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Women's Ministry that Changes Lives

This download gives practical advice and perspective for you as you create a women's ministry that does more than entertain.



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Introduction

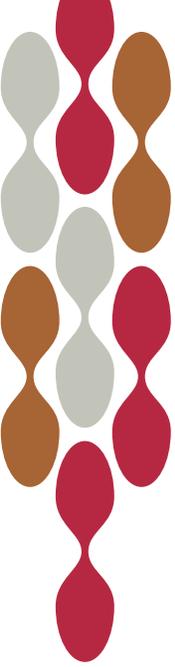
Beyond Entertainment

By JoHannah Reardon



Too many women's ministries focus on just providing fun and entertaining events for women. They often operate as a social coordinator for the women of the church rather than as something that can bring lasting change to whomever is involved.

That's why I love this download. It is written by women who have had a lot of experience in helping women become all they can be in Christ and who are willing to pass it on to the rest of us. It covers issues such as figuring out a vision and mission for your women's group, facing the problem of declining attendance in your women's ministry and understanding why it's happening, setting up a mentoring and equipping ministry for the women in your church,



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Beyond Entertainment

providing a network of small groups that defines your women's ministry, empowering women with confidence to wrestle with the Scriptures as competently as men do, and finally, making sure we are prepared to welcome into our ministry those who have no prior experience with the Bible.

Use this download to help your women's ministry move beyond mere entertainment to making lasting life-changes that will carry the women in your church through whatever comes their way in life and ministry.

Blessings,

JoHannah Reardon

Contributing Editor for GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM

Leader's Guide

How to use this download for a group study



This download can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

- 1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
- 2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
- 3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
- 4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
- 5. When working through the Reflect questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
- 6. End the session in prayer.**

Create a Vision Statement

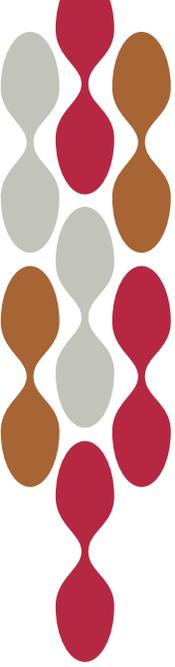


It starts with a dream.

By Michelle S. Lazurek

Every women's ministry has the tools necessary to attain a clear vision for their future. Leaders must dream what their ideal ministry will look like and then implement a specific plan so they can achieve those dreams. Women's ministry's that are achieving their dreams started through creating vision and mission statements.

All ministries need to have a vision statement and a mission statement to clearly communicate the church's future as well as strategically plan how to get there. Vision statements help ministries acknowledge their past (who they were when they were established), identify their present (who they are now), and prepare for their future (who the church wants to be one, three, or five years from now.)



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Create a Vision Statement

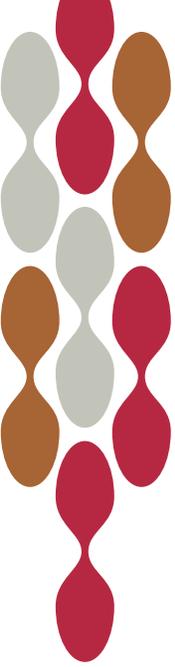
However, leaders cannot simply create vision statements without purpose behind them. They have to allow themselves to dream first. In order to have any sort of healthy, reproductive organization, you must begin at the beginning. You have to start dreaming about where you would like to see the women's ministry in one, five, or ten years.

A vision statement is a succinct, one-sentence statement encompassing all you want to achieve as an organization. A mission statement, on the other hand, is longer and specifies the steps your organization is willing to take to achieve the overall vision.

After a ministry creates a vision statement, they then create steps to achieve the vision. This is achieved through their mission statement. All ministries should possess two missions:

Internal mission: Connection must be at the center of every group's purpose. If members don't feel connected through the programs the church offers, it is easy for members to leave. Each member must be committed to establishing connection and community within the group. Matt Smay and Hugh Halter, authors of *The Tangible Kingdom*, ask, "What will be your unique thumbprint of God on your congregation? What is different about your calling than what God may call other churches to?" Besides prayer and fellowship, groups must meet the needs of each member.

External mission: In addition to getting together to meet each other's needs for community, the group also needs to establish a mission outside itself. This helps the group's purpose to remain on others as opposed to existing for the sole benefit of its members. All members must collectively decide the group's purpose.



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Create a Vision Statement

The mission statement of your women's ministry puts the feet to that vision and sense of purpose. It provides the movement to quickly and clearly move that vision forward. Each activity helps bring that vision into reality. No activity should exist just for the sake of existing.

What's Your Vision?

To determine the future of your women's ministry, leaders must create a vision statement. If you are feeling overwhelmed by this, you are not alone. Although it is a vital element to any well-run organization, putting all you want your ministry to accomplish into a sentence of 10 words or less can prove difficult. If you're having trouble with this, here are some suggestions:

- Hold a meeting and gather all your leaders together on one approved date and time. The more opinions you get on this, the better chance you have of making sure everyone agrees on the statement and will move forward with you to achieve your vision.
- Purchase a large white board, dry erase markers, and magnets. Ask each member to bring old magazines, tape, glue, and scissors. Provide blank pieces of paper and pens as well.
- Ask people to answer the following questions on their papers:

If you could lead the most ideal women's ministry tomorrow, what would it look like?

