives. Lederleitner (2018) argues that while some “believe that accommodation should never be made” for unjust or unfair systems, many women find strategic ways through those circumstances for the sake of the overall mission or vision. The author mainly speaks of ministry goals, but the pattern rings true in secular sectors as well:

For some women, if their ministry calling fits within cultural gender norms, they can experience greater consistency as they move between family ministry, church, and societal roles. However, many women around the globe frequently have to make choices about what strategies they will use to as they face obstacles in a variety of settings because of differing expectations about women can or cannot do (Lederleitner, 2018).

### Using Strategy to Communicate Effectively

Joy<sup>1</sup>, a young American missionary on assignment in Guyana, was given a huge responsibility: leading a Bible story transition project about the Warau people in the remote jungle. The Warau were an oral people group with no written language and no Bible to learn and study from. By crafting and translating Bible stories into their native tongue and then recording them, the Warau people would be able to hear God's Word in their heart language for the first time.

In addition to three other American teammates, Joy was also tasked with training a group of young indigenous leaders in Oral Bible Story translation so they could lead similar projects among their own people groups and languages. She diligently set out to accomplish her task, working with the local elders to create a local translation team and set up an area for translation and recording.

Joy quickly ran into communication issues. Not only was translation and back translation difficult, but the local church members did not seem to follow her instructions well or even listen when she spoke. However, if one of the men on her team repeated what she said, the message was heard and responded to. Frustrated but determined, Joy soon began meeting each morning with a few of the male leaders from the team she was training before the work began. She would explain the vision for the day, what needed to happen and what to communicate with the Warau translation team for the day. During group meetings when the translation groups would share their stories, Joy made sure to have a male leader with her for the back translation, ready to give feedback to the groups on her behalf.

The addition of extra people in the chain of communication has created extra steps for Joy and additional complexity to the process of Bible Story Translation, but the vision was worth the extra effort. The translation team quickly responded to Joy's changes, and the project is gaining momentum. However, was Joy's decision to move her voice and leadership to the background the right choice for her intercultural context?

## 12.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

Navigating the unfamiliar gendered expectations of personal and professional leadership within another culture or group can be difficult. Socially engrained communication styles related to gender and gender stereotypes vary culture to culture and it is important for global leaders to learn and adapt in cross-cultural settings. One of the keys to adapting to new cultural expectations is through understanding context:

A leader's mission and purpose her reason for serving as a leader in her family, organization, church, community, sports club, or nation is partly dictated by the demands and constraints of context. At all levels, individual, group, organizational, and societal, leadership is tied to context. It is context that shapes the process of leadership. Therefore, examining women in leadership means analyzing different contexts (Klenke, 2018).

Contextual factors form the boundaries for interactions between leaders and followers and "determine the constraints and demands of the leader-follower dyad" (Klenke, 2018). This means that when the context shifts, the leadership needs also shift. Leading in a political environment is different than a multinational corporation, which is different still from running a small startup or leading within an international nonprofit. Ministry contexts also shift the leadership needs within an organization. "The context of leadership may be private or public, a small or large organization, an affluent or poor community, or a developed or underdeveloped nation, each with its own distinguishing contextual features" (Klenke, 2018).

### 12.5.1 *The Impact of Social Games on Context*

Lingenfelter (2008) stresses the importance of analyzing the “social games assumptions” of multicultural group members to facilitate more effective leadership. Social game assumptions form part of the contextual backdrop of leadership. He argues that leaders often assume that the context or social structure they are most familiar with is best, which becomes a handicap to ministry or business, particularly when teams with more than one social context preference are present. Lingenfelter (2008) argues, “effective cross-cultural leadership cannot happen if we are unwilling to learn about and accept the social game assumptions [context or structure preferences] of our partners” (65).

Citing the work of Mary Douglas, Lingenfelter explains that “all humans societies must make fundamental choices about the degree to which relationships are defined by role and rule (Grid) and the degree to which group interests have priority over interests (Group).” Together, these variables present a possibility of four different social “prototype games” that form the basis for social engagement. Discussing these “games” in the language of specific sports helps to clarify how they function:

- The Bureaucratic Game can be characterized in terms of **Baseball**: each member of the organizational team has specialized roles, individual performance is highlighted, and there is a clear manager who directs the game, “intervening to change pitchers, substitute hitters and manage play” (61).
- The Corporate Game is most closely related to **American Football or Soccer**: team play is much more highly emphasized, the leadership for the game play primarily resides with the best players on the field, and each member has a specialized role.
- The Individualist Game is characterized most like **Golf**: each player plays for themselves, matching their performance against prior success or failure but striving to be the best performer during direct competition with others.
- The Collectivist Game most closely resembles **Volleyball**: while Olympic versions of the game have specialized roles, the “camp” version of the game requires every player to be familiar with every position and rotate through them cyclically, the team wins or loses together, and leadership is egalitarian.

**Table 12.2** Social Games

<p><b>Bureaucratic Game</b> <i>Baseball</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialized Roles</li> <li>• Best Performance Wins</li> <li>• Manager Directs Game</li> </ul>	<p>GRID +</p>	<p><b>Corporate Game</b> <i>American Football and Soccer</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialized Roles</li> <li>• Best Team Play Wins</li> <li>• Best Players Lead</li> </ul>
<p>- GROUP</p>		<p>GROUP +</p>
<p><b>Individual Game</b> <i>Golf</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each Individual for Themselves in Match Play</li> </ul>	<p>- GRID</p>	<p><b>Collectivist Game</b> <i>Volleyball</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everybody Plays Every Position and Rotates</li> </ul>

Table 12.2 depicts “the ‘prototypes’ employed by people around the world as they frame the complexities of social life” (Lingenfelter, 2008).

**Contextual Flexibility in Honduras**

Suyen<sup>1</sup> is a master at adapting to new contexts and working with diverse people groups. When she was 15, she left her home in Honduras and traveled to the US to learn English as part of an exchange program. When she returned home, Suyen soon got involved with her local church, translating for short-term teams that would visit her city on medical mission trips. Over the years, the translating developed into coordinating between US-based teams and Honduran ministries, and then eventually to leading teams into the interior of Honduras to work with Honduras’ indigenous nations. Today, Suyen is the Director of Missions for a US-based mission organization in Honduras where she has the unique privilege of leading among three distinct culture groups: American mission groups from many parts of the US, Honduran pastors and leaders in various parts of the country, and the Tolupan people in the mountains of central Honduras. Leading such diverse teams in varying contexts requires Suyen to be flexible, maintaining an open and contextual mindset.



The US mission's organization, as well as many teams that plan trips, has a flatter, team-like structure with little hierarchy. Suyen works closely with other team members to plan trips, coordinate budgets, and fulfill the vision of the organization. The leadership from the States recognizes Suyen as a vital leader, giving her room to make decisions and lead effectively. Decisions are usually made quickly, but with input from the other team members and the leadership of the US organization.

Honduras, in contrast, has much more hierarchical expectations for leaders. Most pastors Suyen works with are older men who have a touch of the Latin American concept of "Machismo," or masculine-centered ethos. A typical leader would be forceful, decisive, and usually, male. It is difficult for many of these men to recognize the leadership of a younger woman. Decisions often need to be framed as suggestions, and the pastors need to feel a sense of ownership over the decision-making process. Over the years, Suyen has worked hard to gain a voice and be respected among the pastors and churches in her country.

The Tolupan are an oral people group with a communal mindset and more egalitarian roots. Respect is given to the elders of the community, but decisions are made by a team of community representatives chosen by the people. Female leadership within the community is much more normalized and women often sit on the community council. Decisions take time to work through, as consensus is needed, and all viewpoints need to be acknowledged. Suyen has learned the importance of taking time to sit with leaders, getting to know their concerns and needs.

Having a clear understanding of the various contexts of her leadership allows Suyen to move fluidly between the three groups and lead effectively when all groups come together to achieve common goals, whether it is an educational project distributing school supplies, medical teams offering free clinics, or ministry teams sharing the gospel at community events.

How would an understanding of the social game preferences of the different team members help Suyen navigate team dynamics and help the members better understand each other?

## 12.6 BRIDGES TO INTERCULTURAL LEADERSHIP: MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

The combined challenges of globalization, competing cultural frameworks, gender complexities, and contextual concerns create many potential barriers to effect leadership; however, there are also many helpful bridges that provide nuanced answers to complex issues and hope for meaningful impact. An area of global leadership research that may provide one (or several) such bridges is the study of contextual, cultural, and emotional intelligence.

### 12.6.1 *Contextual Intelligence*

A leader learns to master new contexts by seizing opportunities for action and by developing contextual intelligence. Kutz (2008) argues that contextual intelligence is a valuable leadership competency that allows a leader to leverage their past experiences and knowledge to accurately diagnose their current context and then “exert influence in crafting a desirable future.” This requires the contextually intelligent leader to raise their awareness of others around them and the personal default cultures at work among their followers, also referred to as the “proverbial baggage people bring to the table” (Kutz, 2008).

Practicing contextual intelligence requires a shift in a leader’s mental framework that leads to new ways of perceiving and behaving. Kutz (2017) argues for a three-tiered model of contextual intelligence; the first tier has three components, *Reframing Experiences*, *Leveraging Learning*, and *Embracing Complexity*, which flow into and directly impact the second, which utilizes *3D Thinking* or perception. With this layer, the leader simultaneously employs *Hindsight* (knowing past experiences), *Insight* (being aware of the present moment), and *Foresight* (able to articulate a plan). The third tier of the model displays the twelve behaviors associated with contextually intelligent leaders. These components of mindset, perception, and behavior are shown in Table 12.3.

Contextual intelligence allows a global leader to approach situations from a holistic perspective, taking into consideration the context itself, the leader’s past experiences and knowledge base, and the mindset and behaviors required to meet complexity with curiosity.

**Table 12.3** Contextual Intelligence

<i>Mental Models of Contextual Intelligence</i>		
<i>Embracing Complexity</i> with an appreciation for nuance  ↓	<i>Reframing Experience</i> by understanding synchronicity and connection  ↓	<i>Leveraging Learning</i> and the influence of tacit knowledge  ↓
<i>Dimensions of 3D Thinking</i>		
<i>Foresight</i> the ability to articulate a realistic plan for an ideal future  ↓	<i>Hindsight:</i> the ability to use past experiences to their full advantage  ↓	<i>Insight:</i> the ability to understand what influences the present moment  ↓
<i>Contextual Intelligence Behaviors</i>		
Intentional Leadership Future Minded Change Agent Diagnoses Context	Constructive Use of Influence Influencer Critical Thinker Consensus Builder	Mission Minded Embraces Diverse Ideas Communitarian Multicultural Leadership

### 12.6.2 Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence addresses the question of what types of leaders succeed in intercultural situations when other do not. The concept of cultural intelligence is attributed to the work of David Livermore (2015) and his “desire to go beyond the existing notions of cultural sensitivity and awareness to identify the recurring characteristic of individuals who can successfully and respectfully accomplish their objectives, whatever the cultural context” (26). Livermore studied more than 40,000 individuals “across every major region in the world” and based his research off the study of other intelligence types including academic intelligence (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EQ). Cultural intelligence (CQ) gives precedence to the types of interpersonal skills needed to succeed in complex, culturally diverse environments. Livermore (2015) argues for four key capabilities of culturally intelligent leadership:

1. CQ Drive: the interest, drive, and confidence to adapt in multi-cultural situations. This capability gets at what a leader feels in

relation to intercultural interactions and is strongly aided by the development of curiosity. There are three subcomponents that play into the motivation a leader feels when approaching a cross-cultural situation:

- a. Intrinsic Interest—“the degree to which [the leader] derives enjoyment from culturally diverse situations.”
  - b. Extrinsic Interest—“the tangible benefits gain[ed] from culturally diverse experiences.”
  - c. Self-Efficacy—“the confidence you will be effective in a cross-cultural encounter.”
2. CQ Knowledge: the understanding about how cultures are similar and different. This capability is about what a leader understands about the cultures they are interacting with and is accomplished in two ways, through *general culture understanding* (knowing the macro-level ideas about how culture functions, and the types of norms and values associated with it) and *specific culture understanding* (knowing the particulars of the specific culture a leader is working in).
  3. CQ Strategy: the awareness and ability to plan for multicultural interactions. Livermore (2015) argues that this is the “metacognitive CQ” and asks the question, “Can you slow down long enough to carefully observe what is going on inside your mind and the minds of others?” (30). CQ Strategy is the application of a leader’s knowledge and their plan of who to handle a given intercultural situation. Utilizing “If-Then” strategies can help build this CQ Muscle and utilizes dimensions of planning, awareness, and checking to prepare in advance, analyze during, and review after an intercultural encounter.
  4. CQ Action: the ability to adapt when relating and working interculturally. This capability is not just the knowledge of what to do in each intercultural situation but also what not to do. It is about knowing when to adapt authentically and when not to. “CQ Action involves flexible actions tailored to specific cultural contexts” and includes both verbal communication and nonverbal communication (Livermore, 2015, p. 30).

### 12.6.3 *Emotional Intelligence*

Holt (2015) describes the study of emotional intelligence in the global leadership space as a natural continuation of “the aspiration to enhance the effectiveness” of leaders in the global arena and the “imperative to respect the host countries’ cultures.” Employing emotionally intelligent leaders—who can understand and manage emotions in themselves and others toward “desired organizational goals”—has become increasingly important. The importance of emotional intelligent leadership was first highlighted by Daniel Goleman (1995) and his work has been central to the discussion since then. The framework for emotional intelligence builds on the degrees to which leaders are aware of and can regulate their emotions and those of the larger group; it is elucidated in four dimensions.

- Self-Awareness is the result of emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence.
- Self-Management displays itself in self-control, transparency, adaptability, a drive for achievement and initiative.
- Social Awareness looks like empathy, organizational awareness, and service orientation in leaders.
- Relationship Management combines the prior three dimensions into a leader who inspires and develops others, has influence, is a catalyst for change, manages conflict well, builds bonds with followers, and collaborates with teammates.

Holt (2015) acknowledges that there is a “growing recognition of the importance of multiple intelligences required for successful global leadership, [and] emotional intelligence is one of the most recent additions to the list.” Emotional intelligence has been shown to increase group and team performance, with the “team leader EQ significantly related to emotionally competent group norms, which, in turn, are related to group performance” (Holt, 2015). Emotional intelligence allows a global leader to recognize, adapt to and manage follower emotions, know what emotions will be beneficial to organizational goals, and “have the skill to take the team from where they are to where they need to be by managing their emotions” (Holt, 2015).

## 12.7 BRIDGES TO INTERCULTURAL LEADERSHIP: GLOBAL LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

When discussing possible bridges female intercultural leaders might look to overcome complex global challenges, it is important to examine global leadership competencies that foster effective leadership, particularly those that may come naturally to women. A survey of the research done in the field of global research produces an overwhelming plethora of global leadership competencies, Mendenhall et al. (2018) noted over 200 that influence global effectiveness and there have been many attempts to “order the garden of global leadership over the years” with varying success. Some of these competencies are even alluded to in multiple intelligences sections above, but it is helpful to distill the multitude of opinions and definitions to find useful insights for effective leadership.

A concise organization of competencies is offered by Bird (2018); he organizes the various competencies into three overarching categories, each with several helpful subcategories. These include the following:

- Competencies of Business and Organizational Acumen which includes vision and strategic thinking skills like foresight, responsiveness and intuition, business savvy, skills connected to managing communities, organizational savvy, and leading change.
- Competencies of Managing People and Relationships includes abilities for valuing people (including cultural awareness and inclusiveness), interpersonal skills like emotional intelligence, sensitivity and social engagement, skills for effective cross-cultural communication, and the ability to empower others, which includes coaching, delegation, and team building.
- Competencies of Managing Self which combines numerous character qualities under the headings of character (including 17 sub-concepts like integrity and courage), resilience, inquisitiveness (which includes notions of curiosity and openness), flexibility, and having a global mindset.

Each of the concepts listed is a distillation of numerous other competencies and it is worth taking time to analyze each one (Bird, 2018). The complexity involved may make the task of learning and incorporating so many competencies into a cohesive leadership paradigm feel like a daunting task for the aspiring female global leader.

However, women may have a natural propensity for many of the global leadership competencies. For example, women are shown to use more communal and relational styles of leading that are both participative and interactive (Klenke, 2018; Bass & Bass, 2009), which in turn connect to global competencies of managing people and relationships, such as valuing people, inclusivity, social flexibility, and others. Domina (2009) points out that “women tend to focus on responsibility and care, are collaborative, and more likely to use participative and transformational leadership styles and create a cooperative work environment” (28). Interculturally, female leaders are resilient, creative, strategic, and high in personal integrity all while navigating complex cultural mine fields in relation to gender and social norms (Lederleitner, 2018).

In summary, women are well poised for success in intercultural leadership and bring many skills and competencies to bear when serving in global leadership positions. Despite potential complexity with gendered expectations for leadership and conservative social norms in many cultures around the globe, women can be confident in their own innate skills and work diligently to build awareness and growth in the areas that need strengthening. As cultural perspectives and expectations of global leadership shift toward more gender-inclusive constructs, women in current intercultural leadership contexts will be poised to shape the narrative for future leadership study.

## 12.8 LEADING WITH FAITH AND CONNECTION

For a woman of faith, the most important and effective bridge in intercultural leadership is found modeling one’s leadership based on biblical values. In this style of intercultural leadership, Lingenfelter (2008) argues, the essential vision is based on Scripture and the desire to engage with God in “kingdom work” by prioritizing the value system, vision, and “good news” of Jesus’ message to create communities of trust. This requires that an intercultural leader flip their priorities and place Kingdom goals ahead of organizational ones: “Leaders and followers must reverse the order of their priorities. Instead of giving priority to attaining vision, meeting goals, and productivity, they must rather give highest priority to the formation of a community of trust and then to doing the hard ‘body work’ of creating both community and trust” (Lingenfelter, 2008, p. 80).

A flip in priorities does not mean that there is a lack of accountability, or a failure to focus on productivity or results, but rather the starting

point is one of trusting community, partnership, and shared values. This requires a leader to enter cross-cultural leadership as a learner and identify with Jesus in His incarnation.

Even as Jesus, who was fully God, became fully human, we must move out of our nationalistic cultures and values; enter into the family, community, work, and worship world of the people we hope to serve; and become like them. We can never fully identify with them, but we can relinquish those aspects of our values and culture that cause pain for others and take on those aspects of their culture and values that create mutual trust and commitment (Lingenfelter, 2008, p. 101).

The denial of self that living incarnationally requires is the ground on which a cross-cultural leader can build a gospel-centered framework. It is the teaching of Philippians 2:5–8, to “have the same mindset as Christ Jesus” in how one chooses to relate to their followers, denying the rights or our cultural framework in favor of humble submission to God.

To accomplish this denial of self, Lederleitner (2018) reminds women that their identity as an intercultural leader “must be rooted first in God, and not merely in His purposes” and that “all leadership challenges are manageable if she maintains a healthy and vibrant relationship with God” (45). Ana, a cross-cultural leader from El Salvador, shared her perspective on having her identity firmly centered in God:

God uses us like he uses men. Sometimes I forget that I have an identity him, and the way of leadership does not need to be like a man or the same as another woman. It needs to be how God has made me: the talents the abilities, even with my weaknesses and my strengths and my own personality. This is something I have to remember all the time. I can admire another woman in leadership, but I don’t have to be like her. Maybe we can complement each other, but the Lord is going to use me for how I am (Lederleitner, 2018, p. 46).

### 12.8.1 *The Faithful Connected Leader*

In her qualitative research conducted amount women in intercultural leadership positions around the globe, Lederleitner (2018) “wrestled with how to capture the complexity of the [emerging leadership] model in a concise way” (52). While most women that she spoke with used



some form of “serve” in their descriptions of leadership and even stated they were “servant leaders,” the two words that stood out the most were *faithful* and *connected*, which led Lederleitner to speculate that the *Faithful Connected Leader* has seven distinct traits:

1. A foundational belief that their leadership is not about them, but about God.
2. A deep commitment to prayer because knowing God personally is more important than the work they do.
3. A preference for collaborative leadership, valuing the opportunity to work closely with others.
4. A holistic view of mission, recognizing that many factors help or impede the accomplishment of God’s purposes.
5. A “wise perseverance” despite difficulties and injustice, often manifesting as gender discrimination.
6. They care deeply about ministry impact and monitor it regularly.
7. A commitment to excellence in their professions and intentionality about their ongoing personal growth and development.

While the above traits were noted in a subset of women serving interculturally, many of the traits are encouraging women who strive to faithfully serve God’s mission. When cultural conflicts inevitably arise, the leader who has prioritized Kingdom values and placed her identity in God’s hands will be able to point their team back to what is truly important and confidently lead the way forward.

### 12.8.2 *Building Bridges for Others to Cross*

It is imperative to not only look for bridges to effectively lead the situations in front of us, but also to create bridges for other women to be able to cross into leadership behind us. Bullough (2009) suggests that where there are more women in positions of leadership in an organization, the opportunities for other women are increased, and “glass ceiling effects may be minimized” (19). This may be particularly true in case of intercultural leadership, where cultural gender norms in some countries may mean women have few leadership examples to look to.

There is a need for older, mature women in intercultural leadership to mentor and empower others to follow in the paths they have

forged. As Lederleitner (2018) notes, “When God calls women to serve in types of leadership roles, being mentored is essential for them to be able to develop their full potential and navigate the variety of pitfalls that can undermine their leadership and fruitfulness” (180). In addition to providing mentorship, cross-cultural leaders who desire to empower others must learn how to practice “power-giving leadership,” which releases control and chooses to focus on relationships over positions. Lingenfelter (2008) writes, “Instead of focusing on authority and responsibility, the Christian leader works to build relationships that influence others... through integrity of character and depth of relationships” (111). Through intentional relationships, a mature mentor identifies future leadership potential, helps young followers to align their talents with both organizational and gospel missions, and empowers them to do the work of leading others as well. It is vital for women in leadership to see their place in the cycle of leadership and to actively pursue healthy leadership connections, with both other women who can mentor them in leadership and younger female leaders who can benefit from their expertise.

