

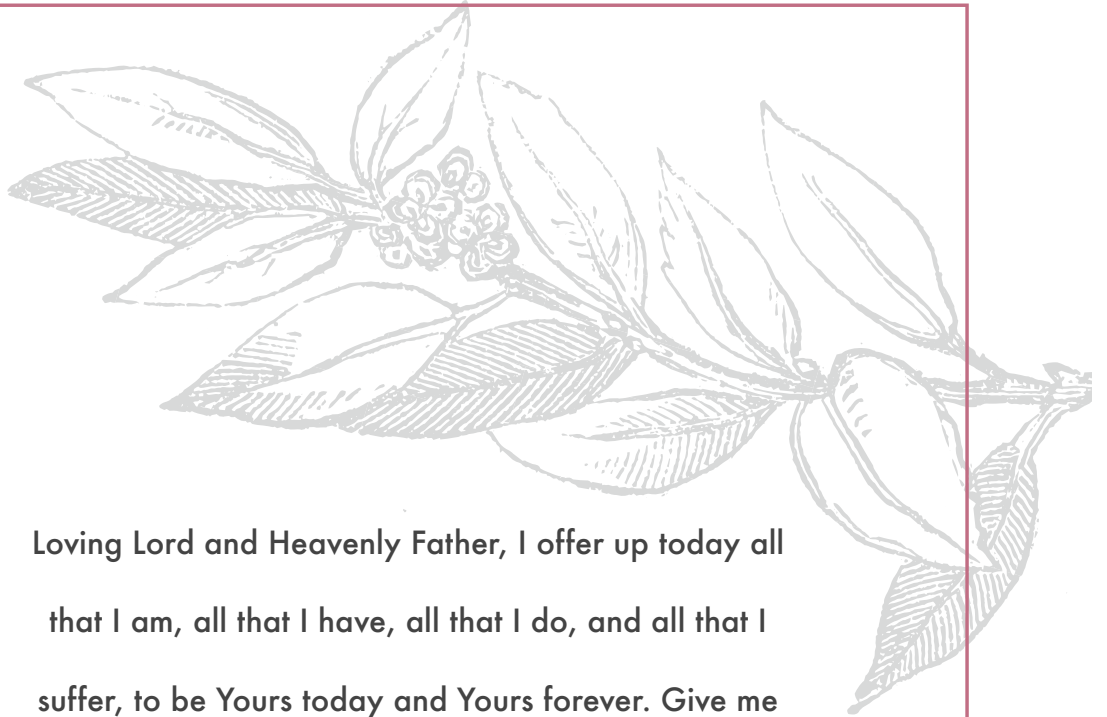
Revive Our Hearts™

Women's
Ministry Leader

SURVIVAL GUIDE



EDITED BY LESLIE BENNETT



Loving Lord and Heavenly Father, I offer up today all
that I am, all that I have, all that I do, and all that I
suffer, to be Yours today and Yours forever. Give me
grace, Lord, to do all that I know of Your holy will.

Purify my heart, sanctify my thinking, correct my desires.

Teach me, in all of today's work and trouble and joy,
to respond with honest praise, simple trust, and instant
obedience, that my life may be in truth a living sacrifice,
by the power of Your Holy Spirit and in the name of
Your Son Jesus Christ, my Master and my all.