If you could describe our ministry in one word, what would you say? Why?

What is the legacy that you want to leave (What would you like the women's ministry to be known to have achieved)?

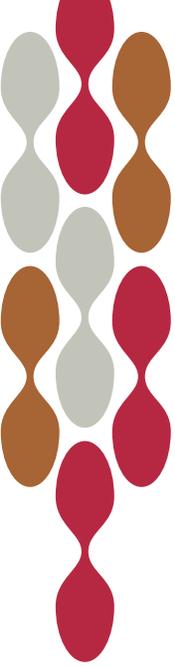


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After they have answered the questions, write on the top of the board the following sentence: "The perfect women's ministry would be . . ."

- Have them comb through their magazines for pictures of things that represent their answers. For example, if they want a ministry that values feeding the poor, a picture of fruits and vegetables or the words "abolish hunger" all work well.
- Give them permission to go crazy! No dream is off limits. If they want to treat members to free catered lunches once a month, let them cut out pictures of sandwiches. If they want the church to treat leaders to a yearly trip to the spa, cut out a picture of a woman getting a hot stone massage. It's okay to be a little silly in this part of the exercise. (When you discuss your ideas together, that will be the time to let the group know which ideas you can realistically fulfill.)
- After a designated period of time, share your answers with the rest of the team. Let each member speak and dream freely. This helps establish trust and bonding as well as the feeling people truly are being heard. Have each of them place his or her picture on the white board with magnets with an explanation of what the picture represents. Pictures should complete the sentence "My perfect women's ministry program would be . . ."
- Write the names of your current programs on the empty side of the white board. Compare what your programs offer with what the leaders' pictures represent. Are there ways to implement what the leaders want into the programs? What new programs could you offer to help meet these needs?



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Create a Vision Statement

The programs that emerge from your meeting are part of your mission. Every member of the group must have the opportunity to give input into what they want to see the group achieve. The leaders provide the women's ministry eyes with the illumination it needs to forge ahead with God's mission.

Please visit Michelle S. Lazurek's website at www.michellelazurek.com, find her on Facebook at Michelle S. Lazurek, or follow her on Twitter @mslazurek. This article is adapted from one that first appeared on GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM.

Reflect

- *When can we set up a time to develop vision and mission statements for our women's ministry?*
- *What knowledge and information do we need to gather before meeting?*
- *Who needs to be at this meeting?*
- *How will taking time to do this help the future of our ministry?*

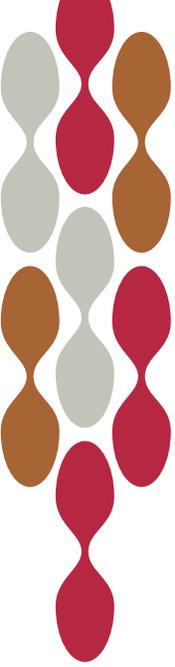
How to Address Declining Attendance



Reviving the committed in a low-commitment culture

by Cortney Whiting

When I was growing up in the Bible Belt, Sundays consisted of church, fried chicken, an afternoon nap, and then another dose of church in the evening. My childhood memories are full of handbells, youth choir, discipleship training, visitation, and potlucks. Fast-forward 20 years and Sundays look very different around town. No longer is the church the center of the family's social network. According to a recent Barna poll, only 2 in 10 Millennials (those age 30 and under) believe church attendance is important. Even the definition of regular church attendance has changed from those who attend several times a month to once every four to six weeks. In light of this lack of commitment to the body of Christ, how should the church, and particularly women's ministry, respond?



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How to Address Declining Attendance

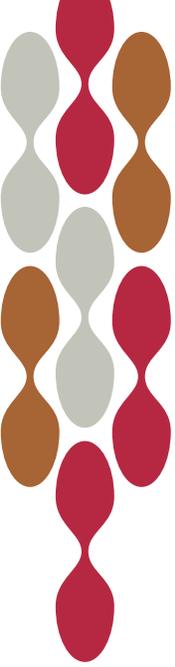
Perhaps it is not style, atmosphere, or environment that needs to change, but rather the message. We don't just want more numbers, but we want to create lasting disciples. Following are six principles employed by the New Testament church that we need to keep in mind as we minister to women.

Pray without Ceasing

Before any strategizing or planning, the most important thing we as believers can do is to commit the cause to the Lord. Acts 2:42 emphasizes the importance of prayer within the early church and the catalyzing effect prayer had in expanding the message of the gospel. Likewise, Jesus prioritized prayer within the scope of his ministry. He withdrew to pray before and/or after major life events, and prayer was a regular means by which he was strengthened and resolved in his mission (Luke 5:15-16, 6:12-13, 9:28-29, 22:42). Prayer was the means by which Jesus found complete fellowship with the Father. In the same manner, people of the church should devote themselves to prayer, communing and petitioning with the Heavenly Father regarding the needs of the body before any concrete solutions be evaluated or implemented to revive the body of Christ. It is by faith and prayer that the Lord responds to his people (1 John 5:14-15).