## NOTE

1. The name and identifying features of the women behind these stories have been altered slightly to protect their anonymity.

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# Women Leaders Across the Nation: A Study in a Leadership Movement

*Stefanie Ertel*

## 13.1 INTRODUCTION

One cannot deny that women have made an impact, and women leaders today are appreciated and supported by the majority within this nation. Nevertheless, strong forces are still coming against women rising in leadership within denominations. Concurrently the roles and acceptance of women in leadership are being rediscovered among Christians and their communities (Chilcote, 2001). Women are typically significantly active within the Christian community but have only sometimes had an equal voice. For the body to be healthy, women should have a part in shaping the memory of Christianity (Chilcote, 2001) and leadership. Chilcote (2001) continues on this subject; he writes, “The church itself is born at Pentecost with the outpouring of the Spirit, who gives a voice to every daughter and son of God. And yet, we have so little memory of the precious daughters of God through the ages very simply because

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213

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they were women” (p. 9). An opportunity has arisen where women can contribute to the Church and leadership as a whole. Women have a voice, not because they are women but because all individuals can make an impact. All can be part of the current leadership movement, and the determining factor is hard work and determination, not a specific biological gender, race, or class.

An opportunity has arisen to study a leadership movement from influential women leaders. Although some may experience challenges due to their gender paired with their environment, many of these challenges are mindsets, not discrimination. Unfortunately, these learned mindsets have developed in male leaders who saturate executive leadership that often need to be made aware of how to train, coach, and empower women leaders (Leach, 2017). Therefore, one may wonder why an extra effort should be made to this growing and developing group of leaders. The answer would include changing mindsets in both male and female leaders. It is common for women to undervalue themselves due to a lack of opportunities, training, mentorship, and the flexibility needed for a woman with varying home life responsibilities.

The following will study the leadership movement of women across the United States. In order to determine the environment, there will be research from credible sources and surveys explicitly conducted for this research and chapter. This study also includes advice and perspectives from short interviews with successful women across the ministry and business fields. To study the rising leadership of women we will look at the various contexts at play, identify what the church says about women and how the local church acts it out, and then hear from some successful women leaders. These leaders have insights into what it takes to be a woman leader. Their partnership through these interviews and, more importantly, how they act out solid leadership principles daily is critical in encouraging current and rising women leaders!

## 13.2 BACKGROUND

Barna released a study on “What Americans Think About Women in Power,” identifying the acceptance level of women leaders across fields. For example, among Evangelicals, 39% were comfortable with the idea of a female pastor, 79% of the total surveyed were comfortable (Barna Group, 2017). The total percentage of those surveyed who were comfortable with a female CEO of a company was 94%, but only 77% of

evangelicals supported women CEOs (Barna Group, 2017). Along with other results in varying fields and positions, it was evident in this study that the general populace is accepting of women in leadership in the church and business worlds. However, those who were evangelicals were the most resistant, somewhat within the business world and especially within the church world. Stone, editor-in-chief at Barna Group said, “However, for churches who continue to hold a traditional position on women in leadership, it will become more important for them to articulate their theology for their members. Women and men in their congregations deserve to know what their church believes and why they believe it. Because such a stance will feel increasingly irrelevant and outdated, churches and members need to understand why such a theology still exists” (Kumar, 2017, para. 13). Similar studies like this have come out through various groups and at different times. The following research will focus on a study of 12 evangelical churches around the nation with at least 500 members who are actively growing. One may assume most churches are growing, but this is not the case. In 2020 before the pandemic, 65% of churches had fewer than 100 people in weekly attendance (Thumma, 2021). It is also important to be aware of the impact of the pandemic on churches. According to Barna’s (2022) research, among post-pandemic Millennials, 23% would be considered church hoppers and 16% stopped attending church altogether. Some of these statistics are important to be aware of as the following research discusses the perspectives from these growing 500-member plus evangelical churches.

Stone (Kumar, 2017) discusses the need for local churches to articulate their theology to women about their stance on this topic; this is often not the case. Reasonings for this may include the leadership wanting to avoid controversy or they need clarification about the details of what they believe and why. The following study from local church leaders across the country asks about their theological stance concerning women in leadership. All of the churches in this study are evangelical, have more than 500 members, and are growing. Much of Barna’s research identified the evangelical group as the least accepting of women in leadership in ministry and business (Barna Group, 2017). However, more than half of church congregations have less than 100 people in attendance (Barna Group, 2022). With these statistics in mind, one can deduce that these churches surveyed have a healthy atmosphere and significant influence on the community and the local church.

### 13.3 BELIEFS AND ACTIONS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Before getting to the theological responses to the surveys, there were some preliminary questions to ensure these leaders and churches met the conditions of this study. All twelve leaders responded yes to questions one and two. Question One—Do you serve as a pastor or leader at a growing Bible-believing church located in the United States? Question Two—Are you able to answer questions in alignment with the beliefs of this church and their leadership?

Question three asked about the size of the local church where they serve. Five were in the 500–1000 category (42%), three in 1000–5000 (25%), three in 5000–10,000 (25%), and one had 15,000+ members (8%). Next, question four asked about their denomination. Eight were from non-denominational churches, and the other four were from different denominations (Every Nation, Assembly of God, Nazarene, and Converge). There are approximately 21 million adherents of non-denominational churches in the United States, which is larger than any other Christian denomination in the country (Silliman, 2022). Therefore, it is not surprising that 75% of the participants came from this type of local church. The last demographic question was, do they currently have a woman pastor on staff? Eight selected yes, and four did not have a woman pastor (all four came from non-denominational churches).

Next were the theological questions, which also focused on the practical application of their stance. The question asked these leaders if women preach or teach at their church, and if yes, through what venues (small groups, from the pulpit, Sunday School, etc.)? Nine of the twelve either have women serving in all capacities listed or are willing (one was willing to have a woman speak from the pulpit but did not have any women able to do it at this time). Three others allowed at Bible studies and small groups but did not list teaching from the pulpit as an option: “Yes, small groups and at larger gatherings of Bible study,” “All, except a woman has never preached alone from the pulpit,” “Yes, in small group settings primarily” (Ertel, 2023, Theological Question 1). These responses could mean women are limited to these actions or are open but have yet to have the right woman to preach. As one may suspect, these three responses came from three of the four churches that do not have a woman pastor.

The next question asked how the leadership of their local church interpreted such verses as 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34 concerning women in leadership. Within the responses, there were three central



answers. First, two responses came from top leaders from local churches who were unsure of the prohibition in these verses, or the leader was re-evaluating previous beliefs, in essence, Response Group #1—unsure (17%). This grouping supports the stance that despite differing interpretations of these verses, there are conflicting interpretations that are deep and worth re-evaluation. Many larger and growing churches today fall into one of the three categories in interpreting these Scriptures from this local church sample. Although some Christians interpret from Scripture that women should not teach, be a pastor, or have authority over men, most larger and growing churches do not have this view. These two passages, specifically 1 Timothy 2:11–15 (see Chapter 2 of this book), are crucial verses on the study of women in leadership. Understanding these leaders’ interpretation of this verse (and others like it) is critical to understanding their beliefs on women in leadership.

The next category of responses, or Response Group #2, from these leaders, is that in 1 Timothy, the command for women was not for all time. The most concise response within this group stated, “Contextually descriptive, not prescriptive for all time” (Ertel, 2023, Theological Question 2). Another respondent wrote (Ertel, 2023, Theological Question 2), “I interpret them in light of the biblical-theological whole. These context-specific verses do not reflect the tone and tenor of the whole Bible. Female leaders are seen frequently in the OT and NT, and not just in roles of leadership with children or other women. The same Paul who wrote these prohibitions had a female mentor and lists multiple women in Romans 16 who were not just friends, but co-workers and leaders in the church.” Scripture should be a significant factor in interpreting other Scriptures. These verses focusing on women need to be taken into context and seen within the totality of Scripture. Six leaders fell in Response Group #2—not prescriptive for all time (50%).

The third group within this study begins with the previous group’s central idea and goes further. They believe women can lead; therefore, the beginning of the 1 Timothy passage is not for all time. However, these respondents focus on needing male headship (concentrating on the second part of this passage; see Chapter 2). One leader wrote, “A woman must be under the authority of a male headship,” and another wrote, “Women may preach and teach to mixed audience, but women may not serve as lead pastor or elder in light of the headship of Christ” (Ertel, 2023, Theological Question 2). When responding to the subsequent theological questions, these leaders will offer more depth on this

view. Response Group 3—male headship accounts for 33% of the group (four local church leaders).

The following theological question (Ertel, 2023) to this group of leaders asked, “Do women like Deborah, Priscilla, and Phoebe affect your view of the verses listed in question 2? Why or why not?” Two leaders did not believe these women in the Bible impact how they currently interpret such Scriptures as 1 Timothy 2:12, 1 Corinthians 14:34, and similar passages. However, one respondent is currently working through their study on this particular subject, and the rest believe these women impact how one should interpret Scriptures on women in leadership. Some responses included, “Yes. Because it’s clear that women lead in the early church and that men followed them,” and “Absolutely! They serve as great examples of gifted, called, and God-affirmed leaders.” Another respondent emphasized that these women served in leadership roles but not as “the ultimate leader of their church which is the only role in which women do not serve at our church.” This response references the previous question and impacts the upcoming final theological question.

Chapter 2 of this book shows that two large groups fall between complementarianism and egalitarianism. Both believe women can lead in the church and the business world (and that the husband is the head of the family); the difference is whether or not a woman can lead in governmental positions in the church (typically the lead pastor or elder). Most, if not all, of these churches, would likely fall into this in-between. Keeping this in mind, as well as the answers from the previous questions, leads to the following question: “Are there limitations to women in leadership in (1) full time vocational ministry or (2) business? If yes (to either 1 or 2), what Scripture is this based on? Please provide a short explanation of how this verse is applied to the described restriction.” Due to the nature of these responses and the quality of the content presented, all answers to this question are listed below.

- *I believe that women should enjoy all the freedoms of leadership without the burden of government or oversight (letters to Timothy and Titus indicate male eldership). No limitations on business.*
- *1) In my view, the scriptures do not explicitly say whether or not women can be elders. But they do indicate that women can teach in some roles. 2) Yes in business.*
- *Excerpt from by-laws. 2.07 Male Leadership. In keeping with the consistent pattern of male leadership among God’s people throughout the*

*Scriptures, the selection of men as Jesus' twelve apostles, biblical guidance on male leadership of the family, the similarity between the biblical model for the church and the biblical model for the family, and the traditions of the Christian Church throughout history, the roles of a church's senior pastors and elders are to be fulfilled by men. Ephesians 5:22–33 (describing the model for the church as similar to the model for the family); 1 Timothy 3:1–7 (noting that an overseer must be “the husband of one wife”); Titus 1:5–9 (noting that elders must be “the husband of one wife”); see also 1 Timothy 2:11–14; 1 Corinthians 14:34–35.*

- *No.*
- *I think there are limitations to anyone in full time vocational ministry. I don't know that I would say it's just specific to women. 1 Peter 5:1–5 gives clear instructions of how we are to serve and care for the flock God has entrusted to us. We are to lead with humility as women understanding our role and place as God has designed it.*
- *The limit is God's call/assignment.*
- *No if under male headship—as should EVERY minister.*
- *I don't believe there are any limitations. In [name of local church] we have women at every level of leadership, including District and General Superintendents.*
- *Our church has no restriction for women to lead at any level.*
- *No.*
- *Women may be ordained, may preach and teach to mixed audience in small groups and on Sunday, but women may not serve as lead pastor or elder in light of the headship of Christ.*
- *I am currently working through my own study of this particular subject and am not sure where I will end up landing on this issue yet when it comes to limitations for women in ministry leadership. I do not have any concerns with women in business leadership as Paul's directives were addressed to the church in context. In many ways I am currently re-visiting, challenging, and researching this subject and previously held positions.*

From looking at these churches and many large and growing churches today, one can conclude that many healthy, Bible-believing churches in the United States would fall under the two categories apparent in this study—one, women can lead in all capacities; two, women can lead in

all degrees except in governmental leadership roles within the Church (apostle, elder, or highest level of pastor at that local church).

The goal of this study was to see not only how the local church is acting out their beliefs concerning women in leadership but also to see what they believe and why. A growing number of churches support women in leadership, and these churches must know where they stand on this topic. However, even though many accept women leaders, there may still be considerable resistance from church members. Conversely, some church leaders believe this topic is controversial and will not readily communicate their stance. When asking churches to participate in this study, many declined. Most did not give a reason, yet one did identify that the reasoning was due to the topic's controversial nature. Women leaders in the church should not be considered controversial. When leaders avoid talking about women leaders and where the church leadership stands, these local churches are also likely not to offer education in this area or empowerment to women leaders. Churches today should ask themselves, what do we believe about women in leadership, and why do we think this (is it biblical)? Are our actions consistent with our stance, and how do we communicate our beliefs to empower our current and upcoming women leaders?

### 13.4 PERSPECTIVE AND VOICE

The glass ceiling, leadership labyrinth, jungle gym, and glass cliff are all terms that people have used to describe women and the challenges they face in rising and sustaining a leadership role. These terms are typically less used within church leadership since some churches do not support women leaders in significant roles and do not desire to seek changes in this area. This perspective is less common than previously taken, yet it will take time to shift this mindset, even if the leadership is already there. Today's women are in an exciting time! They are typically accepted yet still underrepresented in many areas; therefore, more and more women are entering fields needing diversification. As the study of this leadership movement continues, it is paramount to hear from some of these rising leaders and what advice they would give to those who will come after them.

Short interviews were conducted with women from multiple fields and environments to hear from various perspectives.<sup>1</sup> The average time was 10–15 minutes ranging from women 30 years old to 64 years old. All

women had leadership experience in some form, ranging from 1.5 years in a leadership position to 43 years in ministry. Most of the surveyed women had at least ten years of leadership experience, and two-thirds had fifteen or more years of experience. Two of these women had no college experience, two had some college, and the rest had at least a Bachelor's degree. Of those surveyed, there are several identifiable groups: (1) Church Leadership Group (or CLG): four from local churches (three in church leadership and one long-standing pastor's wife of a large and growing mega-church), (2) Christian Organization Group (or COG) five in Christian colleges, universities, or para-church organizations, (3) Corporate Group (or CPG), including two in government, two in the medical field, and one public-school principal, and (4) Local Business Group (or LBG) contained four in this group. Groups one and two may combine into a broader "Ministry" group, and groups three and four may combine into a broader "Marketplace" group. Many of these women came from different backgrounds, including race and ethnicity. Ten were Caucasian only, four were biracial or white Hispanic, and four were African American or Asian American alone. Even though these women came from different environments and backgrounds, patterns were evident in their responses.

Each woman answered two main questions. The first focused on the advice they would give a rising woman leader in their field or organization, considering their experience as a woman leader. The second question asked if they would like to see any changes concerning women in leadership in their field or organization within the next five years, and if yes, what changes. The following will highlight the answers of the different groups and the entire group of women leaders. There will be some direct quotes from the interviews, but adjustments will be present due to the nature of wording used within conversations. The original intent will stay; however, filler words or phrases that may blur the intended message will occasionally be slightly modified or deleted.

### *13.4.1 Church Leadership Group*

Among the groups focused on in this study, the women from the Church Leadership Group (CLG) historically come from the most restrictive group for women in leadership. Whether or not these women have dealt with restrictions due to their gender and their church's theological beliefs, most have experienced this or nonacceptance from those nearby, such as church members. As evident through the Barna research in this chapter,

evangelicals are the most unaccepting group of women in leadership, more specifically in church leadership; yet, a small group was against women in business leadership, such as a company CEO.

These four interviewees' overall tone was positive and offered great insight. There were two prominent themes: perceived resistance and calling-focused. It is easy to taint opposition within the lens of perceived resistance. For example, it is easier to say they are not accepting my ideas because of my gender, a component that one does not have control over, which is an unchangeable area. Not to say there is not ever discrimination or favoritism toward men. More typically, women blame rejection of ideas on gender when in reality, she is likely being treated as an equal; the acceptance or rejection of the concept is more likely based on the quality of the idea presented. Here are some quotes from the interviews based on this topic:

- *“The resistance that you feel is not always about your gender. It’s less often about me being a woman and more often it’s that they respect me enough to have a challenging conversation. If I’m invited to the table, they value me as a voice at the table. If they’re pushing back, it’s not because I’m a woman, it’s because I’m at the table and that’s what you do, that’s how you collaborate. Sometimes collaboration brings conflict, and, in that conflict, you find healthy resolution for your organization and for yourself, but very often I see younger women, or less-seasoned, in their roles react to everything as if any pushback is always because you’re a female and they’re belittling me, and so often that’s not the case. So now if that is your assumption going in, you’re always going to have barriers between you and the team you are working with. You’re never going to be in unity, and if you’re not unity, you’re not going to make progress, and you’re not going to move forward.”*
- *“Put aside any ideas or limitation that you have felt as a woman previously because they are not there. There is a lot of self-doubt that we can come against, ...put that aside and assume that in this environment, the answer is yes, you hold the same value, you hold the same weight, and you wouldn’t be in this role if we didn’t believe in you.”*

If women want to be equals, others will sometimes accept their ideas, and at other times they will reject them. Therefore, just like any other individual, the arguments should be presented well, focusing on the

strengths and accounting for weaknesses. Women want to be heard and invited to the table, and when they are not accustomed to being treated as equals, they may become offended when others are not overly sensitive to account for their feelings. We are, therefore, equals at the table; let us all have that mindset and welcome healthy and constructive criticism.

Conversely, there will be people who reject women in leadership solely based on their gender, but if leadership has set them in, there ought not to be a need to question the validity of her voice within the church leadership. She needs to be confident in this, as one respondent said, “Don’t apologize for who you are,” and another said, “You will never be cheered on by every person.” These quotes lead to the following theme, which is serving/calling-focused.

- *“Be willing to do the job even if you don’t have the title.”*
- *“Not everyone’s going to cheer you on, but that’s okay, because if you’re called the gift makes a way for itself, and you’re going to be where God has you.”*
- *“Remember that we’re all called to serve, so we should be pursuing how can I best serve you Lord, or where it is that I am, rather than pursuing a calling.”*

The term “calling” may be used differently, but the focus here is similar. Serve the Lord and pursue where He has you. The title is not the focus, but serving the Lord is the priority. This priority is evident in Colossians 3:23–24, which says (ESV), “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.” Let there not be a misunderstanding, in any case: women should receive titles and equal opportunity based on competence and character, but if they are focused too much on titles, is serving the Lord truly the focus? Honestly, this component can also be said to be the same for all leaders—titles should not be the focus. One respondent said, “There’s an old saying, job security is a job well done” ... “Make yourself indispensable.” It is about serving the Lord (Col. 3:23–24), it is about living a life worthy of the calling we have (Ephesians 4:1), and it is about throwing off every distraction and focusing and persevering (Hebrews 12:1) on living a life glorifying God.

Individuals deeply long to find and fulfill a purpose beyond themselves (Guinness, 2018). When using the term “calling,” some may focus on vocational calling. However, Guinness (2018) offers an all-encompassing definition of calling when he writes, “*Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service*” (p. 5). The secondary, or vocational, calling should not be the driving factor. Titles are not the focus, but conversely, the focus is the primary calling that God calls those to Himself to a special devotion to Him. Through this devotion, one finds their identity and everything sprouts from one’s identity in Christ.

Concerning the second question focusing on what changes these women would like to see either within the local church in general or within the local church they serve, there was an evident pattern. This pattern was the acting out of one’s theological beliefs and accepting women serving/where women can serve across the local church.

- *“I would love to see us get to a place where we can legitimize what we believe our theological position is, where our stated theological position and the way that we are walking that out, fully line up.”*
- *“I don’t think any changes are needed, it’s just more over time I think walking out what we believe. It might look differently in our organization just as we continue to walk it out.”*
- *“Acceptance and support across the local church in general, I think I would love to see that look differently than it has; I think it feels very divided with the acceptance of women being in any type of ministry.”*
- *“I would like to see us address some semantics issues that I feel lead to a misunderstanding about how and where women can serve.”*

Education, mentoring, and coaching are critical for women in leadership today. Education and understanding of what the Bible says about this topic should be prevalent among local church leaders. Various reasons have impacted the representation of women in this field, including past mindsets and beliefs, the appearance (and at times, reality) of purity issues, women not having as much opportunity due to underrepresentation, the avoidance of appeared controversial matters, and self-exclusion because of other home and family responsibilities. As many effective, spiritual woman



leaders are rising today, now is the time to embrace them, offer them a place, and empower them to pursue the calling on their lives!

### 13.4.2 *Christian Organization Group*

The Church Organization Group (COG) consists of five ladies, three of which work at Christian colleges or universities (all from different schools located in different states) and two who lead in para-church organizations (one president and one director; in different organizations and states). Within the first question, two themes were apparent. The first theme is support; some specifically noted the need for male support, and one focused on the need for mentorship, to “have somebody who wants to see you succeed.” One respondent emphasized how “it would be impossible to do what I’m doing today” without the support of other male leaders and her husband. Another significant area within these responses is embracing who you are as a woman leader.