— ELISABETH ELLIOT



HIS STEADFAST

Love

ENDURES

forever

PSALM 107:2

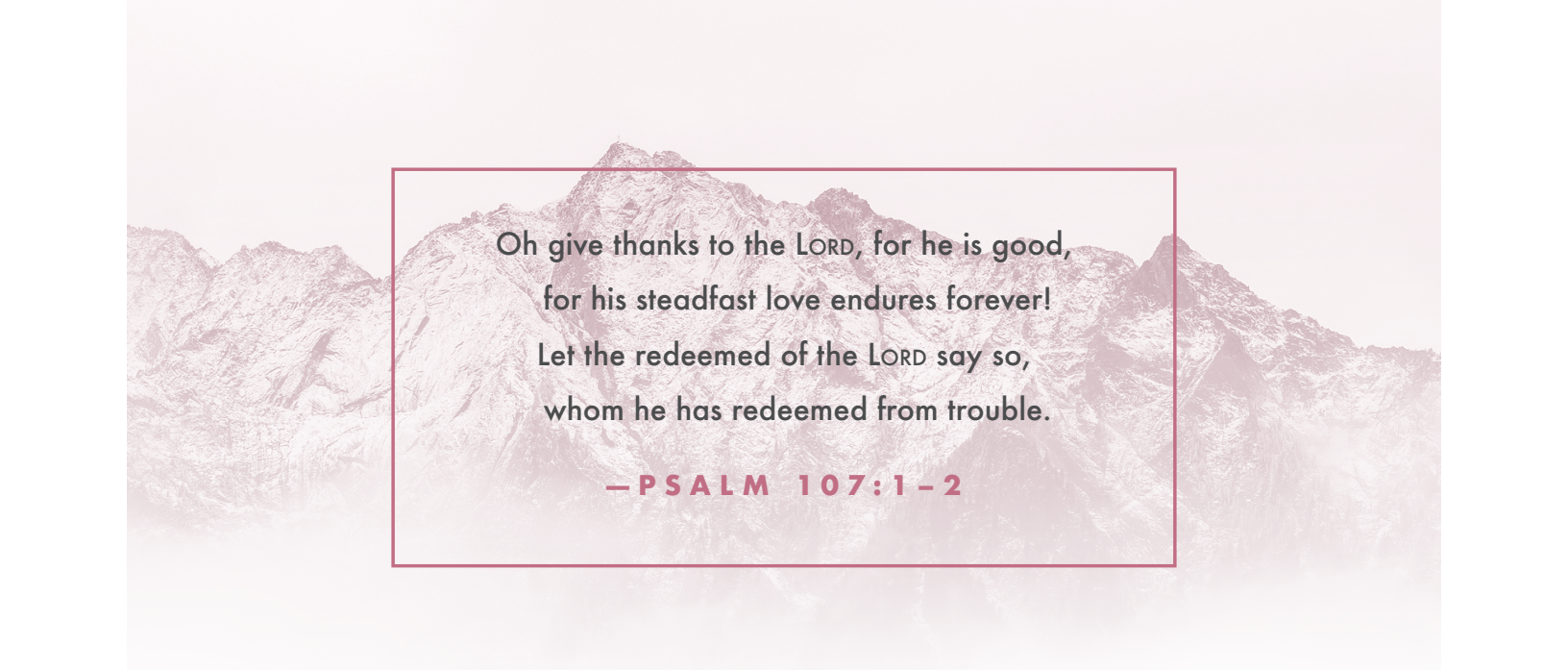
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"O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you. . . . We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." — 2 CHRONICLES 20:6, 12



Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!
Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
whom he has redeemed from trouble.

— P S A L M 1 0 7 : 1 - 2

Introduction

We've all heard astonishing tales of survival against impossible odds.

Take Aron Ralston. Hiking alone through the Blue John Canyon in Utah, Aron suddenly found his life in jeopardy when his right arm was pinned against the canyon wall by a dislodged 800-pound boulder. After five grueling days of entrapment, he almost abandoned hope of being rescued. The experienced mountaineer was in a physical state of delirium and dehydration when he made the unthinkable decision: to free himself by amputating his arm with a dull, two-inch pocket knife. Once unloosed, Aron Ralston rappelled down a sixty-five-foot sheer cliff face and hiked out of the canyon; 127 hours after the tragic accident, he was rescued.

There have been plenty of times when I've felt trapped with little hope of escape. While ministry is a precious joy and privilege, it isn't necessarily easy. Whatever your leadership role entails, there's no avoiding the challenges that inevitably arise. From budget restraints to burnout, from a lack of training to a lack of volunteers, from being misunderstood to being dismissed by decision makers, from limitations of too many demands with too little time . . .

Even on the most brave days in ministry, our heroic feats can fall short. The thought of giving up threatens our minds until we remember to cry out to the Lord who knows precisely how to rescue the godly from trials ([2 Peter 2:9](#); [Ps. 69:13–16](#)).

It's our hope that this Survival Guide will be a pocket tool God employs to deliver you from trouble (*even the danger of bone-crushing boulders!*). I pray it will be a compass to lead you to Jesus, the ultimate Rescuer, whose life was crushed so ours could be freed from sin and death—the greatest threat we'll ever face.

If you find yourself in the heat of a battle today, sister, we're in the trenches with you. What's more important . . . the Lord your God is with you. The battle belongs to Him. Stand firm. Together, we'll keep our eyes on Him and watch for deliverance to come. (Read [2 Chronicles 20](#) for an encouraging boost of faith.)

And while we wait, let's lay down our futile attempts to save ourselves and worship the gracious Father who promises to save.

Hang on . . . help is on the way!

Leslie Bennett.

Women's Ministry Initiatives



LESLIE BENNETT joined *Revive Our Hearts* with a dozen years under her belt of leading women's ministries in the local church. As a speaker, writer, and Bible study leader, her passion is to serve women through life-giving discipleship. For survival, she sharpens iron with fellow leaders and relies on the power of prayer. Connect with Leslie at the Leader Connection—ReviveOurHearts.com/leaders/

Tool #1



NOTHING LEFT TO GIVE

By Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth

A few years ago, I was able to join some of our team at a fellow staff member's home for a unique experience—a cider-making party. The process was fascinating and thought-provoking.