Keep Christ the Head of Your Women's Ministry

The common phrase "running around like a chicken with its head cut off" is used to describe someone who is without direction or purpose. Unfortunately, many women's ministries operate under the same colloquialism. The effects of a "headless" ministry are noticeable. Colossians 1:17 states that Christ is the one who holds all things together. The verse that follows that one tells us that it is he who is the head of the church. Just as the body cannot exist without a head, it also cannot have two



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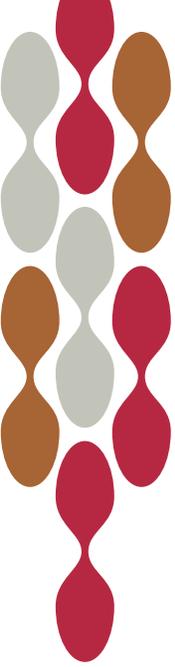
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heads. I remember visiting Ripley's Believe It or Not, where they had a picture of a two-headed cow. The cow lived for only two years because it was not meant to exist with two heads. Likewise, if a ministry leader becomes the focus rather than Christ, the ministry will not be able to thrive. Members will begin to see disunity and leave.

Show the Importance of Community

A survey of 1,200 Millennials by LifeWay Research found that those 30 and under value the authority of people's personal experiences over expert advice. What this means for women's ministries is that in order to effectively reach this generation, we must prove the authenticity of the gospel through the relationships we build with them. In the study, 50 percent of respondents said church had no influence in their lives. However, parents, friends, and extended family had significant influence. Therefore, if we want to impact generations for Christ, we need to understand the importance of community. If those attending your women's ministry events speak to no one, they are not making connections.

Acts 2:42-27 describes how the early church emphasized the importance of community. Theirs was an ongoing devotion to doing life together. They learned, interacted, and ate together. They were one in heart, connected by Christ, and they met each other's needs. If your women's ministry came up with a strategy to help believers understand that we need each other to do life together, it would be impossible for the ministry to have no influence in people's lives if they truly connected. People want to feel like they belong.



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How to Address Declining Attendance

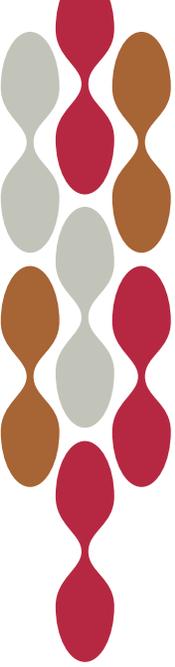
Embrace Diversity of Roles

One of the reasons the New Testament church thrived through times of hardship and persecution is because it recognized the importance of each person to the body of Christ. First Corinthians 12 discusses the value of diversity and the consequences of disunity within the body of Christ.

Today when people feel disconnected from the church, they either relocate or disengage entirely. The temptation is to elevate one position within the church or a ministry over another. The result is politicizing the church rather than honoring the body. If the women's ministry focused on seeing the potential in each member and plugging them in where they would thrive rather than trying to fill empty spaces, people would feel valued for who they are and retention rates of volunteers would most likely increase. It would also help to celebrate the "less honorable" members of the body. Sometimes a little appreciation can carry a lot of impact.

Nurse the Members Back to Health

If the church wants to grow and flourish, we must recognize that we all struggle in many ways. At a conference, Pastor Perry Noble said, "It's okay to not be okay, but it's not okay to stay that way." If your women's ministry wants to meaningfully impact this generation for Jesus, it needs to recognize that women need help and that as Christians we need each other. First Corinthians 12:26 states that if one member suffers, we all suffer together and if one member rejoices, we all rejoice together. Therefore, the women's ministry needs to be a place where all are welcome and where we can accomplish victories together in Christ. If people feel that they have to overcome their struggles before they can walk through the doors, we can



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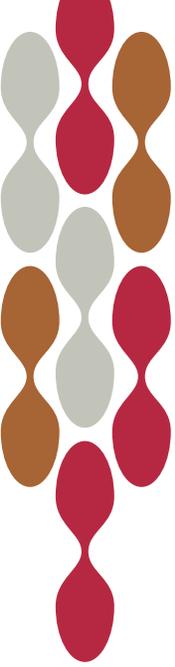
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never effectively reach the world for Christ. If a member feels judged when they fall rather than supported, they will turn away from the church instead of running back to the body.

Apply Scripture Accurately and Prudently

In looking at how the early church responded to the Spirit's lead in the New Testament, it is clear to see the important roles biblical interpretation and application played in the growth of the church. If your women's ministry wants to continue to reach generations in a relevant way, one of the most important ways it can do so is by teaching how to correctly interpret and apply Scripture to daily situations. Second Timothy 2:15 commands believers to be diligent in presenting themselves to God as workers who are tested and approved. This is done by knowing how to correctly interpret the word of truth. When Jesus was on earth, he spent a large portion of his time teaching people how to understand the truth of God's Word. He then challenged them to respond through action.

Likewise, Paul wrote to many churches explaining the cultural applications of the cross. For instance, the Corinthians had many questions about how to respond to the culture of the day in light of the change in their theological views (1 Corinthians 8). Paul did not simply indoctrinate them into a system of belief, but he talked them through why they should make the decisions based on their religious convictions. If your women's ministry wants to survive in these times of tolerance, it must learn how to teach its members to think critically and yet respond lovingly. The New Testament writers emphasized this need for humility, love, and prudence when it came to sharing with unbelievers (Matthew 10:16, 1 Corinthians 9:22-23, Colossians 4:5-6, 1 Peter 3:15).