- Share your mind. *“Don’t be afraid to say what is on your mind. I have noticed in the past where women may be intimidated working with men and they may not share what is on their mind.”*
- Demonstrate vulnerability. *“I encourage the women that I work with to demonstrate their vulnerability whenever they can and I think that is a hard thing because for a lot of us, even in a lot of fields that we work, vulnerability isn’t really the driving force, especially when it’s a field where men have more or less dominated... God intended for us to be different and for us to bring different perspectives to the table, and the ideas that would work together with those varying perspectives, not having to compromise them and let one dominate, the one or the other—on either side.”*

God gives leadership gifts to both men and women. However, women sometimes do not feel empowered to lead; many do not see themselves as leaders or as capable of becoming effective leaders. Leach (2017) identifies the concept of *Imposter Syndrome*, and she writes, “When a woman is called, gifted, or recognized as gifted but is unable to embrace her giftedness, we see the imposter syndrome. It is not whether a woman *has a gift* but whether she can *internalize* this as true” (p. 37). This mindset is common among women and especially when that woman is in a field

or organization surrounded by men. Today's leaders must determine if this mindset is accurate and on a due cause or a reaction focusing on a victim mindset. The answer to this question will be different within organizations and fields. Within the many surveys (not only within the COG), several women identified aspects of this mindset while identifying that it was not based on truth and facts but rather their perception of them. At the same time, there were a few identifiable areas where it was noticeable that the women were perceived as less, not in character, but in capability. It is critical to recognize if this is based on facts or not. For example, men are naturally stronger and larger than women (even though there can be exceptions), but this does not mean that women are incapable of leading teams because they are weaker than men. Women typically are more emotional, but this does mean all women are overly emotional and, therefore, should not trust their opinions in a situation that needs logic. Often misconceptions are based on reality. Leaders need to realize that their actions communicate louder than their words. Therefore, a leader must be cognizant of what those actions are saying to others.

Some women in this group feel empowered and encouraged as leaders and do not desire changes concerning their organization's perspective of women in leadership. At the same time, others in this group have barriers with differing theological beliefs concerning women in leadership. What is quite interesting to note is that most stances concerning women in leadership are limitations within the church, not business environments. However, due to the closeness of these organizations to the local church, some confuse these views, viewing leadership within these Christian organizations as leadership within the church. One respondent detailed her struggles in this area. She emphasized how they are not the local church, that "we come alongside the church, to help the church." Although, she also talked about how some men resigned from their position when they realized she had authority over them. A few from the COG believe there is a need for more education in this area. One highlighted the connection between more education and emotional intelligence.

- *"In general, people are becoming more aware of the concept of emotional intelligence; it's hard to talk about emotional intelligence without taking into consideration the varying perspectives that can be especially related to if you're a man or a woman, and learning about how being a woman, how you're wired differently than your counterpart... I think if we are a little bit more informed about why people*

*might be the way that they are, it would help us in the projects and the tasks we have to get shoulder to shoulder to make happen.”*

Previously, many people thought that talking about one’s emotions in the workplace was unprofessional and inappropriate (Goleman et al., 2013). Nevertheless, with a more recent focus on emotional intelligence, it was determined that it is appropriate and often needed (Goleman et al., 2013). Goleman et al. (2013) write, “But research in the field of emotion has yielded keen insights into not only how to measure the impact of a leader’s emotions but also how the best leaders have found effective ways to understand and improve the way they handle their own and other people’s emotions. Understanding the powerful role of emotions in the workplace sets the best leaders apart from the rest—not just in tangibles such as better business results and the retention of talent, but also in the all-important intangibles, such as higher morale, motivation, and commitment” (pp. 4–5). As individuals learn more about understanding the emotions of others around them, it will be critical to increase one’s understanding of typical cross-biological gender emotions.

### 13.4.3 *Corporate Group*

This group of women consisted of a medical doctor, a Director of Clinical Operations, a public-school elementary principal, a Battalion Unit Ministry Team Leader (UMT), and a Senior Community Relations and Government Manager. This group had a range of fields, perspectives, and experiences. Additionally, some in this group were in a male-dominated, woman-dominated, or primarily equally represented field. Two significant themes came from these women in their interviews: work and family balance and mentorship.

- *“Being able to balance – having a good balance, and having that work and family balance. Having that balance, really staying very organized, and knowing your purpose and knowing your why. Because if you don’t know your why, it’s so easy to fall, it’s so easy to not keep going forward, but if you know why you are working for something, why you’re doing it and who you are doing it for, there’s pretty much nothing you can’t do.”*

- *“Balance, balance, balance. I really wish I had learned this a lot sooner, before I got to the point of burning out. Because we wear a whole bunch of different hats and we tend to be women of excellence. We want to do what we do and do it well.”*
- *“Family, everything starts at home first. How is that going to affect your lifestyle at home? Think through before jumping into this field, in any field.”*

The topic of work and family balance is a significant factor for many women in the workforce today and specifically for those with children. It is often challenging to fill the role of a professional and the family’s primary caretaker. One respondent discussed the expectations of how the wife typically focuses on the kids so the husband can focus on work; however, she is the one to do both. Another respondent jokingly told her co-workers, “I wish I had a wife,” due to the help the men were receiving at home and, ultimately, with their careers. Women’s various responsibilities with career and mom roles can make it difficult for them to receive comparable pay in the same positions. Northouse (2019) titles these women as “superwomen” when he writes, “Some women choose not to marry or have children, others choose to become ‘superwomen’ and attempt to excel in every role, and others take leaves of absence, take sick days, or choose part-time employment to juggle these work–home conflicts” (p. 406). Due to these responsibilities, women typically have less work experience and more employment interruptions (Northouse, 2019). Challenges arise with these many roles and possibly significant interruptions within their professional careers.

Many of these women also emphasize the need for mentorship. Two of the women specifically noted the importance of mentorship with other women. These two women were in male-dominated fields. They appreciated their male mentors, but for one, the women mentors were able to offer more practical perspectives and advice. The other could not find a female mentor and now hopes to fill that need for others in her organization and industry. This interviewee said, “mentorship is huge... I see the ones I’m working around now, they are about half my age, but I love it because I try to give back to them what I didn’t necessarily get myself. Now, I’m looking more at legacy and making sure those that come beyond me can take my lessons and even go further.” Dr. McGinnis writes about similar concepts of mentorship and legacy, yet with different words that paint another picture of the beauty behind helping others be the best

they can be. He writes (1985), “In our age of high-tech advancement it is very easy to forget that our failure or success will be determined largely by our ability to work with and assist other people in functioning at their best”... “There is simply no substitute for the rewards of helping other people grow, the pleasures of teaching other people to succeed, and the excitement of organizing a group of colleagues who spark one another’s enthusiasm” (p. 178). When one can articulate lessons learned and help equip others for the future, the fruit can live past one leader and one lifetime.

#### 13.4.4 *Local Business Group*

Of the four women in this Local Business Group (LBG) three are within women-dominated fields, and the other woman is within an organization mostly made up of women. This aspect of this group made the perspectives and responses interesting to see how they would line up in comparison to other interviewees within fields and companies with men as the majority. While looking at the respondents opening answers, three gave similar initial responses to the first question; they said, “Don’t be afraid to be who you are, but stay humble and listen closely,” “Be bold with your vision, walk into a project with authority and humility,” and “Don’t doubt yourself.” Even within fields and organizations filled with women, some advice is still focused on knowing who you are, just as one woman from the CLG said, “Don’t apologize for who you are.” A theme is evident here across fields but is not determined by gender majority.

When asked about needed changes to those within women-dominated fields and organizations, they made an excellent point: not to undervalue oneself. Leaders are often not given this title within most of these organizations in this group (a commonly used title is director or manager). One respondent highlighted this and emphasized how these directors would likely change if their mindsets shifted to realizing they are leaders. She said, “I think it would change their perspective, and they would maybe treat it a little more professionally and not discount or disqualify themselves.” Another respondent highlighted how this undervaluing could impact other areas. She said, “The biggest thing would be to not undervalue your work or make yourself small to appeal to the company you are working for. Asking for fair compensation for the work that you provide, the gender shouldn’t matter if the work is excellent.” She emphasizes the need for an accurate evaluation by not lessening oneself to appeal to

a specific company; self-evaluation will impact one's compensation in this field, just as it would in most environments. Rossman (2016) writes about the importance of honest self-evaluation during his time at Amazon.com; he writes, "If you weren't willing to be completely honest about where you, your project, or your numbers stood, then there was simply no chance of attaining your goals" (p. 27). This type of evaluation is needed as individuals must identify their strengths and weaknesses.

According to another interviewee, "There are many times when I think I don't have enough or the 'right' experience to be in the position I am in, or that there is someone else better for the job. But, I've learned to stop doubting myself and that I am in fact capable of being exactly where I am, doing exactly what I am doing." One is not a prideful leader if one knows their strengths; an individual is a self-aware leader that can identify these areas. Women must accurately articulate their strengths within a crowd of men and women. They should not lessen their value if they feel intimidated but be confident in what they know. Self-awareness is a critical component of emotional intelligence, which can be learned and developed (Daft, 2011). How can a leader expect personal and professional growth and accomplishment of goals if they cannot identify their starting point and resources available? Avoiding hubris is not an ample reason to cast off self-confidence and self-awareness. In reality, a form of pride allows leaders to believe these qualities are unnecessary.

### 13.4.5 *Total Group Reflections*

These interviews with successful women across fields have benefited this study on women in leadership. These women's contributions are much appreciated! Identifiable themes are in the previous sections per study group. Now, however, it is necessary to look at the entirety of the interviews. Two prominent themes were overarching throughout. *Prominent Theme One: Value*, the heart behind these phrases and ideas combined due to a similar approach or mindset on the need for value, using such words or themes as have a voice, bring to the table, and have value (Table 13.1).

Within both prominent themes, three areas will be highlighted. First, what is *Told*; second, what is *Tale*; and lastly, what is *Truth*. What is *Told* today to those in leadership is that women have fewer opportunities for development at work and, in part, due to gender prejudice; they are less likely to receive encouragement from male leadership and

**Table 13.1** Value

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*VALUE—have a voice; have something to bring to the table; have value*

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*“Don’t apologize for who you are”*

*“Put aside any ideas or limitations that you have felt as a woman previously, because they are not there. There is a lot of self-doubt that we can come against...put aside and assume that in this environment the answer is yes, you hold the same value”*

*“There are not enough degrees that you can get for a person that doesn’t think you should have the ability to have that voice, nothing’s going to change that”*

*“Their value is in who they are, not whether they are male or female, but what they bring to the table”*

*“You need to get past, I’m pretty, thank you Jesus, but I have so much to bring to the table. I fought to get to this table, now you need to listen to what I have to say”*

*“...and not discount or disqualify themselves”*

*“Don’t be afraid to say what is on your mind...What you are holding back from saying/sharing may be the answer that is needed”*

*“God intended for us to be different and for us to bring different perspectives to the table”*

*“We all have a voice, and we have something to bring to the table”*

*“Don’t undervalue yourself”*

*“Don’t be afraid of who you are”*

*“Don’t doubt yourself... I have learned that the imposter syndrome is very real. There are many times when I think I don’t have enough or the ‘right’ experience to be in the position I am in, or that there is someone else better for the job. But, I’ve learned to stop doubting myself and that I am in fact capable of being exactly where I am, doing exactly what I am doing”*

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may have fewer responsibilities than men within the same jobs (Nort-house, 2019). The preceding sentence is true that studies have supported these findings. However, in the *Tale*, prejudice is prevalent toward women in most, if not all, fields. Additionally, women must work harder to prove themselves worthy in all environments, specifically male-dominated domains. The *Truth* is that the preceding statements are rare more than true. Much of these ideas are embedded within the minds of women leaders, creating a mindset set out to prove capability and, at times, worth.

Dr. Arthur I. Gates (as cited by Carnegie, 1981) wrote, “‘Self-pity’ for misfortunes real or imaginary is, in some measure, practically a universal principle.” Carnegie continues (1981), “So, if you want to win people to your way of thinking, put into practice... Principle 9 Be sympathetic with the other person’s ideas and desires” (p. 174). Leaders need to be sympathetic to other people. However, in an attempt to do this, the mindset has been created that others must be sympathetic to one’s desires. This treatment is unfair and unwarranted if not treated appropriately with enough

sympathy (according to the receiver). This mindset creates a victim identification, and what one focuses on frequently becomes a reality. Most people know that type of person who believes everyone is out to get them. It can become self-seeking due to the intensity of this thought pervasiveness seeping into their lifestyle.

Self-pity can disguise itself as righteous indignation, where one may feel the need to fight against injustice; nevertheless, it may only be a response to not getting one's way (Bloom, 2016). Self-pity is a sin because it is a form of pride. Pride is blind to outside circumstances and others that do not revolve around the individual in focus. Proverbs 17:22 (ESV) says, "A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." Living joyfully and focusing on God's calling is good medicine for the negativity that often saturates society. God strategically made women the way they are. One interviewee within a heavily male field said, "If I were a man, what would that man say? That's not how God created us; He created us as a woman; what I think and how I feel, and the strategic way that I present it, is how I am supposed to. I don't take on ownership of someone else. I hope one day we all get to that point. Know that God strategically created us this way, and what I have on the inside, someone needs it." This respondent is not focusing on the negative but on God's calling for her. She is paving the way for future women in her field, not attempting to become more masculine to fit with her peers but accepting how God has made her and called her. This perspective leads to the following prominent theme, which is *Prominent Theme Two: Mentoring* (Table 13.2).

Mentoring was a significant point for many of the interviewees. The focus was training current and upcoming leaders, but also focusing on legacy ("Now I'm looking more at legacy and making sure those that come beyond me can take my lessons and even go further") and enhancing the lives of the next generation (... "instead of keeping them locked in the old way of doing things. Basically, I want a team that cultivates a culture worth continuing"). Fewer people today claim self-made proficiency; many realize maturing takes time and usually involves others' help and guidance (Stanley & Clinton, 1992). This process may be through official mentoring relationships or identifying others in similar areas of life that one can look up to and learn through observation. As people discover they cannot get far alone, they desire mentoring relationships and pursue them. Those worth mentoring do not only see this as training less experienced leaders but see the opportunity for investment in legacy.



**Table 13.2** Mentoring

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**MENTORING**—mentor, intentional training, enhance the lives of the next generation, draw out gifts and talents

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*“Mentoring is huge... I see the ones I’m working around now, they are about half my age, but I love it because I try to give back to them what I didn’t necessarily get myself. Now, I’m looking more at legacy and making sure those that come beyond me can take my lessons and even go further”*

*“Give someone one rice crispy at a time before giving the whole spoonful” [when talking about training up others]*

*“When I have shortcomings, I need to know that these are the ways I need to fix it. How are you going to develop yourself? Where do you need to go? Who do you go to for mentorship? Who are the people you ask for, who do you trust to ask certain questions?”*

*“Make sure to get mentorship from another woman and from men as well, but specifically at least 1–2 women you can get mentorship from, that has been one of the biggest life-saving influences”*

*“I would love to see throughout different organizations and churches that there is mentoring that’s taking place in young women’s lives”*

*“Hire a team that continues to evolve with passion, positivity, and artistic excellence, wanting to enhance the lives of the next generation, instead of keeping them locked in the old way of doing things. Basically, I want a team that cultivates a culture worth continuing”*

*“Thank God for strong men that will help to draw out the gifts and talents and abilities within women so that they can fulfill the call of God on their lives”*

*“Have a mentor that is for you—it has to be someone that is for you. If you have somebody who wants to see you succeed, and a mentor, you’re going to fly”*

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These mentors are not stuck in their ways, blinded by their pride, but are looking for the next generation to stand on their shoulders and go farther.

Leaders know the significance of mentoring, but women are *Told* mentoring is not as easily accessible within leadership realms (Northouse, 2019), especially church leadership. The often-used *Tale* is that women cannot have a male mentor. Often, a female mentor is preferred, and they can relate more with one another, but this is only sometimes available. Additionally, cross-gender mentoring is typically against policy in spiritual environments based on avoiding the appearance of evil (Titus 2:7–8) and not allowing unethical relationships to develop. The *Truth* is that fewer women are in senior leadership roles (Northouse, 2019). Additionally, there are plenty of women with leadership experience within organizations created for leadership mentoring for women (for example, Propel Women and Ministry Chick). Also, women

can have male mentors within a wholesome environment. For example, allowing women in group mentoring led by a man has become more accepted. Finally, women can find mentors; they may have to search more or find a mentor in a comparable but not identical field.

One minor theme in the responses is worth studying: *Minor Theme: Balance*. Many women with careers must balance their home and work lives continually. One interviewee said, “Family, everything starts at home first. How is that going to affect your lifestyle at home? Think through that before jumping into this field, in any field.” Every individual has to think about their current responsibilities and roles before taking on new commitments. This reality has hindered women from advancing in their careers if they are the primary caretaker of their homes and children. Many successful and thriving women today have a healthy view of balance and priorities.

Dr. Tim Elmore created what he calls “Habitudes”; this concept is a mixture of habits and attitudes. Within the books he writes on Habitudes, one picture is helpful to focus on within a study on life balance: “Big Rocks First” (Elmore, 2011). The idea here is to focus on the most significant priorities first. Then all the little priorities will have room to fit into life. Unfortunately, when the reverse occurs, when little priorities are first (possibly because they are fast or fun), people often run out of time for the *Big Rocks*. As Covey (2013) wrote, “The key is not to prioritize what’s on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities” (p. 170). The key to work-life balance is identifying the biggest priorities, the *Big Rocks*, and ensuring those are the responsibilities put into the day and week before any other aspects of one’s life.

The “Imposter Syndrome” is common among women today. One interviewee noted this view in her response, as seen in Table 13.1 (last response). Leach (2017) describes this in her book: “Women who are capable and compelling teachers and preachers, women who are brilliant theologians and scholars, and women who are magnetic leaders are simply unable to embrace their God-given giftedness. Although a woman has clear ability and giftedness, and although others recognize her giftedness and ability, there is an *inability* on the part of the woman to internalize that giftedness as genuine. When a woman is called, gifted, and recognized as gifted but is unable to embrace her giftedness, we see the imposter syndrome. It is not whether a woman *has a gift* but whether she can *internalize* this as true” (pp. 36–37). One can see this mindset within the primary interview theme of *Value*. These healthy women in

various fields want other women and upcoming leaders to know they have value, a voice, and a place at the table. God has given them gifts and talents to use, and they should embrace them while knowing they do not need to prove their value to anyone else.

From hearing from successful careerwomen in ministry and marketplace fields, it is evident that they believe women need to know they have value. Also, leaders need a support system through mentorship. This mentorship may be from other women they know personally, or they may need to search more using other various resources. However, women can still learn significantly from male mentorship and coaching; concurrently, boundaries and systems to guard against ethical failure is vital. Lastly, having a healthy balance of work and family life will create healthy boundaries and effective time management. Part of identifying the most significant responsibilities when prioritizing them is knowing the purpose behind the various aspects of life. One interviewee said, “If you don’t know your why, it’s so easy to fall, it’s so easy to not keep going forward, but if you know why you are working for something, why you’re doing it and who you are doing it for, there’s pretty much nothing you can’t do.” Knowing the why behind each responsibility and priority in one’s life will determine the need, or lack of need, for it.

### 13.5 LEADERSHIP STYLE AND GENDER

Scholars previously studied to determine if women were capable of effective leadership; this question has no practical relevance due to the many examples of great women leaders (Northouse, 2019). Northouse (2019) proposes new questions now that are more applicable to our current circumstances, “The primary research questions now are ‘Do men and women lead differently?’ and ‘Are men more effective leaders than women?’” (p. 403). Much research is available here, but within the context of the above study, it is practical to look at these differences and whether they impact the reality or perception of both men and women leaders.

Women usually experience added difficulties when working in a masculine leadership role (if mainly surrounded by men and in a field usually run by men, for example working in construction) (Northouse, 2019). Similarly, women will have fewer difficulties leading in a typical feminine leadership role (for example, managing a beauty shop). However, the reverse is also true, men may have difficulties leading in a feminine

area, and now they also have the added accusations dealing with gender identity within some of these commonly highly feminine roles.

Typically, do women lead differently, and does this impact their effectiveness? According to Daft (2011) and other researchers, as evident through the support on this topic found in his book *The Leadership Experience*, typically, men are competitive, individualistic, hierarchical, and more task-oriented. Although women can show these characteristics, women tend to be more collaborative and not focused on competition but on building relationships (Daft, 2011). According to Daft (2014), “This difference between the relationship orientations of men and women has sometimes been used to suggest that women cannot lead effectively because they fail to exercise power. However, whereas male leaders may associate effective leadership with a topdown command-and-control process, women’s interactive leadership seems appropriate for the future of diversity, globalization, and learning organizations” (p. 338). According to Northouse (2019), research has found minor, but robust differences in leadership approaches based on gender; women tend to lead more than men in a transformational leadership approach and focus more on others and societal impact. Regardless, men and women can collaborate while focusing on relationships over hierarchy, but women appear naturally bent this way.

Groups may label some characteristics as masculine or feminine. In the workplace, harassment or belittling may occur if an individual is not melding into the typical societal roles. Biological men and women are naturally different, and as such, certain characteristics may come more easily to one over the other. For example, men are naturally stronger, but not every man is stronger than every woman. Also, women are naturally more nurturing, but this does not mean every woman is more caring than every man. Many may accept the previous characteristics as masculine or feminine, but these are not necessarily gender-specific. For example, women tend to be people-oriented; men can also demonstrate this characteristic. Additionally, it may be typical to accept confidence as a masculine characteristic. Nevertheless, confidence is a characteristic that most, if not all, leaders could benefit from. Men and women will have strengths due to gender, but this does not mean they should be deemed unable to exhibit certain characteristics. It is essential to learn from one another (no matter the gender of the individual). Depending on the organization’s needs, this should help determine which approach and characteristics to use and look for in a leader.

Some of the greatest leaders are ordinary people who quietly deliver extraordinary results (Collins, 2001). Level five leaders, according to Collins (2001), are those who are typically described as “*quiet, humble, modest, reserved, shy, gracious, mild-mannered, self-effacing, understated, did not believe his own clippings*; and so forth” (p. 27). Where women may have tendencies this way, men can lead similarly. So, to answer the question, yes, women lead differently, and no, they are not less effective than men. The typical approach of a woman leader is more collaborative and relationship-oriented, keeping in mind the needs of others. This approach is commonly the preference in diverse, growing, or innovative environments.