Women's Ministry that Changes Lives

How to Address Declining Attendance

Women's ministries can thrive and reach people for Christ. The body can respond in several ways. It can ignore the warning signs and continue to operate as it has. Or it can look at the studies, examine the Scriptures, pray, and strategize together for how we can more effectively reach the generations for Jesus Christ.

You read more from Cortney at <http://becomingministries.blogspot.com> or check her out on twitter at @cortneywhiting. This article is adapted from one that first appeared on GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM.

Reflect

- *Look up the verses the author mentions under "Pray without Ceasing." How can our women's ministry make prayer more central?*
- *Is our women's ministry doing a good job of providing ongoing community for our members? How might we do better?*
- *Are those involved in our ministry generally healthy emotionally and physically? If not, how can we help them?*
- *Are we teaching the women in our church to study the Scriptures carefully? If not, how can we better do this?*

Mentor and Multiply

Identifying, training, and equipping leaders

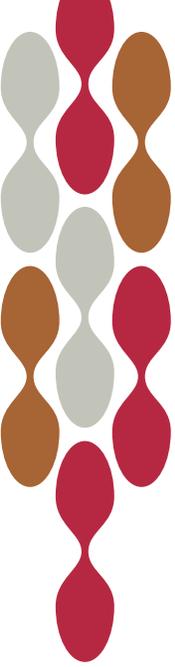
by *Natasha Sistrunk Robinson*



After many lessons learned from teaching the Bible for 10 years and having successfully launched a women's small group ministry at our former church, I wanted to take time to pray and research before launching a women's mentoring ministry. After reading a few articles and researching online, I read Regi Campbell's book ***Mentor Like Jesus***, in which he presents Jesus as the world's best mentor and highlights lessons gleaned from Jesus' mentoring relationship with his 12 disciples.

What's Prayer Have to Do with It?

For starters, Jesus selected the disciples after spending an entire night in prayer (**Luke 6:12-13**). There were no applications or referrals. Jesus simply prayed to his Father and selected the ordinary men his Father revealed for his missional task. From a biblical perspective, mentoring is for the purpose of discipleship.



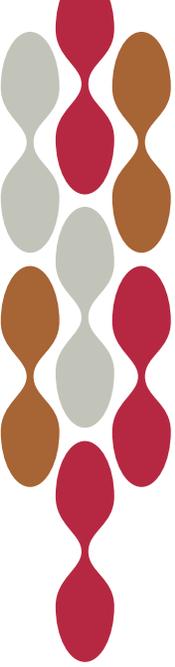
Women's Ministry that Changes Lives

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It requires a serious commitment of servant leaders willing to sacrifice and lay down their lives for the sake of others. If a person is not fully committed to the work, she should not do it. Therefore, praying for God's direction concerning leaders is a radical first step.

For many years, I have been appalled by some of the people allowed to lead in the church. My observations are not that they were bad people. In most cases, the people were sincere Christians who wanted to please the Lord but lacked spiritual depth. Others had sound theology but were emotionally immature; they lacked either self-awareness, personal integrity, or discipline. Because these people were hurt and unhealed, they often (with no intention) hurt other people. Those type of leaders are rarely corrected because they are in positions of power and the hurt parties either remain silent or leave the church, never to be heard from again. In cases like this, the person with the "title" should not have been leading in the first place.

The church is one of very few organizations where people are allowed to volunteer and then be placed "in charge" with no real evaluation or training. Sometimes church leaders do this for lack of resources and at other times, out of laziness because some ministries are deemed more important than others, so we focus on our "pet ministries" with little regard for what is best for the other ministries or the entire church. In short, this practice is irresponsible and must stop. In the church, we are God's agents of change for winning souls and shepherding them. I submit that this work is more important than anything that takes place in the secular arena and therefore requires much more care.



Women's Ministry that Changes Lives

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I Have Prayed, Now What?

Jesus' model for choosing leaders was simple. Pray and wait for God to reveal his chosen vessels. Once God reveals his chosen vessels, those people are then confirmed by the recognition of humans. When launching the women's mentoring ministry, we prayed to God and developed a list of women to potentially lead mentoring small groups. We asked the women's ministry director for confirmation, along with our church staff. Afterward, we asked those women to pray about this potential leadership opportunity. Approximately half of them came back with a "no" response. Because we followed Jesus' example, there was no temptation to manipulate them to decide otherwise. In our first year of ministry, we confirmed eight mentors to establish a leadership team.

If identifying leaders is important, training them is equally important.

The New Testament talks about equipping believers for work of the Kingdom (**2 Timothy 3:16-17** and **Hebrews 13:20-21**). Looking to Jesus, we observe him spending the most time praying with, teaching, and training his twelve disciples. He did this so they could go and do likewise. Campbell writes, "Those he [Jesus] mentored totally committed to his mission, worked together as an effective team, and through their efforts, arguably one-third of the world's populations believes in what they taught. From eleven people [I would add the Apostle Paul as the twelfth] to two billion . . . Jesus was a pretty good mentor."

A Mentor's Vision Is God's Kingdom

The growth of Jesus' ministry and the advancement of God's Kingdom occur through the power of the Holy Spirit as evident in the book of Acts. God's Kingdom explodes as a result of the faithful commitment and firm foundation laid by those ministered to by



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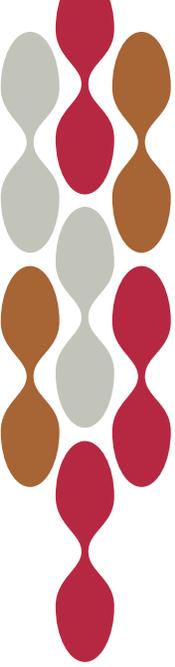
Jesus. Making disciples of all nations begins at home (**Matthew 28:19-20**). On our leadership team, we equip leaders to go out and do the work of God's kingdom. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church of Ephesus that leaders are given "to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (**Ephesians 4:12-13**, NIV).