### 13.6 LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Growing up in the church, I often avoided women’s ministry. At the beginning of this journey of educating and researching this topic, I was not excited. Many women’s ministries appeared to me to always be complaining. We get together to complain, tell each other that it is acceptable, and assume you will be negative. We are not victims; the more we think we are and act upon it, the more that truth becomes a reality. The very reason I avoided this topic is also a determining factor of why I have immersed myself in this study—empowering women. These women do not need to complain and do not need to change who they are. God has created us with gifts and talents to use. God knows what He is doing. He is never surprised and never makes mistakes.

A leadership movement is happening among women today! They are becoming more influential in the ministry and marketplace environments. More churches believe women can lead, some are acting this out, and others are shifting their culture to make room for women leaders. Due to pressure on this topic, women leaders must know what they believe and how it is biblically based, especially within the church.

Many woman leaders excel in the current environment because their relational and collaborative style benefits the quickly evolving environment we live in (Northouse, 2019). Therefore, current and rising women leaders must embrace their strengths, put off any negative mentality, and avoid oversensitivity now that they are in a fast-paced and highly demanding environment. They will benefit as they continue to embrace their strengths and find others to mentor them to create a sturdy support system while calling out unhealthy patterns. Great leaders typically do not

focus on themselves; they focus on others and purpose—what will last past the individual. According to Collins (2001), the greatest leaders “channel their ego away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It’s not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious—but *their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves*” (p. 21). Now is an exciting time for leaders! Now is the time to accept diversity and viewpoints while accepting that there will be good and bad ideas. Individuals need to take ownership of bad ideas without offense and grow together. Women leaders have value and have a voice; there may still be opponents of this view. However, this view as the minority, women leaders need to step into the leadership calling over their life while realizing that many of the strengths that are commonly associated with their gender are more often positive in today’s environment. Today, men and women can be advocates for an equal value of voices based on character and capability.

## NOTE

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# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Biblical Perspective and Framework for Christian Women in Leadership

*Ashley Graves*

## 14.1 INTRODUCTION

In the late 1970s, Connie's young memory of the church includes women serving at the communion table, reading Scripture from the pulpit, praying, and presenting the message. She witnessed her mother serving as the Youth Pastor. Women as elders of the church were common practice. Her little eyes observed and thought nothing of it. It was common practice to see women included in all areas of leadership.

Fast-forward to Connie's teenage years. This same young girl begins going to another congregation out of a desire to study Scripture on a deeper level. It was the first time someone told her that she could not teach the Word of God based on her gender. They said to her that Scripture confirmed that only men could be in the pulpit, hold leadership

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241

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positions and teach the Word unless it was to children. She was shocked and confused because she had witnessed women teaching, preaching, and leading. Connie was confused at being told that what she was raised witnessing was considered “not biblical.”

Connie desired to know the Word of God in a practiced manner. She had a passion for the Word of God but also a desire to know the Word so no one could ever lead her astray. This resulted in her finding a church led by the Word of God that also embraced women in leadership. Studying Scripture led her to the truth that women were not a lesser sex and that God trusted women as much as men to teach His Word. Her voice was not restricted for the first time, and she openly used the gift of teaching God’s Word to His people.

Later the Lord would ask more of her, and Connie would attend seminary. The sexism and vile things said to her were shocking. A man told her that he did not believe women could speak directly to God. Another said she could teach the Word if all the adults were seated but not if she stood behind a pulpit. She heard stories of her sisters in leadership being pinned in closets with men and others told that they were physically assaulted as they were told to “get back into their place.” Connie never lost faith in her call to teach the Word of God or her faith in God; she began to lose her faith in the people of God.

As an adult, Connie compromised on her church home to find a church that consistently taught the Word of God. The church never allowed women to serve at the communion table. Women did not read the Scripture or bring the message. Slowly Connie looked at her two beautiful daughters observing this subliminal message. At home, she began to teach her daughters the importance of men and women in the church. She taught them how important their voice was and to not be silent about what the Lord had given them. This teacher of the Word of God slowly left the church because there was no place for her to use the gifts the Lord had given her.

Women are confused and hurt by churches that teach that they are inferior or less than others based solely on their gender. People of color are equally confused about their place within the church walls that white male pastors lead, and little discussion occurs about racial issues. This chapter will not make white males out to be an enemy. Instead, it will look at the glorious gifts found within making an effort to diversify the faces and leaders within the Christian churches.

The Bible answers all the questions regarding diversity, equality, and inclusion within God's church. It answers how the Lord sees His people and how precious they are to Him as the Creator. It has never been the mission of the Word of God to demean or tear down one people group. Specifically, Jesus Christ brought the message of reconciliation to God. Paul reiterates the importance of one's identity to Christ above all others. The following chapter will look to Scripture to reconcile the importance of diversity, equality, and inclusion and show the blessings for the congregations that open their leadership up for women and people of color.

## 14.2 DIVERSITY, EQUALITY, AND INCLUSION

A common language must be established to begin the conversation about diversity, equality, and inclusivity. A diverse group means that no more than 80% of one race or ethnic group is found within the population (Dougherty et al., 2020). For this chapter, gender diversity means that one biological gender does not make up more than 60% of the population. For purposes of this chapter, the two biological and biblical genders considered will be male and female.

As Christians look to the future, they must look at the tapestry of the individuals attending the churches. For decades, black churches have remained the least ethnically diverse out of all churches. Still, the diversity within the churches has been slowly changing the landscape of congregations. From 1998 to 2019, there has been a significant increase in ethnically diverse congregations. The pattern is expanding as opposed to plateauing (Dougherty et al., 2020, p. 654). Diverse Catholic parishes are on the rise, as priests often serve multiple ethnic and linguistic groups through shared parishes (Reynolds, 2019). The diversity within Christian fellowship communities made the members more accepting of other ethnic groups. These are very hopeful numbers. However, studies have found that ethnic diversity within a church may be superficial.

Though diversity is increasing, the work toward integrating Sunday mornings appears one-sided. When minorities are asked about their multiracial congregations, they believe numerous racial issues are being ignored, as opposed to white congregants (Oyakawa, 2019). However, white people that attend a multiracial congregation are far less likely to socially distance themselves from other races (Becker, 1998). Black churches are known to be less ethnically diverse because fewer white

people choose to visit a black congregation as opposed to black individuals coming to a multiracial church (Jenkins, 2013). Studies have found that church attendance is in decline, yet an area of significant growth has been in Latinos attending Protestant churches (Ramos et al., 2018). Multiracial churches are growing, and Scripture supports this trend. However, multiracial congregations do not occur by accident.

Leaders have worked intentionally to bring different groups together in hopes of changing the tapestry within a church. Pastors leading multiracial congregations found that languages, worship styles, and rituals are the most significant obstacles in building a bridge of inclusivity for congregations (Priest & Edwards, 2019). Leaders that have found the beauty within different ethnic groups coming together understand the obstacles and find the conversations worth the growth that happens in such churches. Integrating different people groups requires tenacity to not give up after the first obstacle but rather have the necessary conversations to keep growing together.

However, as ethnic diversity has increased, gender diversity has declined dramatically. In the last ten years, research has found that 16 million women have left the church in the last decade (Anderson, 2023). Patriarchal beliefs within Christian communities have led to women being seen as less than in churches, which is more than in the secular world (Wood, 2019). Women receive rules on the clothes they should wear to foster modesty. In addition, messages regarding women's inferior place in Scripture and not seeing women teaching the Word deter women from engaging in churches (Wood, 2019). The predominant male language found within church leadership, by-laws, and organizational documents further limit women's feeling welcomed into a congregation (Kwaramba & Dreyer, 2019). As more women are found in the leadership of businesses, women continue to have a limited voice in the leadership of the church. All of the above factors contribute to women leaving the church.

Diversity, equality, and inclusion are essential conversations and have responses in the Bible. The biblical view does not limit the voice of people groups (Baptista, 2019). It provides a strong response for the individuals that have felt ignored. The biblical examples show the importance of diversity and inclusion modeled by Jesus Christ and how they can make God's work here closer to the ideal ecumenical framework.

### 14.3 BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE—DIVERSITY, EQUALITY, AND INCLUSION

From the beginning, the uniqueness and diversity within the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit embrace the unity hoped for by God’s people. Genesis 1:26, “So God created Him in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them” (English Standard Version). God decided from the start that a creation that closely resembled Him was needed. Thus, humankind was created. It is also made clear that the creation of both male and female reflects the image of God (Wenham, 2014). Scripture does not teach that only the male was created in God’s image but is specific to state that “both male and female” were created in the image of the Creator. The Trinity reflects both male and female traits that glorify the beauty of inclusion within the Church (Boyce, 2020). The above Scripture clarifies that women are a counterpart to men, not a subordinate (Bøsterud, 2021). Both males and females were given dominion over all creatures in Genesis 1:28 and were the only creation given that authority (Bøsterud, 2021). God gave importance to all humankind from the very beginning.

In Genesis 1:28, God commanded the man and woman to “go forth and multiply.” As the population grew and expanded worldwide, races and ethnic groups naturally grew. Racial diversity was never a result of sin to separate God’s people from others (Boyce, 2020). Instead, it further glorifies the diversity of God. As the tribes, countries, languages, and peoples diversified through the circumstances in which they relocated, the people of God exemplified the beauty and creativity first seen as God created the heavens, earth, land, and all creation. The diversification of God’s people brought color and variation that His Church should celebrate and embrace.

The New Testament provides more evidence for the diversity of God’s people. Galatians 3:27–29 teach, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (English Standard Version). Paul taught the superiority of the belief in Jesus Christ over everything else (Campbell, 2008). Becoming a Christian did not change one’s ethnicity or gender, but the importance remained in whether one believed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for humankind’s sins. Our most significant

identifying trait must be our relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul urges the reader to focus on Jesus Christ, in themselves and others.

Even as the biblical models show the importance of diversity by God, studies have found that within the United States, images of God align with one's race. Roberts et al. published a study of how Christians often perceive God as a white male (2020). White Christians perceived God as a white male, and black Christians believed God to be a black male. Within majority and minority groups, Christians of all races perceive God as more white than black, and all perceive God as more male than female. A surprising find to the researchers was that United States children of diverse races all believed God to be less prejudiced than they are. The children strongly believed that God loved all races and genders, as opposed to how the children felt about others. Throughout the research, the conclusion was that most people surveyed imagined God as a white male.

If individuals come to church believing that God is a white male, it is easier for them to expect that in the church's leaders. Black or female pastors are perceived at a lower level of authority and go through a process of proving themselves that white male pastors do not face. Pastors of color and female pastors speak about the higher standard expected from them and a season of proving their capabilities to the church.

Throughout this book, the theological basis and grounding aligning women in ministry have been provided. However, the glorious diversity, equality, and inclusion show the ecumenical community growing toward the beautiful picture of the Church as one (Boyce, 2020). God's people are looking toward the hearts of other believers and growing past the differences. Bridges across divisions solidify the beauty found in the Garden of Eden in the very beginning. At the same time, it is abundantly clear that more intentional work by God's people needs to occur.

#### 14.4 RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

For decades the term restorative justice has been utilized when speaking to diversity and lack of inclusivity. Attributes of restorative justice have been provided by Van Willgenburg and Van der Borgh (2021). Restorative justice pertains to misconduct against persons or human rights. Attention is given to the person(s) harmed. The harmed persons are given a stance of empowerment and a voice to speak about the offenses. Restorative justice does not provide a criminal sentence or punitive

damage. The focus is on the persons harmed and restoring their voice to the issue.

For the basis of this research, restorative justice must be seen through a biblical lens. Tushima provides a biblical perspective on peace and justice (2019). Biblical peace lies within a life without conflict, aligned with the Creator, and finding security with one's self and environment. The biblical model of justice is defined as a faithful administration of decency and fairness and maintaining the right relationships within a community. In these definitions, the reader can see the emphasis on uniting with the community again and living harmonically within it.

All of the definitions focus on the persons that have been harmed or discriminated against. Thus, it provides a platform or areas for the harmed parties to voice their stories and struggles. In addition, the listeners provide a listening ear and an active approach to react in a positive manner moving forward. Restorative justice and biblical justice provide avenues to hear the persons harmed and to find a path back to the community.

Acknowledging the prejudices and privileges that each individual has experienced is a place to start. A white woman has experienced both places of privilege as a white person and the prejudice of being a female, especially within the church. Overweight people, thin people, short people, tall people, and every human has been prejudged before they are known, and thus they should not have to work hard to appreciate the struggle of those oppressed. Empathy does not require a person to know exactly how another person feels, but to be sensitive to their struggles and hurts. Thus, believers can empathize with others who have been prejudged based on their skin or gender and choose to work against those prejudices.

As children of the same God, it is crucial to allow space for the voices of the hurt individuals, not to fix the problem instantly but to see solutions moving forward. The listener is responsible for being a part of the greater solutions after learning about the offenses. Once a believer has learned of discrimination, a response toward restorative justice is vital for the entire body of believers to grow toward the unified Church. If an individual learns of the discrimination and chooses to do nothing, they are now part of the problem rather than the solution.

## 14.5 WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR WOMEN IN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

Thus far, this chapter has looked at diversity and equality through the lens of both race and gender. Now the lens will settle solely on how this information impacts women in Christian leadership roles. Studies have found women rising in leadership roles in business and commerce, but the church has remained a place where women are openly restricted, and patriarchal views prevail.

The Bible is clear in the creation of males and females in the image of the Trinity. When leadership keeps women out of prayer meetings, ministerial vocations, and preaching positions, the church body is limited to only the male viewpoint. The Trinity encompasses both male and female traits, so it is vital for God's people to hear from both (Shin, 2021). Christian churches need both male and female scholars and colleagues to learn from each other and appreciate the unique viewpoints each brings to the community (Kessler, 2022). Doctrines and traditions can align with Scripture and recognize that all of God's people were created on equal grounding, no matter their race or gender (Slater, 2020). Scholars have successfully presented the biblical answer to women in Christian leadership, but many doctrines and traditions must also affirm their role.

Women have been the core of churches for decades. From teaching children to equipping churches with vocation Bible schools to leading women's Bible studies to building fellowship, women have been in leadership roles for generations. Ordination and preaching from women is the area of most significant concern, even though women have been vital leaders in Christian faith communities for centuries (Duncan, 2019). During times of great need, the traditions of women not preaching were set aside, as was done during World War II, when so many men were off at war or arrested by Nazis (Lazarsfeld-Jensen, 2022). Hundreds of emergency ordinations occurred to teach the communities and provide the sacraments. These were incredibly terrifying roles for women in European countries, as they could lead to arrest and placement into concentration camps. Once the war ended, all of the emergency ordinations were voided. If women can step into these roles during a crisis, they can continue to serve without one.

One of the greatest ironies is that Christian churches will take a strong stand against violence against women or justice issues that women face globally (Thomas, 2022). However, women at every level of Christian

leadership have countless stories of sexual harassment, sexism, and gender-based violence (Thomas, 2022). Women are generally perceived as inferior in churches, and those views open the door to more violence toward them (Magezi & Manzanga, 2019). Stereotypes also limit the potential that women can strive for, which in itself is an injustice against women (Wood, 2019). The Christian community suffers when women are caged by limitations placed upon them, and their voice is limited or restricted.

Women in Christian leadership often talk about the times they held back opinions or views while attending church or study groups. These same women speak their views, give opinions, and manage teams in the business world. However, women relinquish leadership roles and their voices in the church to accommodate the patriarchy and masculine mindset (Baloyi, 2022). Women in the church can all speak to times they fell silent, not to overstep or be perceived as too vocal. The church should be a place of safety and freedom to discuss topics impacting community members. Instead, half or more of its population is silent due to insufficient theological doctrine and traditions.

Thus far, it has been proven that growth and change are coming in more inclusive environments within the body of Christ, but more work must be done. This work will be intentional and strategic. Believing that if the community of believers follows the Bible, the inclusivity will change on its own is naïve and a passive response. Churches must strive to foster a culture that leans into issues of gender and race. Leaders with a social justice and diversity lens must guide the people closer to inclusion.

## 14.6 GOING FORWARD

One of the greatest hopes for the future of churches is the influx of people of color and women in seminaries. The seminaries across the United States have been more diverse every year (Snarr, 2019). Representation matters, and more diverse communities coming through seminaries turn into a more diverse population of leaders in Christian faith communities. It will be the responsibility of the church bodies to embrace these new seminarians upon graduation. Intentionally striving to change the tapestry of our congregations leads to more socially aware members who welcome diversity in the church. Diversity is found throughout the world congregants live in, and the church should be as diverse. The church should be the leader in integrating different people into one people group celebrating Jesus Christ.



Specifically, bringing women into the leadership circle of churches opens the door to a broader view of the world and the Word of God. Studies have found that corporations with gender-balanced boardrooms experience greater stability and economic growth (Brieger et al., 2017). Women in leadership have proven to expand recruitment practices and create a welcoming atmosphere for more women. Including women in leadership expands the scholars brainstorming and conversing about management practices, governing structures, and the organization's overall health. Women and men see things through different lenses, and appreciating both lenses only strengthens the organization.

For Christian faith communities to move forward, they must address the problem proactively. Theologically speaking, scholars have proven over and over again the partnership that men and women play in the church. It is time for the churches to have honest conversations concerning the leadership women have always offered to their churches. The way toward healing is by recognizing the problem and long-term harm and providing a place for the harmed individuals to speak freely (Riley, 2017). It is time for leaders of churches to listen to the hurt that has intentionally and unintentionally been committed.

As discussed earlier, diversifying a church body is an intentional paradigm shift. The leadership of the church must be proactive in building a diversified community. This begins by looking at policies and statements of faith to make sure they have welcoming language (Barnett, 2020). This does not mean the Christian tenets are watered down at all. It ensures the wording is not only focused on male leaders or white people. If the only pronoun used through the leadership codes and policies is male, women will assume their skills are not welcomed. Hiring and recruiting individuals that welcome more people of color and more women opens the door to a more diversified congregation (Barnett, 2020). A visitor to the church should be welcomed by a community that is welcoming to all of God's people and the tapestry they represent.

It is a crucial time in the United States and the church, and our responsibility is to invest in the generations coming behind us. Our young people went through a pandemic, social discord, and political dissension in a short time frame. They are watching to see how Christians will respond. Ignoring the hurting individuals and discounting collective voices is not the answer for the church (Kerwin & Alulema, 2021). Christians should be leading the way in listening to the voices of the hurt

people. The church should teach the world unique ways to reach the discounted individuals, just as Christ did.

Part of being part of the Christian faith means an added responsibility. If an individual is unaware of a problem, they are not expected to respond. However, once they know that persons have been wounded due to actions within the church, Christians are responsible for being a part of the solution. Individuals cannot save every church, but each Christian can impact their circle to make room for inclusivity. Every Christian can use their voice in leadership rooms to bring up diversity and equality. The only way toward change is by enough Christians choosing to be a part of the solution. Contributing to the solution will look different in every community, but every step is closer to God's desired image for His church.

## 14.7 CONCLUSION

As communities of Christian faith look to the future, intentional conversations and actions must move toward diversity, equality, and inclusivity. The outside often sees the church as outdated, looking nothing like the world encountered daily. The churches that actively strive toward diversity are growing at far greater speeds, and they replicate their local community (Keller, 2023). For the Christian faith to grow and impact the world, it must stop looking segregated and divided.

Christian churches are not called to look exactly like the world. They are called to be a set-apart community that changes the world for the better. The church provides charity for the needy, messages of community over self-centeredness, challenges to remain married through trials, and avoiding unhealthy sexual expressions (Keller, 2023). All of these impact the world for the greater good and show the importance of the Church. The Church is a beautiful and needed entity within the world.

In hopes of changing the texture within churches, the Christian tenets should never be compromised or water-downed. This chapter and all proceeding chapters have laid the firm foundation of biblical principles that support women in Christian leadership and ethnic diversity within churches. Our Christian communities are strengthened, not compromised, by welcoming these impacted groups. However, leadership must be diligent in protecting Christian principles to remain faithful to the Word of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ.

By opening doors to different ethnic groups and women, the Christian Church looks closer to what people see in the outside world while

protecting the framework upon which the Church was built. Churches are not compromising by taking affirmative steps toward diversifying the congregation. The exact opposite is true. When churches let traditions dictate the church steps, they only add to the arguments that dissenters argue about the church and limit the overarching impact Christian faith communities can have upon the world.

As leaders look to the future and the impact they hope to make upon the world around the Church, they must open their eyes to the groups impacted by prejudice and insufficient theological arguments. Allowing the Word of God to be seen through different viewpoints and experiences of scholars provides a greater understanding to be shared with the whole body. It also positively influences how the congregants respond to these same impacted groups outside of the church walls.

Christian churches have the answers to all of the weariness and sin in the world, and it is time for our congregations to evolve into a landscape that proactively removes barriers to entering the doors. Church bodies must embrace the beauty and viewpoints found through diversity, equity, and inclusivity. As they work toward this magnificent ecumenical framework, the people of the world will observe and begin to discover their place within Christian church bodies.

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# Career, Life, and Family: Do Christian Women Have to Choose

*Ashley Graves*

## 15.1 INTRODUCTION

In life, there are some universal truths that many people accept. Some will try to find the exception to the rule, but in the end, most people assume that truth. For mothers worldwide, this truth is that motherhood guilt is a reality for most. Mothers often feel guilty when they are home with their children or, conversely, if they are at work. Mothers feel guilty if they are stay-at-home mothers who may not contribute to the family income but contribute in countless other ways or feel guilty when they work yet have fewer hours in the day with their children. Motherhood guilt is part of most mothers' lives; it is a mental battle many struggle with daily.

Across the board, research has proven that women experience much more guilt than men when balancing family and career (Aarntzen et al., 2022; Rajgariah et al., 2021; Zanhour & Sumpter, 2022). Gender stereotyping of men being the breadwinner of the family and women being the

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255

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caregiver contributes to women carrying far more guilt than men when work interferes with the home (Aarntzen et al., 2022). The pandemic brought this to the surface for many families. Studies showed that women were far more responsible for the children's schoolwork and care during the lockdown while trying to be the ideal employee at the same time (Zanhour & Sumpter, 2022). Men were found to focus on their work far more than assisting the children (Zanhour & Sumpter, 2022). The research concluded that working and stay-at-home mothers experience a high-stress level, but working mothers are at a higher level (Rajgariah et al., 2021). Working mothers grapple with a feeling of not being there for their children as the social, emotional, and physical obstacles increase as the child matures (Edgley, 2021). Even in mid-life, mothers carry a heavier burden for their older children and aging parents than men in the same age group, who speak to greater flexibility and freedom in their later years (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). Mothers strive to keep minimal stress and guilt as the tightrope walk becomes a daily practice.

Men actively engaged in the children's lives and care positively impact the degree of stress and guilt. When mothers could keep the children in 50% volunteer childcare by a spouse, friend, or family member and 50% in paid childcare, the mother's satisfaction with work-life balance increased significantly (Luppi & Arpino, 2020). In addition, women in a more egalitarian relationship experienced far less guilt and less weight on their shoulders to do all the work within the home when they finished working (Aarntzen et al., 2022). Across the board, unmarried mothers carry the heaviest workload for all mothers, and as women's education increases, so does the number of hours that she works (Hazan & Zoabi, 2014). Even within more egalitarian homes, the father described the mother as the primary caregiver in daily schedules, routines, and emotional and fundamental needs (Niemistö et al., 2021). Fathers are vital to the degree of stress and lack of balance that mothers battle. The more engaged they are with the home and family life, the less stress the mother carries daily.

Working mothers often experience another level of guilt from Christian communities and churches. Often, women find patriarchal and outdated traditions within the church walls, confusing them about their place as a working mother (Baloyi, 2022). Even as the secular workforce progressed toward equality, the church has appeared far behind (Wood, 2019). Women speak of feeling judged by others in the church for following a career. Studies found that women desire pastors that acknowledge the trials of working mothers, family struggles, and time constraints for it all

(Howard Ecklund et al., 2020). The same study discovered that women would feel seen in the church if pastors spoke to what they offer within and outside the home and by affirming women working outside the home. Such conversations and sermons would make them feel more legitimate within their congregation. Women are looking to their church to affirm that they are providing for their families by working and to help alleviate the guilt. Furthermore, many women find great purpose within their careers, and affirmation within the church would acknowledge their impact.

The following chapter will examine the Scriptural truths for women who have dealt with motherhood and working guilt. There will be examples of women that had a career in the Bible. Scriptural truths will be presented for all women as they struggle to balance life. It will be followed by healthy habits to care for women and the stress they carry. The fact is that women have been working, raising families, and supporting their spouses from the beginning with Adam and Eve. Women wearing many different hats is not new, but women can choose to the degree they will engage in each area. They now have more freedom to decide what is best for their family. However, the most crucial point is determining the call the Lord has placed upon their lives and their place to do God's work here on earth. Women provide such a unique perspective on the world around them, and their voice is needed. The hope is that this piece of work will show the irreplaceable value and need for every woman to complete God's work.

## 15.2 SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLES OF WOMEN

In previous chapters, authors investigated Deborah, Esther, the woman described in Proverbs 31, and the many women who helped build the Church. However, this chapter will expand the list of women who held jobs outside of their home lives, and they changed the course of history forever. In addition, it will look at mothers and their role in building up families. These Scriptural models hope to encourage women in the many roles they provide in the home.

In Exodus 1, a scared king ordered Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, to kill all newborn males. This ordered infanticide was meant to control the population of Hebrews and contain their numbers (Walton et al., 2000). For fear of the Lord, the midwives ignored the Pharaoh and allowed the male babies to live. By doing so, the midwives were



blessed with families, and Moses was born to lead the Israelites to freedom (Berlin & Brettler, 2014). Two women had a role in delivering children and assisting new mothers. Later, they would become mothers. Due to fear of God, their obedience would change the world. One of the babies would grow to be a man, lead God's people, and change the world. They may have thought their role was minor. They may have discounted their fears. They may have doubted their value in the grand scheme of life. However, they changed the world.

Joshua 2 introduced a prostitute named Rahab, who would again change history. Rahab conceals spies who explored the land of Canaan. Not only did she hide them, but she also equipped them with information to be successful in the battle (Waltke, 1994). Rahab affirmed her belief in the God the spies believed in and would negotiate the safety of her father, mother, brother, sister, and household. Rahab recognized the might of the deity of the Israelites and declared allegiance to Him (Clendenen, 2009). The Israelites moved forward and took the land of Canaan. Being a prostitute, Rahab would have no clout or connections to save herself if caught. The danger was far greater for her than for the spies; thus, she was a hero. What started as a typical day for Rahab would align her with spies and save her entire family. Her bravery would change the generations to come. Days before those events, Rahab may have discounted her value. She may have questioned what her life was meant to be. However, she changed the world.

In 2 Kings 22, Huldah was the only prophetess mentioned in the book of Kings, and King Josiah sought her out to discern the Lord. King Josiah ordered a temple renovation and discovered the *Book of Law*. Hearing the words within the book, King Josiah knew of the importance. He ordered his high priest, secretary, and attendant to go to Huldah to discern what was found (Waltke, 1994). Huldah warned of the wrath of God because the law had been ignored. She proclaimed that King Josiah would not witness the destruction due to his repentance at the discovery. King Josiah preceded a rebirth of the Mosaic Law in the land, and many proclaimed him a king in the status of King David (Berlin & Brettler, 2014; Waltke, 1994). Without the wisdom of Huldah, a prophetess and wife, the rebirth would not have occurred. She lived her life pursuing the Lord and honoring her husband. Huldah did not know that an ordinary day would bring a remarkable discovery to her door. Huldah was only one of a few prophetesses in the Old Testament, but her voice was heard.

Her discernment led to a country returning to the Lord. She changed the course of history.

In Acts 16, Lydia was transformed by the words of Paul. Lydia was a worshiper of God, the seller of purple goods, and had a household. She would house Paul and those following him on at least two occasions. The descriptors of Lydia within Acts 16 offer many clues. Being a “worshiper of God” would refer to her being a Gentile, and dealing in “purple goods” would mean that she was a woman of means and influence (Clendenen, 2009). Leading her household to the Lord and offering her home to Paul and his colleagues affirm her place of prominence and means (Waltke, 1994). Though Lydia was not a Jew, she believed in God, held prayer meetings, and was baptized by Paul. Though Lydia had a position and business, she housed a meeting of God’s people and opened her home to His teachers. She modeled faith, led women in His teachings, and had a career. Lydia did not know that a regular prayer meeting would change her life and lead to her baptism by Paul. She would assume it would be a regular meeting. One meeting of prayer with other women would change their lives.

In Acts 18, Priscilla is introduced with her husband. She was a Jew who converted to Christianity and had a business with her husband. Not only does the reader see Priscilla as a career woman, but she is also a teacher of the Word of God. Priscilla and her husband portrayed the beauty of God’s people working in tandem with their spouses (Waltke, 1994). They were a clear example of a husband and a wife guiding followers of Jesus together. Jesus transformed Priscilla, and she would become a guiding light to women who followed her. Countless women look to Priscilla today as an example of women knowing the Word of God and being able to teach it. She had no idea her life would impact so many as she worked in her trade and spoke of the Lord she loved.

### 15.3 SCRIPTURAL TRUTHS FOR WOMEN

Examples of women having families, careers, and living for God in the Bible have been presented. During the times of the Bible, women were seen as less than, yet over and over again, God would highlight women that impacted His story (Stern, 1999). God proves that He saw and gave value to women when the world did not. Though acknowledging the women that have come before offers excellent examples, it is vital to

counter the guilt that women feel through Scripture. By knowing God's Word, women can walk in the truth as they strive to live a life of balance.

- *No Condemnation*: Women often feel they are letting their families and workplaces down. Even when a woman stays at home, this chapter explains the guilt women endure. However, the Word of God boldly proclaims no condemnation for those in Christ (Romans 8:1). If one confesses their inadequacies, they are assured forgiveness in Christ (1 John 1:9). Jesus did not come to this world to condemn us, but to save us (John 3:17). Therefore, when a woman is overcome with guilt and feelings of lacking, these Scriptures speak to the truth of the Lord's covering from condemnation.
- *Trust the Lord*: Trusting the Lord as women balance the trials of life is vital. Biblical truths include the Lord being one's strength and trusting Him (Isaiah 12:2), knowing that one does not need to fear because God will not leave His children (Isaiah 41:10), and acknowledging that the enemy comes to destroy. However, the Lord comes to protect us (John 10:10). Jesus taught us to believe Him above worrying about things in the world (John 14:1). Resting in the fact that the Lord is our rock and shield, and one must trust that truth (Psalm 28:7). These are a sampling of numerous Scriptures speaking to the peace and hope that comes in trusting the Lord.
- *Strength in the Lord*: Women speak of weariness and not feeling that they can accomplish all they desire to get done. The truth is that only with the Lord can women find the strength to battle all on their plates. Scripture repeatedly tells believers that their strength source is in the Lord (Isaiah 45:24, Psalm 28:8, Psalm 37:39, Habakkuk 3:19). Women must acknowledge that the only strength and balance in life are found in the Lord. This small sampling of Scriptures are a starting place for women to find truths that strength can only come from the Lord.

## 15.4 HEALTHY HABITS FOR WOMEN

Though Scripture is a primary source for women to secure their identity and peace in life, other healthy habits have proven to equip them for daily hardships. Individuals can often be told to reduce their stress, but many of those stressors are not going away. Therefore, it is essential to care for

one's body and health as one experiences stress. The following list will identify practices that care for women as they try to manage the stressor of life.

1. **Time with the Lord:** Time with the Lord does not have to be hours. Studies have found that 15–20 minutes of meditation and mindfulness significantly decreased anxiety, stress, and depression in students (González-Valero et al., 2019). Thus, if women take a few moments every day to connect to the Lord and meditate on the Word of God, one can expect the same reduction in anxiety, stress, and depression. Christian women often speak about the relief and grounding they feel by spending time with the Lord during their day (Slavkova, 2021). Life's stressors do not disappear, but how they respond to them is transformed by time with the Lord.
2. **Mentorships:** Far more than male counterparts, mentorships significantly influence women. Hill and Wheat found that mentorships helped women as they maneuvered an organization's social and career climates (2017). Having time with women that have gone before them allowed a unique perspective that guided women along their career paths. Mentoring offers a balance of emotional support and advice that women find beneficial (Longman et al., 2019). Mentees are more confident and secure in seeking help moving forward (Anthony & Soontiens, 2019). The mentoring relationship is deeper when one's faith is included, especially if the mentee has never experienced a Christian mentor. Bringing Christian practices into the mentorship offers even more insight and wisdom.
3. **Community Priority:** As women juggle family and careers, their social life can take a backseat. Women begin isolating themselves, whether at home or working outside the home. It is vital to find community with other women (Rajgariah et al., 2021). Time to go to lunch, Bible study, or exercise leads to women expanding their circle. Stay-at-home mothers struggle to find childcare or feel guilty about asking for time without the children. While working mothers feel guilty doing something without their children when they are off work. However, this time with fellow women and friends makes mothers and wives more balanced and less stressed for their families.
4. **Sleep:** Sleep is an often-overlooked struggle for many women. Studies have found that people are often unaware of how the lack of sleep or interrupted sleep affects memory issues, decision-making

abilities, and cognitive accuracy (Worley, 2018). In addition, sleep deprivation significantly affects emotional health for the worse. Individuals that are sleep deprived are often only aware of the impact that it is having on their decision-making processes or emotions once something has happened. Women must understand the simple importance of sleep. Adequate and consistent sleep of six to eight hours a night will positively impact stress.

5. **Taking Time for Joy:** As women give so much to family and work life, women need to find areas that bring them joy. Hobbies that include reading, exercise, crocheting, and crafting relieve stressed women. Giving themselves the gift of disconnecting from the world and turning their mind off for an activity is very rewarding. Again, they can sometimes feel guilty in this area as they care for themselves and not others, but it is a gift they can give to themselves to help others from a place of balance.
6. **Stop Comparison:** It is not surprising that women compare themselves to each other, but studies can confirm the negative impact. Lipson and Sonnevile found that 17% of undergraduate female students are at high risk for an eating disorder (2017). Additional studies found that undergraduate females engaged in weight, appearance, and size comparisons far more than in Muslim countries (Sahlan et al., 2021). The trend does not stop with age. A study of mid-life women found that after comparisons, they had opposing views in their minds and prematurely stopped physical activity (Arigo et al., 2021). When women fall into the trap of comparing themselves to others, the impact has not been positive. Most often, it leaves women feeling less than their counterparts and inferior in one way or another. Stop comparing oneself and acknowledging the beauty of differences reduces stress.
7. **Actively Encourage Other Women:** Just as the comparison is harmful, actively encouraging and lifting other women has a powerful impact. As studies stated, the importance of mentoring is far more reaching due to the encouraging and empowering relationships (Hill & Wheat, 2017). Actively supporting other women in any area of influence can have a lasting impact. One does not have to look far in media, television, and entertainment arenas to find women pitted against each other. One of the most pivotal ways Christian women can model characteristics counter from the world would be to encourage and cheer other women. Making the

active decision to be an encourager of other women will not only impact other women but also change the mind and thoughts of the encourager.

Women profoundly impact the world around them, but Christian women have an even more significant impact. Not only do they impact the world as a woman, but they can also impact the world as Christians. Christians are called to be salt and light to the world (Matthew 5:13–16). Women bring that beauty into their families, marriages, friendships, and workplaces. The mission field is a diverse terrain that needs the voice of godly women to bring love and truth to it.

### 15.5 THE CALL OF CHRISTIAN WOMEN

Thus far, this chapter has acknowledged women's stress and guilt in their many roles. May the reader not leave discouraged or feel less than others. Instead, may the reader know that the importance of the female voice is priceless, irreplaceable, and needed in the world today.

In Genesis 1:26–28, the Bible is clear that both males and females are made in the image of God. Thus, when only one gender has a voice in the room, the audience does not have the overall viewpoints represented in God. God is not either male or female. Scripture teaches that both genders are modeled after God. It is vital to hear both voices in all areas. Now more than ever, it is vital for women to have a voice in arenas where they may have been lacking in the church. Female scholars, pastors, theologians, and Bible teachers bring a different lens to Scripture. Their view is not better or inferior, just different. That is the absolute beauty within the Trinity and, therefore, in bringing men and women together to examine God's Word, the people of God receive a more complete perspective of the Word of God.

Earlier in this chapter, it was proven how often women remain the family's primary caretaker. Though more families are taking on egalitarian roles within the home, women carry a heavier weight of caring for the family. Women and men are both vital within homes. Just as in the workplace, both bring different viewpoints and experiences to the children and home life. Mutual respect must coexist to value both genders in the home.

Though both genders are vital, a woman's voice for the family and children cannot be ignored. As a lioness fights for her cubs, the world needs godly mothers to fight for their children. Her voice is unparalleled

within the walls of the home, schools, church, sporting venues, social venues, and communities. Wherever children are found, the voice of the mother must not be silenced or ignored. In the same way, women cannot be silent. Women must use their voices and opinions in the world they live. By remaining disobediently silent, women leave the door for others to speak for children that do not have Christian values or truths. This is especially dangerous when outside voices are speaking into the lives of children.

The voice of a woman is vital in all areas. Whether a woman chooses to have children or not, stay at home, or be in the workplace, women bring to life views and insights that make the world a better place. Their existence from back to Genesis impacted humankind and will continue to do so. Christian women must answer the call to impact the world for the betterment of God and His Kingdom. Christian women have changed the world throughout history, and now it is no different. The Lord needs godly women willing to speak the truth in a dying world.

## 15.6 NO NEED TO CHOOSE

Now that it is clear that women must be vocal and seen in the world, home, and church, they can no longer be ignored nor be asked to choose. The world misses so much by placing women in boxes and asking them to choose. Women bring God to the world through prayers as they counter obstacles (Slavkova, 2021). On countless occasions, women exemplify missional living as they merge their love of the Lord into their workplaces, homes, schools, and all other places they serve and lead.

Studies have discovered that women asked to choose less often between work and family are far more balanced and find more joy in all areas of life. Women that enjoy their workspace and the organizational environment are more likely to stay employed there (Sriram et al., 2022). Organizations that offer more flexible hours and the ability to attend family functions also retain more female workers (Woolnough & Redshaw, 2016). Furthermore, organizational cultures open to female views provide environments where more women desire participation (Cho et al., 2019). When organizations make the space open and welcoming to women, fewer women will have to choose between one way of life or another. Organizational culture can be open to families and value female roles within those families. By doing so, women will continue to be empowered within their organizations and homes.

As the younger females mature, they watch the women before them to see the path made. The critical question lies in what they are watching. If a woman models a life out of balance and stress as the driving factor within their home and life, the young female may decide quickly that they do not want a career or that they do not want a family. If they experience a church where women are not affirmed and appreciated in their many roles, these young eyes may leave the church altogether. However, if the child experiences a mother living with passion and peace within the workplace, church, and family, that child will only know that choosing is unnecessary. Imagine a world where the female voice is encouraged, celebrated, and highlighted, so the younger generation wants to be an active voice as she grows into adulthood. Imagine the new viewpoints and voices that can change the world for the better.

The greater choice may not be whether a woman has to choose between a career or a home but how she chooses to balance them. In April of 2021, over four million Americans left the workforce and participated in what economists called the ‘great resignation’ (Morgan, 2022). Most cited refocusing on family rather than their careers as the reason. Some started their own businesses or moved to a better organizational culture, but a desire to slow down and reprioritize was the reason (Morgan, 2022). Many decided the strenuous career life was not worth the stress and decided upon a part-time or more flexible position. In December 2022 and January 2023, 1.2 million Americans moved to part-time positions, with over 22 million current part-timers who work 35 hours a week or less (Wilde, 2023). The “great resignation” found women leaving the workforce twice as much as men, and one-third of working mothers scaled back their work or resigned after the pandemic (Lee, 2021). Many hypothesize what this means to the workforce moving forward, but the point is that women are making choices in their lives about how they balance work and family.

## 15.7 CONCLUSION

As children of God, Christian women are given many opportunities to choose the life they desire for themselves and their families. Studies affirm that the mother is the core factor in smoothing the transitions between work and home life (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). When they are allowed the opportunity to have freedom and a voice, they have a greater chance to choose the best model for their home life and family.



Countless women choose to stay at home. These women often volunteer at organizations to impact the community and focus on the care of the family. That model may be the extraordinary mission the Lord has given them. It should never be mocked or seen as less than others. The value she brings to her home and family is irreplaceable and priceless. Likewise, some women have been given a mission in the workplace. Their heart is to serve in a career and be a wife and mother. Again, this woman should never be judged or seen as less than others. She has followed the passion in her heart and is serving her best in both environments. Women must celebrate and encourage each other whichever choice they make for themselves and their families.

Where we should mourn should be the woman who has no choice. The woman that has no voice in her economic situation. The woman forced to stay within the home by an abusive spouse. The woman who has been told to sit down and shut up too many times and in too many scenarios. We should mourn the women that are not allowed the possibility to dream. The Christian community should grieve the female voice that has been silenced due to outdated traditions.

To be able to ask if women should have to choose between a career and a family models a great deal of privilege. Millions of women do not have the luxury of choice. They are trying desperately to keep food on the table. Many are single mothers juggling all of it alone. Many are women without a partner or support system. They are mothers spending the day in and day out trying to survive by any means possible and, hopefully, raise their children to adulthood. If these women were asked about choosing between work and family, they would explain that they do not have a choice. Their only option is to try to survive.

Many Christian women may need to take a hard look at the privilege of choice available to them and ask the Lord how they can assist the women without a choice. Serving to help a single mother, an elderly widow without children, or within a shelter for abused women can create an opportunity for women to uplift other women with the love of Christ. Women know how to care for others. They have always done it. Now that choice may be to seek out other women that need support and help.

Overall, women carry so many stressors and levels of guilt in their daily life. However, practices within our Christian faith offer relief and hope during stressful times. Leaning into the truths of Scripture, time with the Lord and a community of other Christian women relieve the burdens as they lean into the Lord. Throughout the day, women make countless

choices on where their focus and attention will be, but remaining with their eyes on Jesus, those choices can be more manageable. Remaining connected to God maintains their strength and diligence as they continue to impact and change the world for the better. Women are the backbone of our homes, communities, and churches. Creating space for their insight, perspective, and different opinions only strengthens the world around them.

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# Beliefs and Action Steps

*Stefanie Ertel*

## 16.1 INTRODUCTION

Why are we still talking about women in leadership in various contexts? Many women today are empowered in their current environments, but some are not. Many women have the support system and environment they need to thrive without the support of other people highly advocating for them, and honestly, others do not. Additionally, some of these perspectives are only perceived, but it is critical to note that this is only sometimes the case. The shift is happening, more and more women are in leadership, and more and more women desire to be leaders. The shift is happening within women, and the shift is happening within various cultures and societies.

I have personally experienced both extremes. I have been in environments where I have had an equal voice to everyone in the room on significant decisions of an organization. In that environment, I did not need advocacy or desire it. I wanted my ideas to speak for themselves,

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271

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not my gender, age, or race. As a woman, I have also personally experienced times I needed to be silent within cross-cultural circumstances, or at least until the male leader communicated his support. I have heard women describing circumstances in which they believe they were treated differently. Often, I could discern that it was not based on their gender but rather their inexperience or lack of emotional intelligence. However, there are notable instances that are rarer, that it was evident they were treated unjustly due to their gender.

To many outsiders looking in, the local church would be a common offender of women. Many have been offended by the local church; some women leaders will look elsewhere to invest their talents due to the use, appreciation, and impact of their investment within the Christian community. Offenders could be church leadership, but many times it is other church members who have a particular mindset of what a church service and church leadership should look like. Many men in church leadership empower women today to be leaders and pastors. Many of them see the potential in women and what they offer as leaders to the Body of Christ. To move forward, it is critical to define and communicate the theological line set in one's environment about women in leadership and specifically for Christian organizations and local churches.