A few months ago, my ministry partner and I received a note from one of our mentors stating that she would not return as a mentor next season. She explained that in her prayer time, God had birthed in her heart a desire to minister to widows. This is a gap that needs to be filled in our church, and ministry to widows speaks to God's heart. We will miss her leadership in the mentoring ministry, but we have equipped and trained her so that she can faithfully and confidently go out to do the work God has prepared for her to do. We will continue to lovingly avail ourselves and assist her to this end.

Equipping the Saints

Prior to launching mentoring groups, we spent five months praying, teaching, and training our leaders and preparing them for the important work of ministry. Perhaps the biggest transition we observed during this time was the building of confidence, not in their own abilities, but in their trust that God who called them would also sustain them (**Romans 8:30** and **Philippians 1:6**). Then we shared the message of mentoring with others. Throughout the season, we continue with monthly leadership meetings and training sessions with the leaders.

One mentor said, "The training we received not only taught us the biblical perspective of mentoring through the example of Jesus' ministry, but we also received instruction in leadership,



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organization, listening, and 'people skills' necessary for conducting our mentoring gatherings, maintaining order, and preventing 'domination' by an over-talkative or zealous mentee. We were trained to understand the worldview of the various generations of women who would be in our groups, and how to encourage interaction. We were also trained in how to conduct a meeting and keep up with the time in order to accomplish the goals of each mentoring gathering. It was very important to have each mentor trained, equipped, and ready in order to maintain consistency in what was being taught and discussed. There were no 'rogue groups' going off on tangents, which would defeat the purpose of the women's mentoring ministry. I felt fully prepared to conduct my first meeting with the training I received."

Natasha Sistrunk Robinson serves as co-director of the Women's Mentoring Ministry at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina. Connect with her through [her blog](#), [Twitter](#), or [Facebook](#). This article first appeared on [GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM](#).

Reflect

- *Have we taken time to pray about our discipleship and mentoring ministry? If not, how can we set aside time to do so?*
- *What kind of training can we set up for those in our church who feel called to leadership?*
- *The author said, "the biggest transition we observed during this time was the building of confidence, not in their own abilities, but in their trust that God." How can we help our leaders to gain this same kind of confidence?*

The Healing Power of Small Groups



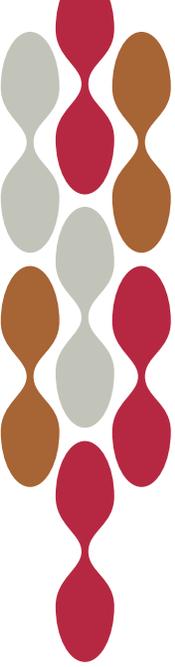
We need friendship, and friendship happens on purpose.

by Julia Mateer

As a mental health therapist, I am frequently shocked at how psychology thinks it's discovered a mystery of human functioning when all along these "mysteries" are found in Scripture. Case in point: our need for relationships. Writing for *Psychology Today*, Hara Estroff Marano reports the following:

"Friendship is a lot like food. We need it to survive. What is more, we seem to have a basic drive for it. Psychologists find that human beings have a fundamental need for inclusion in group life and for close relationships. We are truly social animals.

"The upshot is, we function best when this social need is met. It is easier to stay motivated, to meet the varied challenges of life.



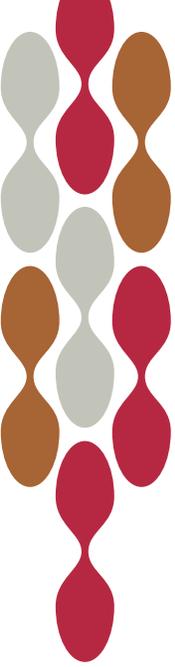
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"In fact, evidence has been growing that when our need for social relationships is not met, we fall apart mentally and even physically. There are effects on the brain and on the body. Some effects work subtly, through the exposure of multiple body systems to excess amounts of stress hormones. Yet the effects are distinct enough to be measured over time, so that unmet social needs take a serious toll on health, eroding our arteries, creating high blood pressure, and even undermining learning and memory."

So if loneliness is one of mankind's major maladies, how does a Christ follower combat loneliness and develop meaningful friendships? The Father's heart is for his children to connect. Let's look at God's Word to see the importance of relationships:

1. **Hebrews 10:25** says, " And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near."
2. **Ecclesiastes 4:9**, "Two are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed."
3. **Genesis 2:18**, "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.'"
4. **1 Thessalonians 5:14**, "Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone."
5. **1 Peter 4:7-9**, "The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay."



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The Healing Power of Small Groups

Sadly, many Christians have the unhealthy and unrealistic expectation that attending a function at church with a room full of people will automatically produce friends. When this doesn't happen, people get their feelings hurt and hit the road, looking for another church. But how many of you know that you can feel the loneliest in a room full of people?

The answer is small groups. Relationships happen on purpose. We have to be intentional in developing relationships. Small groups provide opportunities for friendships to develop by providing support and encouragement.