## 16.2 DETERMINING YOUR THEOLOGICAL LINE

Throughout this book, many chapters can be used as resources to help solidify the theological line concerning women in leadership. Where one clearly defines their line should be based on sound hermeneutical study. When discussing a theological line concerning women in leadership, Cole (2019) addresses the area between a local church's line, where women are comfortable leading, and the space between the two. According to Cole (2019), "In my experience, most godly women are very aware there is a line somewhere, and because they are concerned about overstepping that line, they will often stay way below what you believe they have an opportunity to do. This gap is one of the places where you have incredible untapped leadership potential" (p. 18). It is crucial to determine one's theological line, communicate it, and determine the best practices to empower women to lead to their fullest potential. This needs to permeate the culture through words, actions, and opportunities for women to step into leadership while being supported by the local church, the Christian organization, the non-profit organization, and beyond.

The Church is able to apply principles from organizational leadership theory; although this is not the only source which Christian leaders should look to, study, and apply leadership concepts, this can help consult the practicality of leadership approaches and practices (Crowther, 2018). Many Christians support women in leadership within the business world, and most leaders within churches also support this and believe the Bible does as well (as discussed in Chapter 13). However, evangelicals still have the least support for women in any leadership role (Barna Group, 2017). One must consider, is the reason for this disparity partly due to the view that this topic is controversial and therefore avoided, ultimately resulting in an undefined theological line for individuals within the church? Extremes may be rare but present. Due to a lack of communication, Christians may believe widely varying beliefs within the local church. Some differences will occur naturally, and since it is not a salvific issue, it may not need to be addressed. However, this also allows for incorrect beliefs that can have a significant impact. For example, some may believe that women cannot have any authority over men (although rare, this is still present among some). On the reverse side, some Christians believe that since women in leadership was solely a cultural belief in the Bible and is allowed now, the church should look at homosexuality through the same lens. Even though these are extreme examples, both views are present today and can significantly impact the empowerment of women leaders. It is essential to not only communicate one's theological line but also educate on the reasonings behind that line and ensure the actions put in place within one's church or organization support and empower all to act within the clearly articulated and supported beliefs.

### 16.3 EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION FOR EMPOWERMENT

Do one's actions and the culture that those actions and words have formed fully support the desired belief system? In other words, do the words and actions of the leaders and followers create an environment of the desired level of empowerment for men and women? A thorough audit should be conducted to determine the validity of the answers to the preceding questions. Empowerment, leadership, and the advancement of world-changing leaders of all genders is of critical importance. Changing an aspect of one's culture is difficult, but following God's leading, His Word, and how His Word should be applied in our daily lives is worth the investment, even through turbulent times and topics.

Jesus empowered many women around Him, even though women were considered less during His time on earth (McLaughlin, 2022). Within the church and the business world, women are called to lead. Jesus, Paul, and others in the Bible empowered women to lead even within a culture where this was typically not accepted. God is calling us not to stray away from difficult topics, but instead, He has called us to live a life marked by His Presence, marked by His strength and not our own. Let us not shy away from this topic due to its difficulty. Let us embrace what God's Word says and what He calls us to do here on earth.

Let us reveal the truth about God's daughters founded in His Word, but take the knowledge and do not stop there; application is critical. What is the purpose of studying without application? What is the purpose of change if it is not continued? Support, believe more for others than they believe in themselves (McGinnis, 1985), empower, and make a difference—in our lives and in the lives of others.

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# INDEX

## A

- Abilities, 11, 65, 69, 85, 86, 89, 126, 181, 208, 262
- Abrahamic covenant, 31
- Abuse, 33, 146, 266
- Abusive patriarchy, 145
- Acceptance, 7, 141, 213, 214, 224
- Accessibility, 163
- Accomplishments, 86
- Action(s), 32, 34, 44–46, 48–50, 52, 55, 57, 64, 80, 81, 84, 96, 99–102, 107–113, 117, 118, 127, 155, 177, 188, 195, 202, 216, 220, 226, 251, 273
- Action and involvement, 160
- Adam, 13, 16, 30, 31, 257
- Adaptability, 62, 67
- Adaptability and resilience, 73
- Adaptation, 35, 87
- Adaptive leadership, 66
- Adoption, 154, 158, 175
- Adversity, 127, 161
- Advocacy, 72, 271
- Affirmation in the church, 257
- African Americans, 140
- African sub-continent, 140
- Agapao* love, 105, 106, 111, 112
- Age, 25, 26, 228, 256, 262, 272
- Agency, 27, 118, 127, 128, 195
- Agility, 160, 161
- Alignment, 25, 66, 67, 118, 123, 125, 127–129, 216
- Alliances, 163, 187
- Amanuensis, 120
- Ambiguity, 72, 185, 186, 188
- Ambition, 179
- American Red Cross, 176
- 19th Amendment, 175
- A mother in Israel, 62, 70, 71, 74
- Anachronism, 142
- Ancient near east, 142
- Annihilation, 101, 106
- Antebellum, 141, 142
- Antecedent conditions, 43, 52
- Anti-dominant behavior, 84
- Antioch, 35

- Antisemitic state, 85  
 Apocrypha, 29  
 Apocryphal  
   books, 29  
 Apostle Paul, 26, 30, 35, 37, 38, 120, 128, 138, 146, 153, 154, 159  
 Apostleship, 119, 157  
 Apostolic teachings, 124  
 Aquilla, 35, 156  
 Arab, 31  
 Archeological, 124  
 Articulating, 173  
 Asia Minor, 124, 143  
 Aspiration to lead, 51  
 Assertiveness, 66, 75, 179  
 Assimilation, 83  
 Augustine, 26, 126  
 Authenticity, 34, 117, 126, 130, 152  
 Authentic leadership, 124  
 Authority, 8–10, 12, 15–18, 36, 62, 65, 69, 70, 73, 88–90, 117, 119, 121, 124, 139, 142, 152, 155, 157, 174, 210, 217, 226, 229, 245, 246, 273  
   assume, 9  
   exercise, 9, 12  
   over men, 8–10, 17, 18, 217, 273  
   over men and women, 16  
   ruling, 12  
 Autocratic, 12, 82, 87  
 Autonomy, 37
- B**
- Backgrounds, 4, 66, 221  
 Baker, Ella Josephine, 163  
 Balance, 70, 75, 124, 127, 128, 163, 234, 235, 256, 257, 260–262, 265  
 Balancing  
   career, 234, 255  
   family, 70, 72, 227, 228, 235, 255, 265  
   life, 68, 70, 234, 256, 257, 260, 265  
   roles, 70, 75  
 Barna study, 214  
 Barriers, 65, 66, 71, 73, 74, 161, 163, 176, 178, 185, 202, 252  
   to effective leadership, 66, 75  
   to women in leadership, 65, 66, 71, 72, 74, 75, 179, 226  
 Bathsheba, 32, 33  
 Beauty, 31, 45, 88, 97, 98, 228, 235, 244–246, 252, 259, 262, 263  
 Beer-lahai-roi, 31  
 Beginning of knowledge, 46  
 Behavioral cues, 191  
 Behaviors, 24, 26, 43, 51–53, 55, 63–67, 85, 87, 112, 118, 121, 127, 131, 151, 177, 188, 189, 195, 202  
 Bias(es), 34, 36, 65, 66, 119, 154, 177, 178, 180–182, 186, 191  
   conscious, 72  
   external, 161  
   internal, 161  
 Bible, 2, 5, 8–12, 14, 16, 18, 19, 27, 29–31, 56, 68, 70, 82, 141, 142, 152, 172, 174, 175, 197, 198, 216–219, 224, 243, 244, 248, 249, 257, 259, 261, 263, 273, 274  
 Biblical  
   bias, 119  
   concepts, 28, 143, 146  
   context, 62  
   examples, 174, 244  
   exegesis, 141  
   foundation, 118  
   hermeneutics, 146  
   interpretation, 119  
   leaders, 3, 131  
   leadership, 2, 139, 143  
   manhood, 147

- narrative, 2, 126
- passages, 4, 38
- perspective, 4, 125, 245, 247
- principles, 3, 251
- relevance, 28
- restrictions, 123
- scholars, 119
- teaching, 8
- text, 28, 55, 118, 119, 129, 143
- truths, 26, 260
- understanding, 4, 146
- values, 207
- womanhood, 147
- women, 4, 152
- Biblically
  - based, 4, 19, 237
- Binary, 128
- Biological
  - generators, 2, 26, 214, 227, 243
- Black
  - churches, 243
  - women, 145
- Body of Christ, 37, 38, 249, 272
- Bolivia, 36
- Boss, 29, 138
- Boundaries, 144, 163, 188, 198, 235
- Bravery, 29, 174, 258
- Breaking
  - barriers, 73
- Breathed
  - Out by God, 9
- British
  - Empire, 24
  - mandate, 24
- Business(es)
  - application for, 4
  - faith based, 18
  - leaders, 43
  - woman, 18, 176
  - world, 1, 8, 18, 176, 215, 218, 249, 273, 274
- C**
  - Caesar, Julius, 120
  - Calling, 3, 4, 19, 105, 146, 197, 222–224, 232, 237, 238, 274
  - Cancer, 2
  - Canon, 17, 29
  - Capability, 85, 226, 231, 238
  - Capable
    - wife, 90
  - Capital cities, 23
  - Care, 27, 32, 105–107, 111–113, 207, 256, 257, 260, 262, 266
  - Career, 4, 68, 72, 152, 179, 228, 256, 257, 259, 261, 265, 266
  - Catherine the Great, 173
  - Catholic
    - tradition, 34
  - Challenge gender norms, 69, 73
  - Challenges, 61, 62, 65–68, 73–75, 89, 111, 113, 118, 145, 162, 171, 173, 175–177, 179, 185, 186, 188, 202, 206, 208, 214, 220, 228, 251
  - Challenging
    - situations, 90, 193
    - societal expectations, 72
    - stereotypes, 71, 72
    - topics, 228
  - Chancellor of Germany, 176
  - Character
    - noble, 45, 46, 53
  - Charisma, 84
  - Charismatic, 119
  - Chief counselors, 33
  - Childbearing, 13, 16
  - Childbirth, 13, 16
  - Childcare, 70, 178, 182, 256, 261
  - Children, 9, 16, 32, 49, 52, 53, 139, 143, 144, 179, 217, 228, 234, 242, 246–248, 255, 256, 258, 260, 261, 263–266
  - Children’s ministry, 14

- Chores, 48
- Christ  
 centered, 186  
 followers, 37, 38, 142
- Christian  
 church(es), 25, 124, 125, 131,  
 153, 157, 242, 248, 251, 252  
 community, 18, 125, 142, 143,  
 155, 213, 249, 266  
 faith, 34, 119, 153, 156, 157,  
 248–252, 266  
 impact, 252  
 institutions, 146  
 leadership, 25, 29, 35, 36, 138,  
 248, 249, 251  
 men, 37  
 non-pastoral, 36  
 organizations, 25, 226, 272  
 population, 36, 143  
 scholars, 3  
 scriptures, 4, 24, 25, 28, 29, 31,  
 33–35, 37, 138–142, 145  
 servant leadership, 138, 142, 146  
 women, 36, 37, 140, 261–266
- Christlike, 27
- Church(s)  
 activities, 27  
 attendance, 215, 244  
 bodies, 249, 252  
 body of believers, 5, 247  
 Christian, 18, 19, 25, 124, 125,  
 131, 153, 157, 242, 248, 251,  
 252  
 community, 120, 124, 153, 163,  
 198  
 congregations, 215, 243, 244, 252  
 doctrine, 11  
 future, 3, 35, 249  
 house, 15, 18, 156, 159  
 leadership, 8, 13, 19, 25, 35, 36,  
 38, 123, 128, 220–223, 233,  
 244, 272  
 leading in, 8, 18  
 local, 1, 4, 13, 15, 18, 19, 27, 35,  
 36, 197, 200, 214–218, 220,  
 221, 224, 226, 272, 273  
 models, 219  
 pastoral positions, 14  
 preferences, 35, 36  
 size, 216
- #CHURCHTOO, 24
- Circumstantial  
 factors, 10
- Clothes, 11, 50, 55, 99, 102, 244
- Cold War, 176
- Collaboration, 37, 65, 66, 68, 69, 71,  
 72, 74, 87, 90, 130, 196  
 consensus building, 176
- Collaborative, 70, 72, 207, 236, 237  
 leadership, 209  
 style, 237
- Collectivism, 37, 190
- Command(s), 9–12, 17, 81, 217, 236  
 creation order, 13  
 literal, 11  
 women, 10
- Commonality, 90
- Communal, 51, 127, 131, 162, 163,  
 178, 195, 201, 207
- Communication  
 issues, 197  
 nonverbal, 151, 204  
 open, 73  
 styles, 193, 198  
 verbal, 204
- Communion, 195, 241, 242
- Community  
 builder, 154, 159  
 building, 159, 163, 191, 250  
 connection, 130  
 dissention, 120  
 of trust, 191, 207  
 worship, 120
- Comparison, 63, 64, 229, 262

- Compassionate, 51, 70, 71  
 Compensation, 137, 178, 229, 230  
 Competitive advantage, 68, 188, 236  
 Complementarian, 14, 36, 38, 119, 144  
 Complementarianism, 14, 35, 218  
 Concern, 99, 105, 106, 121, 124, 248  
 Concrete ceiling, 177–179  
 Condemnation, 260  
 Confidence, 4, 53, 72, 155, 159  
 Conflict, 62–64, 178, 192, 196, 209, 247  
   resolution, 138  
 Conflicting  
   cultural frameworks, 185  
   interpretations, 152, 153, 217  
 Congregants, 36, 123, 128, 243, 249, 252  
 Congregations, 215, 243, 244, 249, 252  
 Consciousness, 127, 161  
 Consensus-building, 176  
 Conservative, 207  
 Contemporary, 5, 26, 69, 72, 87, 95, 96, 105, 107, 113, 114, 119, 123, 125, 131, 153, 164, 196  
   context, 154  
   leadership, 124, 151, 152, 162  
   relevance, 141  
 Context(s), 3, 4, 8–11, 14, 27, 52, 66, 80, 108, 129, 140, 146, 179, 188, 196, 198, 199, 217, 235, 271  
   current, 2, 11, 202  
   ecclesial, 3  
   empower, 4  
 Contextual  
   factors, 198  
   intelligence, 202  
   intelligent leaders, 202  
   interpretation, 8  
 Continuous learning, 72  
 Contradict(s), 8, 9, 122  
 Contradiction, 8, 11, 179  
   within the canon, 17  
 Contradictory, 8, 179  
 Contrasting folly, 45  
 Controversial, 3, 9, 18, 19, 24, 124, 139, 152, 220, 224, 273  
 Corinth, 120, 122, 123, 126, 155  
 Corinthian epistles, 120  
 Corinthian(s), 28, 30, 120–123, 127–129, 131, 216, 218  
 Correction, 9, 19, 142  
 Corruption, 43, 82, 182  
 Counterculture, 84, 85, 88  
 Counterintuitive, 129  
 Courage, 62, 69, 73, 80, 81, 84, 85, 87–90, 105, 107, 108, 111, 113, 206  
 Courageous, 79, 110, 113, 126  
   women, 126  
 Covenant  
   Abrahamic, 31  
   Davidic, 31  
 CQ  
   action, 204  
   drive, 203  
   knowledge, 204  
   strategy, 204  
 Creation, 13, 14, 17, 26, 27, 31, 122, 125, 145, 174, 245, 248  
 Creational  
   norms, 10  
 Creativity, 66, 83, 155, 162, 245  
 Creator, 25, 243, 245, 247  
 Crisis management, 69, 71, 161, 179, 191, 248  
 Critical conversation(s), 99, 113  
 Critical juncture, 96  
 Cross-cultural  
   clash, 191  
   female leaders, 194

leaders, 188, 208, 210  
 leadership, 199, 208  
 Cross-gender, 35  
   mentoring, 233  
   partnership, 156  
 Crowther, Steven, 2, 3, 97, 112,  
   123–125, 127, 129, 130, 138,  
   273  
 Cultural  
   accommodation, 124  
   analysis, 81, 118, 120, 131, 153,  
     159  
   awareness, 206  
   behavior, 120  
   challenges, 65, 118, 186  
   conflicts, 196, 209  
   context, 118, 126, 153, 186, 187,  
     189, 196, 198, 203, 204  
   differences, 37, 189  
   diversity, 68, 124  
   dynamics, 123  
   elements, 11, 47, 121  
   framework, 185, 188, 189, 191,  
     192, 194, 202, 208  
   identity, 83  
   intelligence, 203  
   norms, 18, 30, 121  
   patterns, 191  
   posture, 126  
   religious stereotypes, 186  
   resistance, 129  
   sensibilities, 89  
   strata, 81  
   themes, 121  
 Culturalization, 118  
 Culturally implicit leadership theories  
   (CLTs), 191  
 Culture(s), 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 18, 32, 37,  
   47, 52, 65, 68–72, 75, 83, 84,  
   88, 89, 118–121, 123–127, 130,  
   138, 141, 142, 146, 153,  
   155–157, 160, 176, 178, 182,

  186–191, 193–195, 198, 200,  
   202, 204, 205, 207, 208, 232,  
   237, 249, 264, 265, 271–274  
   dominated, 11, 32  
   Western, 37  
 Curiosity, 99, 202, 204, 206  
 Curse of Ham, 140

## D

Daughters, 2, 33, 35, 90, 153, 213,  
   242  
 Davidic  
   covenant, 31  
   monarchy, 32  
 Debate, 13, 18, 25, 26, 38, 44, 54,  
   154, 157  
 Deborah, 8, 10, 14, 29, 30, 61, 62,  
   68–70, 73–75, 153, 193, 194,  
   257  
 Deceit, 17  
 Deception, 17  
 Decision-making, 66, 67, 69, 71, 72,  
   99, 201, 261, 262  
 Dehumanization, 138, 145  
 Delegation, 66, 67, 206  
 Demigods, 26  
 Democracy, 36, 176  
 Democratic, 195, 196  
 Denial of self, 208  
 Denominational, 1, 216  
 Denominations, 8, 11, 152, 213, 216  
 Deuterocanonical  
   books, 29  
 Development, 35, 62, 73, 96, 102,  
   120, 125, 131, 164, 187, 209,  
   230  
*Diakonos*, 141, 146  
 Diana, 142, 143  
 Diasporic people, 124, 131  
 Dignity, 10, 27, 45, 48, 163  
 Disciple making, 157

- Disciples, 18, 34, 37, 154  
 Discipleship, 27, 123, 155  
 Discrimination, 62, 63, 146, 180, 181, 209, 214, 222, 247  
 Diverse  
   environment, 8, 203  
   life, 75  
   perspectives, 68, 69, 73  
   skills, 71  
   social identities, 62  
   talents, 69, 71  
 Diversity  
   gender, 65, 67–69, 71, 243, 244  
   level, 7  
   management, 85, 236, 243, 245  
   of thought, 129  
   revelation, 81, 119  
 Doctrine, 11, 126, 131, 140, 142, 248, 249  
 Domestic  
   abuse, 146  
   labor, 139  
 Dominant culture, 83, 84, 89, 120  
 Domineering, 145  
 Dominion, 12, 245  
*Doulous*, 141  
 Dyadic, 82
- E**  
 Early Christian community, 142  
 Early Christianity, 131  
 Early church community, 153  
 Early churches, 127  
 Early Church leaders, 10, 141  
 Early house churches, 156  
 Ecclesial  
   attire, 121  
   context, 3  
   leadership, 4  
 Economic(s), 36, 37, 120, 175, 176, 266  
   constraints, 198, 256  
   growth, 250  
 Ecumenical framework, 244, 252  
 Edict, 83, 85  
 Effective, 3, 4, 28, 62, 65–67, 70, 74, 75, 88, 108, 109, 111, 164, 173, 185–187, 193, 196, 199, 206, 207, 224, 225, 227, 235–237  
 Egalitarian, 4, 38, 144, 199, 201, 256, 263  
   relationship, 256  
 Egalitarianism, 14, 36, 130, 196, 218  
 Ego, 238  
 Egotistical, 100  
 Elevation, 11  
 Eliam, 33  
 Emmanuel, 34  
 Emotion, 19, 102, 106, 107, 227  
   fused thought, 102  
 Emotional  
   healing, 53  
 Emotional intelligence, 130, 202, 203, 205, 206, 226, 227, 230, 272  
 Empathy, 65, 70–73, 79, 87, 105, 106, 111–113, 205, 247  
 Employee  
   engagement, 66, 70  
   interests, 67  
   satisfaction, 68, 70, 138  
   strengths, 67, 71  
 Empower, 5, 16, 220, 225, 273  
   others, 73, 206, 209, 210  
   women, 3, 5, 16, 71, 74, 145, 214, 272  
 Empowered  
   By the Holy Spirit, 5  
 Empowering, 53, 70, 73, 142, 160, 186, 195, 237, 262  
 Empowerment, 19, 27, 53, 62, 68, 69, 220, 246  
 Encouragers, 2

- Entrepreneur, 49, 50  
 Entrepreneurial activities, 50, 57  
 Environment(s), 4, 5, 36, 66–74, 82,  
     84, 85, 87, 89, 90, 102, 176,  
     179, 180, 196, 198, 207, 214,  
     220, 221, 226, 230, 231, 233,  
     234, 237, 238, 247, 264, 266,  
     271–273  
     contemporary, 5  
     diverse, 8, 203  
 Ephesus, 12, 120, 142, 143, 155  
 Epitrepō, 12  
 Equal  
     opportunities, 68, 71  
     value, 143, 238  
 Equality, 24, 27, 67, 71, 72, 75, 125,  
     126, 144, 145, 160, 175, 177,  
     243–246, 248, 251, 256  
 Equitable, 126  
 Equity, 68, 130, 252  
 Esau, 31  
 Esteem, 46, 53, 88  
 Esther, 29, 30, 80–85, 88–90, 95–97,  
     99–102, 104–113, 174, 257  
 Ethical  
     challenges, 118  
     conviction, 129  
     environment, 87  
     leadership, 51, 87  
     leading, 128, 131  
     principle, 73, 131  
 Ethically, 53, 126  
 Ethics, 73, 124, 142  
 Ethnic diversity, 243, 244, 251  
 Ethnicity/ethnicities, 4, 63, 65, 66,  
     98, 101, 109, 221, 245  
 Etymology, 140  
 Eunuchs, 99  
 Euodia, 10  
 Evangelical churches, 215  
 Evangelicals, 29, 30, 214, 215, 222,  
     273  
 Evangelism, 27, 33  
 Eve, 13, 16, 17, 30, 31, 257  
 Example, 5, 15, 17, 25, 28, 29, 32,  
     34, 35, 37, 43, 49, 52, 54–56,  
     62, 66, 69, 73, 80, 81, 88–90,  
     103, 109, 111, 123, 124, 126,  
     128, 129, 139–141, 145, 174,  
     195, 207, 214, 222, 226,  
     233–236, 259, 273  
 Exclusion, 224  
 Execute, 100, 103  
 Execution, 27, 83, 89, 101  
 Executive, 4, 8, 18, 152, 187, 214  
     leadership, 4, 8, 214  
 Exegetical, 28, 80  
     analysis, 28, 80  
 Exegeting, 8  
 Exemplars, 108, 113, 153–155, 159,  
     160  
 Exemplary leaders, 111  
 Exiles, 31, 98, 99  
 Existential analysis, 141  
 Expectations, 4, 65, 89, 119, 123,  
     128, 162, 178, 179, 185, 186,  
     188, 191, 194, 197, 198, 201,  
     207, 228  
 Expertise, 72, 85, 86, 210  
 Expositor, 155  
 Extrinsic reward, 130
- F**
- Facebook COO, 177  
 Fair evaluation, 72  
 Fairy tale, 97, 98  
 Faith, 13, 16, 17, 31, 74, 90, 113,  
     118, 119, 124, 125, 127, 128,  
     131, 155–157, 159, 163, 207,  
     242, 250, 259, 261  
 Faithful, 34, 49, 99, 105, 112, 113,  
     209, 247, 251  
 Fallible, 164  
 False, 12, 17, 139, 142



- teachers, 12, 17  
 teaching, 142  
 Familial, 53, 127, 154, 159  
 Family  
   friendly, 71, 72  
   life, 14, 179, 256  
   models, 266  
   structure, 118, 130  
 Famous Five, 24  
 Fast, 81, 99, 100, 107, 108, 110, 140, 160, 187, 234, 237, 241  
 Fasting, 81, 103, 107, 109  
 Favor, 31, 46, 52, 56, 64, 81, 82, 85, 98, 100, 103, 110, 196, 208  
 Fear of repercussions, 86  
 Fear of the Lord, 44, 46, 52, 257  
 Female  
   leadership, 196, 201  
   leadership stereotypes, 195  
   leadership style, 8, 65, 67–74, 80, 87, 90, 130, 161, 163, 164, 196, 207, 235  
   pastors, 1, 146, 214, 246  
   voice, 34, 263, 265, 266  
 Feminine, 10, 71, 85, 126, 156, 178, 190, 194, 196, 235, 236  
 Femininity, 161, 190  
 Field, 18, 23, 28, 48, 50, 53, 56, 64, 110, 138, 162, 175, 199, 206, 207, 214, 215, 220, 221, 224–232, 234, 235, 263  
 Figurative armor, 45  
 Financial status, 48  
 Fine linen, 47, 48  
 Fiorina, Carly, 176  
 First-century church, 124, 153, 154, 157, 163  
 Flexibility, 178, 206, 207, 214, 256  
 Flexible, 68, 70, 72, 196, 200, 264, 265  
   work arrangements, 70, 72  
   work policies, 68  
 Focus, 2, 5, 8, 10, 12, 16, 25, 52, 53, 66, 67, 72, 73, 80, 87, 105–107, 118, 122, 146, 182, 190, 207, 210, 215, 217, 223, 224, 227, 228, 232, 234, 236, 238, 246, 247, 256, 266, 267  
 Followers, 28, 43, 52–55, 57, 74, 123, 128, 144, 145, 174, 186, 191, 193, 195, 196, 198, 202, 207, 208, 210, 259, 273  
 Folly, 45, 53  
 Foote, Julia, 128, 153, 159  
 Forgiveness, 112, 260  
 Fortune 20, 176  
 Fortune 500, 176  
 Fostering  
   employee engagement, 70  
   inclusive, 69  
   innovation and resilience, 75  
 Foundation, 2–4, 34, 43, 85, 96, 146, 171, 176, 189, 195, 209, 251  
 Freedom, 36, 83, 89, 122, 125, 137, 145, 249, 256–258, 265  
 Friendship, 37, 263  
 Future  
   bright, 3  
   generations, 73, 74  
   leaders, 5, 174, 207, 210  
**G**  
 Garden narrative, 31  
 Gender  
   and authority, 157  
   barriers, 68  
   bias, 119, 154, 178, 181  
   biological, 2, 26, 214, 243  
   complexities, 202  
   congeniality, 196  
   culture, 153  
   differences, 79, 152, 154, 196  
   differentiation, 122

- discrimination, 180, 209  
 discussions, 62  
 diversity, 65, 67–69, 71, 243, 244  
 equality, 67, 71, 72, 75, 177  
 hierarchy, 122, 156  
 inequality, 177  
 issues, 194  
 minorities, 7  
 norms, 62, 68, 73, 185, 197, 207, 209  
 pay gap, 178  
 prejudice, 230  
 role confusion, 4  
 roles, 4, 65, 74, 79, 85, 87, 119, 125, 145, 152, 194  
 stereotypes, 65, 69, 85, 178, 185, 186, 194–196, 198  
 stereotyping, 255  
 strengths, 236  
 Gender-balanced boardrooms, 250  
 Gender-based violence, 249  
 Gender-contextual issues, 123  
 Gendered  
   communication, 156  
   expectations, 65, 194, 198, 207  
   institutions, 36  
   social dynamics, 188  
 Gender-neutral workplaces, 181  
 General Motors CEO, 177  
 Genesis narrative, 31  
 Glass ceiling, 65, 162, 177–179, 209, 220  
 Glass cliff, 177–179, 220  
 Glass slipper, 177  
 Global  
   leader, 185–188, 191, 194, 198, 202, 206  
   leadership, 185–187, 195, 202, 206, 207  
   mindset, 187, 206  
   societies, 119  
   South, 36, 146  
   Globalization, 185–187, 193, 202, 236  
   Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE), 191  
   Globe, 3, 7, 18, 126, 152, 190, 207, 208  
   Gnostic-manipulationist, 83  
   God-dependent mutuality, 122  
   Goddess of fertility, 143  
   Godly model, 95  
   Godly stewardship, 111  
   God-ordained, 113  
   God's  
     calling, 4, 19, 105, 232, 274  
     handiwork, 113  
     impact, 259  
     Kingdom, 3, 4, 18, 28, 36, 145, 264  
     orchestration, 103, 105, 112  
     Presence, 108, 113  
     providence, 102, 103  
     voice, 113  
   Gospel(s), 26, 27, 31, 32, 126–128, 139, 142  
     narratives, 33, 35  
     sensibilities, 24  
     synoptic, 35  
   Governance, 36  
   Governmental  
     leadership, 220  
   Governments, 11, 187  
   Grace, 16, 17, 38, 95, 119, 143, 164  
   Great Commission, 27  
   Great Man, 11  
     theories, 11  
   Greco-Roman, 143, 144  
     community, 121  
     culture, 119, 155, 156  
     world, 37, 131, 157  
   Greek  
     influence, 120

Lexicon, 12  
 speaking, 120  
 words, 141  
 Greenleaf, R.K., 50, 55, 106, 107  
 Growth, 28, 33, 54, 57, 72, 73, 83,  
 194, 207, 209, 230, 244, 249  
 servant leader, 55, 57  
 Guilt, 81, 255–257, 260, 263, 266

## H

Hagar, 31  
 Haman, 81–85, 89, 99–101, 103,  
 105, 108, 109  
 Hands, 11, 50, 55, 209  
 Hannah, 30, 33  
 Harem, 82, 84, 88, 98, 105  
 Harmonization, 74, 247  
 Harmony, 129, 190  
 Hathach, 96, 99  
 Headship, 118–121, 124, 131, 217,  
 218  
 Healing, 53, 105, 106, 111–113, 250  
 Healthy  
 habits, 257, 260  
 hermeneutics, 146  
 teams, 138  
 Hebrew, 4, 24, 25, 28–31, 33, 35,  
 37, 139, 257  
 culture, 153  
 God, 32  
 Hermeneutical clarity, 157  
 Hermeneutics, 36, 141, 146  
 Hierarchical  
 expectations, 201  
 progression, 236  
 Hierarchy, 87, 119, 122, 156, 179,  
 190, 196, 201, 236  
 High-capacity, 3, 4  
 High-performing, 79  
 Hiring, 7, 68, 250  
 Hiring process, 178

Historical  
 canonical texts, 120  
 context, 131  
 documents, 172  
 literacy, 9  
 treatment, 173  
 Historically underrepresented, 139  
 Holistic  
 mission, 209  
 Holy Spirit, 5, 27, 38, 109, 112, 245  
 Home(s), 3, 4, 38, 49, 56, 118, 127,  
 153, 214, 224, 234, 256, 257,  
 259, 263–267  
 Homeplace, 163  
 Homosexual, 10, 141  
 Homosexuality, 273  
 Honor, 35, 49, 52, 55, 56, 81–83,  
 85, 88, 89, 100, 103, 118, 120,  
 121, 124–126, 129, 137, 141,  
 154, 157  
 House church, 156, 159  
 Household  
 churches, 2, 14, 36, 38, 49, 119,  
 120, 124, 131, 159  
 codes, 119, 120, 124, 125, 131,  
 144  
 dynamics, 126  
 Housewife, 49  
 exceptional, 49  
 Huldah, 153, 258  
 Human  
 choice, 103  
 control, 103, 190  
 dignity, 27, 163  
 fallenness, 16  
 race, 3  
 resources, 112  
 rights, 24, 176, 246  
 Humanity, 25, 26, 38, 118, 129,  
 139, 142, 163  
 Humility, 79, 87, 137, 143, 156, 229

Husband, 2, 9, 14, 31, 36, 45, 46,  
49, 52–54, 56, 80, 82, 83, 89,  
98, 101, 124–126, 144–146,  
155, 156, 159, 218, 225, 228,  
258, 259

## I

### Identity

and belonging, 158  
in Christ, 224  
in God, 209  
negotiation, 176

Idleness, 48

Image, 26, 56, 126, 139, 245, 248,  
251

of God, 25, 26, 126, 245, 246, 263  
of the church, 28, 252

Imago Dei, 26, 142

Immaculate Conception, 35

Impact, 5, 18, 34, 36, 37, 54, 68, 70,  
74, 86, 95, 118, 119, 124, 127,  
131, 154, 158, 162, 163, 176,  
178, 185–187, 189–191, 199,  
202, 209, 213–215, 218, 224,  
227, 229, 235, 236, 248, 249,  
251, 252, 256, 257, 259,  
262–264, 266, 267, 273  
on other women, 158, 162, 163  
on women, 5, 33

Imposter syndrome, 225, 234

Incarnation, 27, 146, 208

Incarnational leadership, 208

Inclusion, 34, 153, 243–246, 249

Inclusive, 65, 68, 69, 73, 129, 141,  
158, 160, 195, 207

environment, 71, 72, 249

Inclusivity, 67, 73, 207, 243, 244,  
246, 249, 251, 252

Inconsistencies, 8

Incubators, 23

Independence, 37, 122

Individualism, 37, 190

American, 37

Western, 37

Inexperience, 272

Influence, 11, 34–37, 43, 54, 62–66,  
72, 74, 82, 85, 86, 101, 111,  
117, 119, 122, 124, 126, 127,  
129, 143, 151, 153, 156,  
160–163, 173, 185, 187, 189,  
191, 194–196, 202, 205, 206,  
210, 215, 252, 259, 261, 262

Inflential, 33, 35, 87, 110, 172,  
195, 214, 237

In-group, 63, 64

Initiative, 161, 205

Injustice, 3, 139, 209, 249

Inner texture analysis, 95, 96, 113

Inner texture socio-rhetorical analysis,  
96

Innovation, 72, 74, 75, 177

Inspirational, 62, 74, 75, 131

Inspired, 5, 8, 177

by God, 8, 19

Instruction, 9, 10, 14, 49, 109, 142,  
154, 157, 197

receiving, 9, 10

Integrity, 57, 73, 87, 88, 129, 163,  
196, 206, 207, 210

Intelligent, 46, 202, 203, 205

### Intercultural

context(s), 186, 187, 189, 198

groups, 192

leadership, 185, 186, 189, 202,  
206–209

Interdependence, 106, 118, 123, 127,  
128, 185, 187, 188

Interpersonal, 130, 180, 182, 190,  
203, 206

Interpretative consensus, 154

### Intertexture

cultural, 44, 47

historical, 44

oral-scribal, 44, 52

Intrinsic worth, 204  
 Iron Lady, 176  
 Isaac, M.L., 31, 81  
 Ishmael, 31  
 Israel(s), 8, 32, 37, 49, 69, 175  
   ancient, 62, 68  
   Prime Minister, 175  
 Israelite society, 56

**J**

Jacob, 31  
 Jesus(s), 4, 5, 18, 28, 30–35, 37, 38,  
   51, 108, 109, 138, 139, 141,  
   144, 145, 174, 207, 208, 245,  
   259, 260, 267, 274  
   Christ, 27, 33, 34, 37, 38,  
     243–246, 249, 251  
   teachings, 138, 144, 145, 251  
 Jewelry, 11  
 Jewels, 47  
 Jewish  
   faith, 31, 90  
   heritage, 83  
   nation, 99, 107, 113  
   tradition(s), 11, 83, 153  
   woman, 32  
 Jews, 80–83, 88, 89, 96, 97, 99–102,  
   106, 107, 110, 174  
   and Gentiles, 143  
 Joan of Arc, 173  
 Job, 46, 64, 223, 230, 231, 257  
   performance, 138  
 Jochebed, 32  
 Josephus, 105  
 Joy, 100, 197, 198, 262, 264  
 Judah, 31, 32  
 Judge, 14, 29, 62, 68–70, 75, 256,  
   266  
 Junia, 153, 157  
 Justice, 17, 247, 248  
 Justification of slavery, 140

**K**

Katachronism, 142  
 Kindness, 143  
 King, 29, 32, 33, 48, 81–85, 88–90,  
   96–103, 105–110, 174, 258  
   Ahasuerus David, 82–85, 88–90,  
     98, 101, 103  
 King David, 32, 33, 258  
 Kingdom  
   of God, 3, 4, 18, 28  
   values, 186, 209  
   work, 207  
*Koinonia*, 38

**L**

Lament, 99, 102  
 Language, 17, 36, 47, 48, 121, 141,  
   143, 146, 191, 197, 199,  
   243–245, 250  
   Of Galatians, 36  
 Latin America, 36, 139, 201  
 Leadership  
   apostolic, 28  
   attributions, 177  
   barriers, 66, 68, 71, 73, 74, 161,  
     185, 202  
   behavior, 50, 65, 112, 127  
   characteristics, 11, 80, 85, 88, 91  
   circle, 250  
   civil, 14  
   connections, 210  
   context, 191  
   creativity, 155  
   development, 28, 62, 66–68, 71,  
     72, 84  
   equal, 14  
   executive, 4, 8, 214  
   expectations, 185, 186, 188  
   governmental, 14, 220  
   home, 117  
   identity, 180, 181

- lessons, 109, 175
  - level, 178
  - male, 13, 123, 219, 230
  - missional, 28
  - model, 111
  - movement, 4, 214, 220, 237
  - needs, 172, 198
  - opportunities, 65, 66, 181
  - organizational, 3, 23, 28, 37, 65, 66, 159, 164, 187, 273
  - Pauline, 28
  - potential, 162, 179, 180, 195, 272
  - principles, 29, 95, 108, 214
  - proWess, 69
  - recognition, 126
  - representation, 160
  - roles, 4, 7, 8, 11, 14, 19, 29, 35, 62, 65, 67–69, 71–74, 131, 152, 153, 157, 158, 161, 163, 172–174, 177–182, 185, 194, 195, 210, 218, 220, 233, 235, 248, 249, 273
  - self-centered, 52
  - senior, 7, 14, 177, 233
  - servant, 2, 43, 50–55, 57, 96, 104, 105, 124, 138, 139, 141, 145, 146
  - spiritual, 14, 90
  - stories, 114
  - style, 8, 65, 67, 68, 70, 72, 73, 80, 87, 130, 161, 163, 164, 196, 207
  - theory, 51, 66, 67, 152, 172–174
  - women, 250
  - Leah, 31, 32
  - Legacy, 69, 228, 232
  - Legislative, 24, 36
  - Level 5 leaders, 238
  - Levi, 32
  - Life, 4, 10, 14, 19, 24, 25, 28, 29, 32, 33, 35, 44–49, 52, 55, 56, 61, 63, 68, 71, 73, 83, 89, 97, 100, 103, 105–107, 112, 113, 137, 138, 141, 142, 144–146, 155, 158, 160, 163, 174, 178, 182, 189, 190, 200, 214, 223, 234, 235, 238, 247, 255, 256, 258–265
  - Life-giving, 46
  - Limitations, 153, 155, 182, 218, 219, 222, 226, 249
  - Listen, 10, 106, 197, 229, 250
    - intently, 10
    - quietly, 10
  - Listening, 247, 250
  - Lordship, 118–121, 124, 131, 146
  - Love, 13, 38, 51, 112, 113, 142, 143, 145, 160, 193, 224, 228, 259, 263, 264, 266
    - compassionate, 51
  - Lydia, 153, 259
- ## M
- Male
    - centered-models, 164
    - dominate roles, 65, 153
    - headship, 217, 218
    - mentorship, 235
  - Management, 23, 86, 89, 117, 119, 152, 193, 235, 250
  - Managers, 56, 191, 193, 199, 227, 229
  - Managing
    - people, 206, 207
    - relationships, 205
    - self, 205
  - Manipulation, 84
  - Marginalized, 119, 124
    - community, 123
    - group(s), 119, 131
  - Marketplace, 37, 221, 235, 237
  - Marriage, 31, 37, 263
  - Mary

- Barra, 176  
 Magdalene, 35, 156, 174  
 mother of Jesus, 30, 34  
 of Magdalene, 35, 156, 174  
 Masculine, 11, 71, 126, 178, 181, 190, 194, 196, 201, 232, 235, 236, 249  
 Masculinity, 118, 190  
 Maturity, 84, 161  
 Mental battle, 255  
 Mentoring, 62, 73, 193, 194, 224, 232–234, 261, 262  
 Mentorship(s), 61, 68, 72, 193, 210, 214, 225, 227, 228, 235, 261  
 Mentorship and coaching, 224, 235  
 Merit-based selection, 68  
 Merkel, Angela, 176  
 #METOO, 24  
 Microenvironments, 162  
 Middle East, 137  
 Mid-life burdens, 256  
 Military, 11, 24, 29, 38, 75, 137, 173, 175  
 Mindset, 72, 141, 189, 200–202, 214, 220, 223–226, 229–232, 234, 249, 272  
 Ministry, 8, 33, 36, 96, 109, 111, 113, 137, 142, 153, 157, 186, 196–199, 201, 209, 214, 215, 218, 221, 235, 237, 246  
 children's, 14  
 women's, 14  
 Minority, 179, 238, 246  
 hiring of, 7  
 identifiable, 7  
 purposeful hiring, 7  
 Miriam, 32, 174  
 Misbehaving, 10  
 Mission, 24, 25, 27, 28, 35, 37, 38, 74, 84, 110, 196, 243, 266  
 of God, 25–30, 32–38  
 Missional, 28, 29, 38, 264  
 Mission Dei, 27  
 Mistreatment, 37, 139, 143, 145, 146  
 Moderation, 13  
 Modern, 23, 28, 51, 56, 61, 62, 118, 142, 146, 160, 164, 174, 177  
 employment, 142  
 societies, 127  
 Moral  
 agency, 118, 127, 128  
 alignment, 118, 129  
 balance, 127, 128  
 codes of conduct, 124  
 consciousness, 161  
 courage, 87, 88  
 efficacy, 127  
 fortitude, 81, 84, 85  
 Morality, 43, 51  
 higher life of, 49  
 Mordecai, 80–84, 88, 95–111, 113, 183  
 Moses, 16, 32, 140, 174, 258  
 Mother(s), 31–33, 49, 50, 62, 143, 241, 255, 256, 258, 261, 265, 266  
 church, 143  
 instruction, 49  
 teaching, 49  
 Motherhood, 62  
 guilt, 255, 257  
 Motive, 124, 178  
 Multicultural, 194, 199, 203, 204  
 Multifaceted roles, 164  
 Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, 91  
 Multinational, 186, 187, 191, 198  
 Multiplicity, 187, 188  
 Multiracial congregations, 243, 244  
 Mutual  
 dependence, 122  
 goals, 160  
 service, 124  
 submission, 144, 146, 147

Mutuality, 106, 121, 122, 128, 153,  
155, 156, 158–161

## N

Naomi, 30, 33, 90

Narcissism, 86

Narcissistic, 52, 100

Nation, 8, 23, 26, 32, 97, 99, 107,  
113, 173, 198, 213, 215

National Defense Headquarters, 23

Nationalities, 7

National security, 175

Negative mentality, 237

Negotiation, 72, 175, 176

Neighborhoods, 38

Network, 155, 160, 161, 177, 187

New Testament, 13, 14, 16, 26, 30,  
33–35, 38, 122, 142, 145, 153,  
156, 174, 245