There are entire books, blogs, and newsletters written on the mechanics of how to do small group ministry within the local church, providing valuable information if you're trying to get groups established within your women's ministry. But here are a few tried and true principles for healthy and flourishing small groups:

- The women's ministry should view itself as a ministry *of* small groups, not as a ministry *with* small groups. What's the difference? A ministry of small groups believes that real life-change happens in the context of relationships, so everything that occurs within the women's ministry drives people into groups. Small groups are seen as the primary vehicle for ministry versus an auxiliary ministry. For example, instead of having a women's ministry events, ministering to women is accomplished through women's small groups.
- An important component of successful small group ministries is that the leaders of the women's ministry support this vision.
- There are several small group models, and the one that I'm most familiar with is the free-market model. This model is designed for people to lead groups based on their passion rather



Women's Ministry that Changes Lives

The Healing Power of Small Groups

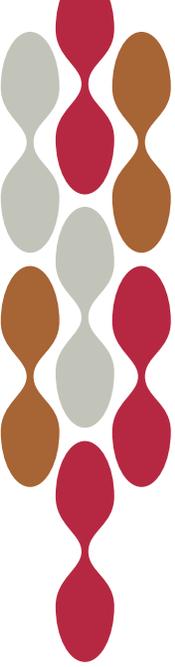
than a need. This model encourages people to feel a sense of ownership with the "stickiness factor" setting in. For example, say I love sushi. I can lead a group where we make sushi as long as I have a spiritual component such as prayer, a devotional, worship, and/or testimonies. I could also do an in-depth Bible study on Revelation if I wanted to.

- Groups are always open so a woman coming through the doors of the church can get connected at any point.
- Small groups meet at least two to four times a month, which gives people an opportunity to develop relationships.
- Groups minister in times of celebration and crisis. For example, if one of your members has a death in his/her family, the members of the small group provide meals, support, and encouragement—whatever is needed to help the person make it through the difficult circumstances. Conversely, if someone has a job promotion or has a baby, the group rallies to celebrate.

One aspect of groups that I love is when small groups reach outside the church and minister to the community. One of our women's small groups ministers twice a week to the residents of the Solve House, a ministry to unwed teenage mothers, providing housing, parenting classes, and transportation to and from school. One of our moms' groups has gone global, adopting a group of moms from Zimbabwe who've lost their husbands to AIDS.

Life truly is better in groups!

*Julia Mateer is a writer, speaker, therapist, and director of women's small groups at **Bayside Community Church**. You can connect with Julia on **her website**. This article is adapted from one that first appeared on **GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM**.*



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Reflect

- *Is our women's ministry a ministry of small groups or a ministry with small groups? If we would like to be the former, what changes do we need to make?*
- *If we move to being a ministry of small groups, how can we help the church understand the change in our approach?*
- *Would the "free-market model" described in this article work for our women's ministry? Why or why not?*

How to Empower the Women in Your Church



Start by addressing stereotypes.

by Sharon Hodde Miller

I am currently a student pursuing a PhD in educational studies. I have a great passion for women in our churches, and I hope my research will one day serve them, so I love to share what I'm learning from time to time. Especially when I think it can help church leaders.

In recent months I have studied a phenomenon called **stereotype threat**. This term refers to the pressure individuals feel in the classroom or workplace due to perceived stereotypes about themselves. For instance, women are sometimes stereotyped as being less capable at math, which can influence the way young girls perform in their math classes. If they believe they are worse at math, they are likely to perform worse regardless of natural ability.



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Numerous studies have shown that the simple presence of a stereotype can inhibit academic performance, but it creates an additional obstacle. If a student or employee anticipates being stereotyped, some will actively try to undermine the stereotype. For example, a businesswoman may fear being perceived as overly emotional by her male colleagues, so she intentionally minimizes her emotions and conducts herself stoically. Unfortunately, the cognitive energy she puts into combating the stereotype also inhibits her performance. Likewise, students who find themselves resisting a stereotype in a classroom setting are less able to learn and engage the subject matter.

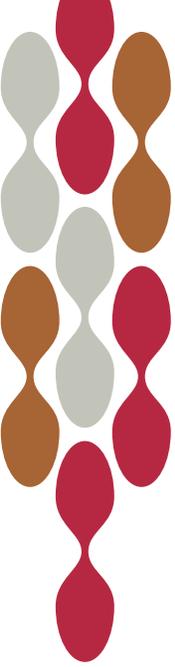
It is remarkable and troubling that a stereotype can be so powerful.

Fortunately, researchers have also looked into the best methods for breaking the power of stereotype threat, and they have discovered two primary options:

1. An authority figure publicly debunks the stereotype.

In a study at Stanford University, a group of men and women were administered a math test and their performances were recorded (Spencer and Steele, 1999). Then the same math test was administered to a different group of men and women, but with one small change. This time, before the students began, the test administrator told the group that there was no previous gender discrepancy in performance on this test. This simple statement debunking the stereotype about women and math made all the difference. The women in the second group tested better.

2. In-group role models. It is also helpful for victims of stereotype threat to see individuals from their own group (i.e. women or minorities) functioning competently outside the stereotype (McIntyre, Paulson, Taylor, Morin and Lord, 2011).



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Having a talented female math teacher, for instance, can help dispel the myth that women are not good at math.