Next generation, 232, 233

Non Canon, 29

Non-denominational, 1, 216

Non-profit, 272

Norms

creational, 10

cultural, 18, 30, 88, 120, 121

transcultural, 10

Nurturing

souls, 163

space, 162

Nympha, 153, 159

## O

Obedience, 34, 49, 144, 164, 258

Old Testament, 14, 30, 47, 80, 81,  
174, 258

Opening-Middle-Closing (OMC)

Patterns, 96, 97

Opponents, 238

Opposing, 18, 19, 262

Opposition, 3, 143, 222

Oppressed people groups, 139

Oppression, 138

Oppressive cultural structures, 158

Oral-scribal, 44, 52

Organization(s)(al)

adaptability, 67

complexity, 124

contexts, 3, 4

culture, 65, 68–71, 123, 138, 191,  
264, 265

design, 28

diversity, 7, 25, 67, 88

fabric, 127, 161

health, 24, 250

leadership, 3, 4, 28, 37, 65, 66,  
159, 164, 187, 273

life, 4, 24, 25, 71, 182

mission, 25, 200

performance, 54, 66–68, 72

purpose, 25, 198

settings, 62, 195

stewardship, 118, 127, 130

strategies, 66, 67

structure, 129, 130, 163, 180, 188

success, 66, 70, 118, 187

turbulence, 71

values, 25, 187, 188

vision, 24, 25, 66, 127, 129, 130,  
188, 201, 229

Original sin, 30

Orthodox

Eastern, 29

Russian, 29

views, 27

Ottawa, Canada, 23

## P

Pandemic, 215, 250, 256, 265

Paradigm, 38, 125, 127, 161, 206,  
250

Parenetical, 120



- Parental leave, 70, 71  
 Partner, 34, 156, 158, 199, 266  
 Partnership, 88, 126, 155, 159, 160, 208, 214, 250  
 Pastor(s), 1, 2, 14, 15, 36, 137, 200, 201, 216–221, 241, 242, 244, 246, 256, 257, 263, 272  
     women, 2  
 Pastoral, 14, 17, 36  
     epistles, 12, 36, 125  
     positions, 13  
 Patriarchal  
     expression, 80  
     system, 152  
     thinking, 11  
     traditions, 256  
 Patriarchy, 32, 33, 36, 144, 249  
 Pauline  
     corpus, 121, 138  
     ecclesiology, 38  
     letters, 26, 155  
     mission, 158  
     versatility, 122  
 Pay inequity, 178  
 Peace, 10, 29, 97, 99, 101, 113, 127, 128, 247, 260, 265  
 Peaceable, 10  
 Peaceful, 10, 124, 182  
*Peers*, 54, 181, 191, 232  
 Pentecost, 35, 213  
     Day of, 35  
 Performance, 54, 64, 67, 85–88, 90, 177, 199, 205  
     improvement, 67  
     measurement, 86  
 Pericope, 44, 46, 47, 50, 52, 53, 56, 57, 81–84, 88, 90, 95–97, 99, 102, 104–107, 113  
 Perish, 82, 97, 107, 110, 129  
 Persia, 81, 83, 88, 89, 99  
 Persian, 84, 85, 88, 89  
     provinces, 96  
     society, 83  
 Persian Jews, 88  
 Persuasion, 120, 121, 152  
 Peter, 28, 124–131, 141, 144, 145  
 Petrine, 125, 130  
     exegetes, 123  
     group, 124  
 Pharaoh, 257  
 Philippi, 35  
 Phillip, 13, 35, 153  
 Phoebe, 10, 146, 153–155, 160  
 Phoenician, 50  
 Pisidian, 35  
 Poem, 44, 47, 53  
     acrostic, 44  
     artistic, 44  
 Poetry, 55, 62  
     biblical Hebrew, 55  
 Policies, 70–72, 178, 250  
 Political, 36, 82, 124, 125, 142, 152, 172, 173, 175–177, 188, 194, 198  
     dissension, 250  
 Poor, 48, 53–55, 179, 198  
 Positions, 3, 7, 8, 10, 26, 29, 32, 36, 50, 62, 65, 67–69, 71–73, 80–82, 86, 99, 101, 106, 110, 111, 118–120, 122–126, 130, 131, 143, 144, 152, 154–156, 158, 160, 161, 172, 175, 177, 179–181, 199, 207–210, 215, 218, 219, 221, 226, 228, 230, 242, 248, 259, 265  
 Positive, 12, 24, 26, 34, 37, 43, 51, 62–64, 68, 70, 74, 87, 90, 126, 195, 222, 238, 247, 262  
 Postmodern, 141  
 Potential, 36, 54, 67, 69–72, 74, 75, 79, 90, 179, 181, 188, 194, 196, 202, 207, 210, 249, 272  
 Power, 11, 29, 36, 37, 69, 74, 82, 83, 95, 101, 109, 112–114,

117–120, 122–127, 130, 131,  
142, 145, 152, 174, 176, 179,  
180, 182, 190, 194, 196, 236  
distance, 146, 189, 190, 194  
dynamics, 37  
Praise, 46, 47, 50, 53–55, 85, 121,  
145  
Pray, 11, 108–113, 241  
Prayer, 10, 81, 103, 105, 107–109,  
111–113, 122, 126, 127, 143,  
209, 248, 259, 264  
Preach, 9, 216, 217, 219, 248  
Pregnancy, 139  
Prejudice(s), 62–64, 178, 231, 246,  
247, 252  
Primary instructors, 14  
Prisca, 153, 155–157, 159  
Priscilla, 10, 35, 218, 259  
Privilege(s), 24, 32, 200, 247, 266  
Problem-solving, 67  
Progressive texture and patterns, 121  
Prominent, 11, 19, 35, 64, 66, 124,  
176, 189, 222, 230, 232  
Promoted, 7, 180  
Promotion(s), 72, 79, 85, 86, 177,  
178  
Prophecy, 123, 126  
Prophesied, 35  
Prophetess, 62, 69, 70, 258  
Protoevangelium, 31  
Providential, 95, 96, 102, 109–112  
Pseudonymous, 124  
Purple, 47, 48, 259

## Q

Qualities, 11, 52, 66, 68, 70–75, 80,  
84, 87, 88, 90, 181, 195, 206,  
230  
Queen, 29, 81, 83, 84, 88, 97–100,  
107, 110, 174  
Queen Esther, 174  
Quiet, 9, 10, 85

remain, 9  
Quietly, 9, 10, 237  
listen, 10  
Quietness, 9, 10  
learn in, 9  
in worship, 10

## R

Race, 7, 65, 66, 191, 214, 221, 243,  
246, 248, 249, 272  
Rachel, 31  
Racial issues, 242, 243  
Rebuke, 11, 19, 142  
Recognition, 62, 155, 205  
Reconciliation, 146, 243  
Recruiting, 250  
Redemptive plan, 31  
Reformist(s), 82–84  
Relational  
leadership, 105, 106, 111, 113  
norms, 124, 159  
reconciliation, 27  
style, 207  
Relationship(s)  
management, 205  
mutuality, 106, 155, 161  
oriented, 146, 195, 237  
Religions, 11, 63, 81, 191  
Religious, 9, 69, 72, 81, 119, 125,  
159, 173, 185, 186  
culture, 185, 191  
Repetitive pattern, 96, 103, 159  
Reproof, 9  
Reputation, 34, 49  
Research, 2, 4, 5, 8, 13, 28, 32, 36,  
50, 52, 65, 118, 119, 124, 138,  
151, 164, 181, 189–191, 194,  
202, 203, 206, 208, 214, 215,  
221, 227, 235, 236, 244, 246,  
247, 255, 256  
graduate-level, 5

- Resilience, 29, 73, 127, 128, 154, 159, 161, 206
- Resourcefulness, 48
- Respect, 10, 34, 49, 53, 54, 123, 144, 145, 154, 160, 172, 179, 201, 222, 263
- Respectability, 129, 161
- Restoration, 26–28, 33, 97, 99, 101
- Restorative Justice, 246, 247
- Restrictions, 2, 17, 218, 219, 221
- Resurrection, 33, 34, 156, 157, 174, 245  
 post, 34
- Reversal of power, 126
- Rhetorical, 9, 80, 110, 119, 121, 125  
 saturated environment, 120  
 strategy, 125
- Riches, 56
- Risk, 27, 80, 82, 86, 87, 97, 99, 100, 107, 113, 155, 160, 174, 179, 262  
 aversion, 80, 86  
 taking, 155
- Role(s)  
 alignment, 66, 67  
 model, 56, 57, 68, 74, 90, 156  
 of women, 3, 4, 25, 30, 38, 118, 126, 146, 178
- Roman  
 Catholic, 29, 34  
 colony, 120  
 Empire, 120, 142  
 influence, 120  
 political, 124  
 settled colony, 120  
 social, 124
- Rome, 124, 142, 153–159, 162
- Rubies, 47, 56
- Ruler, 29, 145
- Ruth, 30, 46, 90
- Rwanda, 36, 146
- S**
- Sackcloth, 99, 102
- Sacrifice, 137, 138, 142, 143, 145
- Safe workspaces, 130
- Salvation, 16–18, 26, 27, 31, 80, 81, 138, 143  
 divine, 26
- Salvific, 16, 18, 26, 36, 273
- Sanctity, 13
- Sandberg, Sheryl, 176, 177
- Scarlett, 47, 48
- Scholars, 8, 11, 13, 14, 17, 26, 28, 43, 44, 51, 55, 57, 119, 121, 122, 138, 139, 141, 142, 144, 157, 158, 174, 178, 234, 235, 248, 250, 252, 263  
 Christian, 3
- Schools, 38, 225, 248, 264
- Scripture(s)  
 ancient, 32  
 authority, 8, 17, 139  
 Christian, 4, 19  
 exegeting, 8  
 Hebrew, 4, 24, 25, 28–30, 32, 33, 35, 37, 139, 140  
 inerrancy, 5  
 interpret, 8, 14, 217, 218
- Secularization, 90
- Segregated, 251
- Self  
 awareness, 127, 128, 162, 205, 230  
 categorization, 64  
 confidence, 205, 230, 236  
 control, 13, 87, 89, 90  
 determination, 37  
 esteem, 52, 63, 64  
 expressive, 102  
 management, 205  
 perception, 180  
 promotion, 79, 80, 82, 85, 86, 88–90  
 reliance, 37

sacrifice, 123, 128  
 Selflessness, 138  
 Semantic fallacies, 140, 141  
 Seminaries, 249  
 Senate, 23  
 Senior leaders, 14, 16, 177  
 Sensory, 96  
 Servant leadership, 2, 43, 50–55, 57,  
 104, 138, 139, 141, 142, 145,  
 146  
 theory, 43, 50, 141  
 Service, 18, 29, 38, 47, 51–57, 113,  
 126, 130, 137, 138, 142, 143,  
 145, 146, 154, 190, 224, 272  
 to others, 129  
 Seven churches of Asia, 142  
 Sexism, 242, 249  
 Sexual, 144, 249  
 exploitation, 139  
 expressions, 251  
 Shalom, 97–99, 101  
 Shame, 45, 81, 98, 121, 122, 125  
 Shared responsibility, 160  
 Shaw Center, 23  
 Shirley Chisolm effect, 160  
 Short-term orientation, 190  
 Shulamite woman, 30  
 Silence, 10, 264, 266  
 Silent, 10, 97, 106, 112, 242, 249,  
 264  
 completely, 10  
 Sin, 16, 31, 45, 139, 232, 245, 252  
 Sisterhood, 154, 158, 159, 162  
 Situational leadership, 66  
 Slave(s), 124, 138–142, 158, 245  
 Slavery, 139–142, 144, 145, 158  
 Sluggard, 48  
 Social  
 analysis, 153  
 awareness, 205  
 categorization, 63  
 challenges, 64

change, 28, 63, 64  
 characteristics, 119  
 context, 84, 123, 199  
 convention, 82, 118  
 discord, 250  
 engagement, 199, 206  
 expectations, 189  
 game, 199, 201  
 group, 63–65, 89  
 growth, 118  
 identification, 63, 64  
 identity(ies), 62–66, 74, 117, 123,  
 128, 130  
 intertexture, 44, 49, 121  
 intertexture analysis, 49  
 justice, 24, 27, 68, 175, 249  
 movements, 11, 64  
 norms, 86, 89, 161, 190, 207  
 reformers, 24  
 relations, 121  
 role(s), 191, 195  
 sectors, 4  
 sensitivity, 79, 80, 85, 87–91  
 structure, 82, 119, 199  
 Societal  
 barriers, 163  
 changes, 74  
 context, 131  
 expectations, 73, 74  
 impact, 54, 236  
 Society, 3, 24, 43, 47, 54, 55, 62, 69,  
 74, 82, 84, 118, 119, 125–127,  
 142, 146, 153, 160, 172, 182,  
 190, 232  
 impact, 54  
 of honor, 129  
 Socioeconomic status, 50  
 Socio-ethical, 27  
 Socio-rhetorical analysis, 96  
 Solomon, 29, 33, 44  
 Song of Solomon, 30  
 Sosthenes, 120

- Spirit-filled, 27
- Spiritual, 47, 48, 52, 53, 55, 56, 69, 80, 90, 107, 119, 154, 155, 224, 233  
 formation, 120  
 leaders, 19  
 salvation, 27  
 setting, 9  
 value, 157  
 well-being, 138
- Status quo, 83, 181
- Staying at home, 255, 256, 260, 261, 264, 266
- Stereotypes, 66, 181, 190, 195, 249
- Stereotypical, 119
- Stewardship, 105–107, 111, 113, 130
- Stigmas, 7
- Strategic  
 acumen, 75  
 approach, 75  
 imperative, 68  
 leadership, 29  
 thinking, 69, 206
- Strategist, 33, 75, 82
- Strength(s), 8, 11, 23, 45, 48, 67, 69, 75, 80, 90, 153, 208, 223, 230, 237, 238, 260, 267, 274  
 character, 45, 153  
 physical, 45
- Submission, 9, 118–122, 124–126, 131, 138–141, 143–146, 208  
 full, 9
- Submissiveness, 9
- Submit, 46, 109, 126, 138, 140–142, 144–146  
 misuse, 145
- Subordinate, 10, 245  
 to all men, 10
- Subordination, 126
- Sub-Saharan Africa, 36, 146, 191
- Subtleties, 81, 102
- Superhumans, 26
- Supplication, 10, 97
- Support, 9, 13, 17, 25, 33, 38, 44, 49, 50, 62, 65, 68, 70–72, 75, 87, 120, 123, 125, 128, 138, 144, 155, 156, 159, 160, 162, 163, 176, 182, 193, 194, 213, 215, 217, 220, 224, 225, 231, 236, 244, 251, 261, 266, 272–274  
 system, 235, 237, 266, 271
- Supporting, 10, 11, 50, 70, 71, 128, 182, 257, 262
- Supportive, 70, 71, 178  
 context, 159, 164  
 environment, 71
- Susa, 98, 100
- Sympathize, 106
- Sympathy, 106, 232
- Syntyché, 10
- T**
- Tabitha, 153
- Tajfel, Henri, 62
- Tapestry, 243, 244, 249, 250
- Task-oriented, 65, 146, 236
- Teach, 1, 3, 8, 9, 11, 12, 17–19, 26, 28, 51, 86, 122, 216, 217, 219, 241, 242, 245, 248, 251, 259  
 men, 19
- Teachers, 12, 17, 234, 259, 263  
 false, 12
- Teaching, 5, 8, 9, 17, 19, 27, 28, 32–34, 49, 126, 138, 175, 208, 216, 229, 242, 244, 248, 259  
 exercise of, 12
- Team, 63, 64, 67–70, 73, 87, 90, 186, 193, 197–201, 205, 206, 209, 222, 226, 232, 249  
 dynamics, 79, 87, 201
- Tekoa, 30
- Temple of Artemis, 142
- Tempter, 31

Tension, 97, 101, 118, 122, 123  
 Thatcher, Margaret, 176  
 Theological  
   arguments, 140, 252  
   line, 272, 273  
   questions, 216–218  
   scholars, 252  
   stance, 19, 215  
 Theological positions, 35, 224  
 Theology, 38, 118, 119, 123, 215  
 Theories, 11, 28, 61, 66, 67, 124  
   great man, 11  
 Timothy, 4, 8–14, 16, 18, 19, 30, 35,  
   216–219  
 Tongue, 26, 45, 49, 154, 197  
 Torah, 11  
 Traditional, 1, 62, 65, 68, 70, 73,  
   119, 126, 153, 164, 185, 187,  
   215  
   communalism, 159, 163  
   roles, 84  
 Traditions, 29, 105, 121, 190, 191,  
   248, 249, 252, 266  
 Trailblazer(s), 154, 157, 159, 162,  
   175  
 Trailblazing efforts, 162  
 Train, 4, 214  
 Traits, 11, 45, 48, 65, 66, 85, 87, 88,  
   90, 178, 181, 186, 195, 209,  
   245, 248  
 Transactional leadership, 65  
 Transcultural, 10  
   norms, 10  
 Transformation, 74, 84, 124, 125  
 Transformational, 66, 68, 189, 196  
   leadership, 65, 87, 90, 91, 236  
   power, 112  
 Transforming  
   presence, 96  
   wisdom, 112  
 Transgression, 16  
 Transparency, 72, 205

Treachery, 83  
 Triadic formulation, 38  
 Tribe, 26, 32, 245  
 Trinitarian, 27, 38  
   activity, 37  
   theology, 27  
 Trinity, 245, 248, 263  
 Trust, 18, 70, 110, 129, 154, 159,  
   160, 207, 208, 226, 242, 260  
 Trustworthy, 186  
 Truth, 2, 4, 8, 24, 25, 34, 38, 142,  
   174, 224, 226, 231, 233, 237,  
   242, 255, 257, 259, 260, 263,  
   264, 266  
 Turner, John, 62

**U**

Uncertainty avoidance, 190, 194  
 Unconscious bias, 72  
 Underrepresentation, 37, 178, 224  
 Undervaluing, 5, 229  
   women, 5  
 United States (US), 7, 24, 25, 36,  
   175, 214, 216, 219, 246, 249,  
   250  
   army, 25  
   military, 25  
 Unity, 128, 142, 143, 146, 156, 163,  
   222, 245  
 Universal, 28, 190, 231  
   Declaration of Human Rights, 175  
   truths, 255  
 University of Ottawa, 23  
 Unmarried, 143  
   mothers, 256  
   women, 143  
 Unstable, 8  
 Uriah, 32  
 US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 36  
 Utopian tendencies, 83

## V

## Values

- cultural, 51, 130
- embodying, 173
- ethical, 3
- moral, 3

Vashti, 88, 89, 98

Versatile, 74

Violence, 248, 249

Virgin Birth, 35

Virtuous, 44, 45

- life, 46
- theory, 139

Visibility, 117

Vision, 24, 25, 73, 117, 118, 129,  
130, 173, 193, 194, 196–198,  
206, 207

Vocational, 8, 24, 137, 218, 219, 224  
ministry, 8, 137, 218

Voice, 72, 73, 88, 113, 158, 160,  
198, 201, 213, 214, 222, 223,  
230, 235, 238, 242, 244, 246,  
247, 249–251, 257, 258,  
263–266, 271

## W

Warrior, 33, 62

Weak, 7

Wealth, 46–48

- material physical, 47
- spiritual, 47, 48, 52, 53, 55, 56

Weep, 99, 140

Weeping, 102

Western leadership, 15, 18

Wife/Wives, 2, 13, 31, 33, 36, 44,  
46, 49, 50, 55, 88, 124–128,  
145, 156, 159, 172, 228, 261,  
266

Wisdom

- elusiveness, 46
- personification of, 46

reward, 46

Wise, 28, 44–46, 50, 53, 56, 69, 71,  
108, 109, 144

Womanhood, 33, 118, 147

Womankind, 31

Woman of Tekoa, 30

Women(s)/Woman

- brave, 24
- elusive, 46
- empowerment, 220, 273
- entrepreneurs, 138
- equality, 24
- in business, 222
- in Christian leadership, 25, 35, 248,  
249, 251
- in early Christian community, 142
- in ministry, 153, 219, 235, 246
- in the Church, 5, 10, 17, 218, 220,  
242, 249, 250
- leaders, 3–5, 11, 14, 18, 19, 56,  
57, 65, 68, 69, 72–74, 118,  
122, 123, 127, 160–162, 164,  
172–177, 196, 213, 214, 220,  
221, 231, 235, 237, 238

mature, 45, 209

ministry, 14

missionary, 158

moral responsibility, 127

of color, 139, 145, 178, 243, 266

pastors, 2

rights, 4

supporting women, 10, 11, 128,  
182, 257, 262

value of, 4, 24, 33, 38

virtuous, 44, 45

voice(s), 88, 214

who paved the way, 174–176

wise, 44

Word of God, 241–243, 250–252,  
259–261, 263

inspired, 5, 8

Work

- ethic, 50
  - life balance, 70, 234
  - place, 7, 67, 70, 71, 79, 85–87, 90, 177, 178, 180–182, 227, 236, 260, 263–266
  - Workforce, 180, 182, 228, 256, 265
    - dynamics, 36
  - Working
    - mothers, 256, 261, 265
    - together, 163
  - Workmates, 7
  - Workplace, 7, 67, 70, 71, 79, 85–87, 90, 177, 178, 180–182, 227, 236, 260, 263–266
    - culture, 71, 178
    - opportunities, 181
  - World
    - business, 1, 8, 18, 215, 218, 249, 273, 274
    - Western, 15, 18
  - Worldview(s), 30, 119, 139, 189, 191, 193
  - Worth, 30, 35, 47, 88, 156, 158, 181, 198, 206, 217, 231, 232, 234, 244, 265, 273
  - Wrongdoer, 13
- Y**
- Yom Kippur War, 175
- Z**
- Zion, 45