This research is fascinating, and it has led me to wonder about its application to women in the church. Many stereotypes about women are both sociological and psychological, so the cycle can be tough to break. If women believe they are not capable of thinking theologically, or leading and teaching in the church effectively, that stereotype perpetuates an unfortunate cycle in which women are hesitant to even try.

That said, there are two applications that churches can take from the above research. The first applies to men. In the same way that authority figures have the power to break stereotypes with a simple word, men in the church have that power as well. That is not to say that women should not also speak out against unbiblical stereotypes, but research seems to indicate that the *power group*—the group that is stereotyped as being naturally gifted or authoritative in a certain area—has particular influence in this regard. If men were to tell their wives, daughters, mothers, and sisters that women *can* think theologically, that women *should* be important voices in the church, and that the church *needs* the contributions of these women, that message would have a tremendous, positive impact.

I should add that this influence is evident in my own life. I have a strong and brilliant dad who has always been unconditionally supportive. Although both my parents believe in me (sometimes more than they should!) my dad would seriously fight anyone who tried to stand in my way. I am no doubt the woman I am today because my dad wanted a strong daughter.



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In short, men, we need you! Challenge your wives and raise strong daughters!

The second application from the above research concerns us ladies. If we want to see younger generations of women pushing themselves and using their gifts for the Kingdom of God, then we need to be doing that ourselves. Change can be slow and discouraging at times, but the more women who are out there studying, growing, and leading, the more we can expect younger women to follow our example. Change begins with us.

Sharon Hodde Miller is a blogger, freelance writer, and PhD candidate. You can find her at her blog, [She Worships](#). This article first appeared on [GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM](#).

Reflect

- *Give examples of when you've seen the "stereotype threat" in action.*
- *Do the women in our church have confidence that they can think theologically and become disciples of Christ as important as the men? If not, how can we help them begin to gain this confidence?*
- *How can we provide positive role models for the women of our church?*

Unprepared for the Unchurched



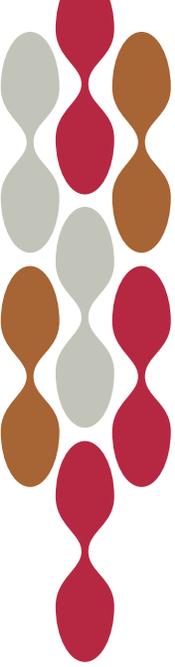
When we're not ready, new believers slip through the cracks.

By Jennifer Waddle

It's true . . . I have been called naive.

Several years ago when my purse was stolen in broad daylight, we found out the police officer wrote in her report that my husband and I seemed very naive. And you know what? She was right. My husband and I were naive to the invasiveness of that experience. We were unsuspecting people!

What I never expected to discover was my naivety, or lack of preparedness, in an area of women's ministry. It caused someone to slip through the cracks, and it was a painful lesson to learn.



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Unprepared for the Unchurched

I had been part of women's ministry for years and loved leading other women. Having been in numerous studies as a participant, leader, and co-leader, I sort of felt like a pro when it came to the unique personalities and challenges that make up women's Bible studies. I thought I could lead just about anyone!

Hmm . . . what was that about pride coming before a fall?

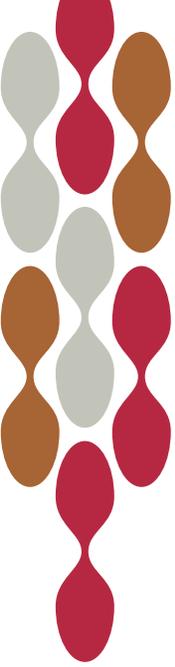
In my excitement at getting to lead a study I had written, I was taken aback at what I encountered. It was a wake-up call that would challenge everything I knew about leading others.

I got to church early that evening to set up my classroom. I had the tables just right, the chairs lined up, and I added cute little paper cups with foil-wrapped chocolates beside the nameplates. After all, isn't chocolate the best icebreaker?

What I didn't bring was enough insight to be able to relate to a brand-new believer who had joined the class. I honestly hadn't expected someone to sign up for an Old Testament study without a general, working knowledge of the Bible. How naively unprepared I was.

This small, older woman sat nervously through my historical introduction of the Book of Haggai. The other ladies seemed engaged and fully attentive, but she flipped through the pages of her Bible aimlessly, finally closing it altogether.

As the study went on, she kept looking at the door as if she might make a run for it. My attempts at smiling and trying to make her feel welcome were overshadowed by the fact that she was simply lost.



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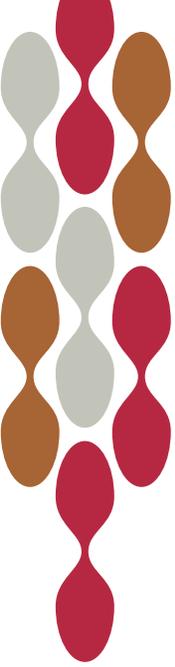
Sadly, she didn't return. Oh, how I wish I could go back and do things differently! I would allow myself enough flexibility to take the time to guide her. I would have more compassion and patience to make sure she was able to follow. I wouldn't be so naively unprepared.

The next day I was able to find her phone number through our church office and invite her to the new believer's class that was ongoing at our church. But to this day, I don't know if she ever went. I learned a painful lesson that night. As a women's ministry leader, I must be ready to meet people right where they are and never assume things about their walk with the Lord.

Since that time, I've been careful to lead in a way that is authentic and welcoming. I regularly give direction in finding Bible passages, while singling out no one. I make sure I am equipped with materials for new believers, including a Bible, a list of upcoming church activities, and information to help them in their Christian walk.

Most important, I pray fervently for each and every woman who might join one of my studies. I pray for wisdom, discernment, and mindfulness to be prepared for every person no matter where she is spiritually. Yes, I still make mistakes. I once called someone Betty for the longest time before realizing she was not Betty. I've gotten lost in my notes, and sometimes even forgotten the chocolate (small tragedy). But I am no longer the naive girl I once was.

I'll never forget that lovely woman who sat in the corner, excluded because of my lack of understanding. I pray for her to this day. I pray that she found a group where she felt welcome and could



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follow along. I pray she found a women's ministry leader who wasn't so naively unprepared and who didn't let her slip through the cracks. I also pray that the Lord will cover all of us who just want to gather together and learn more about him. And you know what? I truly believe his grace is enough—enough to catch a naively unprepared leader, and the one slipping through the cracks.

"We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have lived with a God-given holiness and sincerity in all our dealings. We have depended on God's grace, not on our own human wisdom. That is how we have conducted ourselves before the world, and especially toward you" (2 Corinthians 1:12).

Jennifer Waddle writes books, blogs, and teachings for WomensMinistryTools.com. This article is adapted from one that first appeared on GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM.

Reflect

- ◉ *How is our women's ministry doing in making unbelievers or new believers part of our group? What are we doing well? What could we do better?*
- ◉ *The author says, "I make sure I am equipped with materials for new believers, including a Bible, a list of upcoming church activities, and information to help them in their Christian walk." How can we make sure each of our women's ministry events includes these things?*
- ◉ *What steps can you take to begin to let others take responsibility for the ministry?*

Additional Resources

Articles, books, and Bible studies to help you further



Articles

Mentoring as Discipleship—Through intentional relationships, everyone learns.

By Natasha Sistrunk Robinson, available on GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM.

Everybody's Friend, Nobody's Leader—Women and relational leadership.

By Kate Coleman, available on GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM.

Shoes that Fit—Effective leaders learn to embrace who God has made them to be.

By Esther Feng, available on GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM.

Books

The Team That Jesus Built: How to Develop, Equip, and Commission a Women's Ministry Team by Janet Thompson (New Hope Publishers, 2011). Jesus built strong teams. You can too. Get his methods, answers, and more for team-building challenges most leaders encounter: How do you motivate people to serve selflessly?



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Additional Resources

How do you equip people to be new leaders? How do you "let go" as a leader? Based on the author's experience building the women's ministry at Saddleback Church, California, under the leadership of pastor Rick Warren.

Building an Effective Women's Ministry: Develop a Plan—Gather a Team—Watch *God Work* by Sharon Jaynes (Harvest House, 2005). Want to develop a dynamic women's ministry---but don't know where to start? Jaynes answers your questions and offers the planning tools and confidence-builders you need to succeed. Learn how to identify your mission, develop a team, plan a budget, avoid burnout, achieve balance, and create programs that nurture, reach out, and revive.

Online Resources

Assess the Effectiveness of Your Women's Ministry—Use these assessment forms to help you and your team discern whether you are truly helping women in your women's ministry. Available from BUILDINGCHURCHLEADERS.COM.

Fresh Ideas for Women's Ministry—Tools for evangelism, discipleship, and mentoring. Available from BUILDINGCHURCHLEADERS.COM.

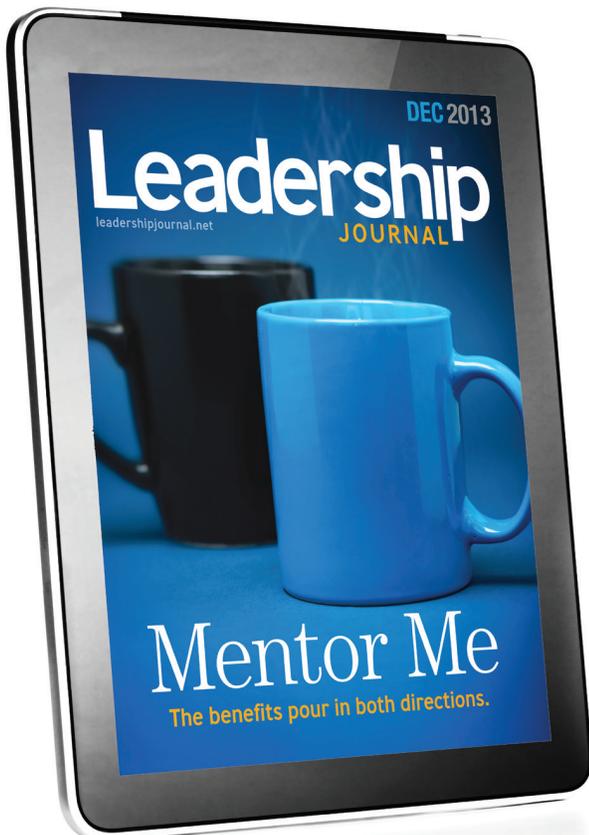
Taking Women's Ministry to the Next Level—These practical ideas will help you consider how to truly minister to today's women. Available from BUILDINGCHURCHLEADERS.COM.

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