First, the apples are washed—sloshed around vigorously in frigid water. Then they are thrown in rapid succession, one after the other, into a rotating device with sharp protrusions that cut them up in tiny pieces.

Those pieces are then pressed with a device that squeezes the juice out of them. Intense pressure is applied by turning a lever that keeps squeezing them more tightly—pressed, pressed, pressed. Just when you think they can't possibly be pressed any further, more pressure is applied . . . and more juice comes out.

Finally, when there is no more juice to be had, the apple pieces are removed from the press and thrown into a refuse pile. By that point they are totally dried out, no more juice or taste in them, useless for anything (except to feed deer!).

As I stood and watched the whole process, it seemed such a vivid picture of what I have at times felt like over the past thirty plus years of ministry.

THE PRESSURE OF MINISTRY

It most definitely is a privilege and a joy to serve the Lord and minister to the needs of others. But I also have to admit that not every moment is a cakewalk (as I'm sure you already know!).

There have been times when I've felt like I've been cut up in tiny pieces, diced and

pressed, and that the juice has been squeezed out of me by the relentless deadlines and demands for books, radio programs, and other content, as well as an endless flow of people pressing in.

Often I thought I had nothing left when God called me to serve Him in something new—a new book, a new conference, more radio programs, more travel. More pressure, more squeezing, until the flow of juice was reduced to a trickle or nothing at all. I have even felt like that box of useless, tasteless, leftover apple pieces, good for nothing but to be tossed out.

In the midst of it all, the Lord has provided encouragement to keep going by reminding me of things I know to be true and for which I give thanks:

- “Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all” (Phil. 2:17).
- “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).
- “Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10).
- “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:24–25).
- “Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38).
- “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships,



persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9–10).



HOW MINISTRY IS LIKE MAKING CIDER

The cider-making process reminds me that:

- 1 . Those apples were made to be used. Their ultimate “glory” is not in simply clinging to a branch on a tree and looking pretty. They were made to be consumed, eaten, and enjoyed by others.
- 2 . In order for the apples to be made into juice—or pies, jams, or something else—for others to enjoy, they have to relinquish their natural identity, to be washed, cut up, pressed, baked, etc.
- 3 . There is no juice without intense pressure and squeezing.
- 4 . We were made to be spent, used, consumed—for the glory of God and the good of others. Our greatest glory is not in holding on to our life, but in losing it—for Christ’s sake and the gospel.
- 5 . The Lord Jesus was used up, spent, consumed, poured out for our sake. He did not count His own life dear to Himself, but gave it up entirely—down to the last drop of His lifeblood.
- 6 . In the spiritual realm, the squeezing and pressing are not random or meaningless but purposeful. There is juice to be had for the blessing, health, strengthening, and enjoyment of others—if we are willing to give up our natural identity and be processed, pressed, and spent.
- 7 . In God’s economy, death brings life. The laying down of our lives is not ultimate but precedes new resurrection life. The “end” is not the end.

We were made to be spent, used, consumed—for the glory of God and the good of others.

- 8 . When we give out and are spent for Christ's sake and others', we not only bless them, but we ourselves receive a blessing.
- 9 . The grace of God enables us to serve and be spent—with gladness. The grace of God is also what replenishes us and enables us to keep giving, to keep being fruitful (producing juice), even when we have nothing left to give of our own.

If God is glorified in my being utterly used up and discarded, that should be okay with me. That He should have ever used me for anything is sheer mercy and grace.

If He wants to continue using me, He can supernaturally supply the grace to make that possible, shredded and dry though I may sometimes feel. The God who can bring light out of darkness, order out of chaos, water out of a rock, surplus out of loaves and fishes, and glory out of the cross can surely turn my desert place into a fruitful place once again.

I am encouraged by these words from Ugo Bassi, a preacher from Rome in the nineteenth century. Although written over a century ago, they are still so applicable to my life—and yours—as we serve Christ today.

*Measure thy life by loss instead of gain;
Not by the wine drunk but by the wine poured forth;
For love's strength standeth in love's sacrifice,
And whoso suffers most hath most to give.*



NANCY DEMOSS WOLGEMUTH has touched the lives of millions of women through two daily nationally syndicated radio programs—*Revive Our Hearts* and *Seeking Him*. Her books have sold more than three million copies and are reaching the hearts of women around the world. Read more by Nancy at ReviveOurHearts.com



Tool #2

A LEADER'S PRAYER CLOSET

By Judy Dunagan

I have often thought about what my greatest surprise will be when I go home to be with the Lord. After much pondering, I have concluded that it will be the tremendous power and peace that was available to me through prayer on this side of heaven—and how infrequently I used it!¹ —Richard Burr,

[Developing Your Secret Closet of Prayer](#)

The first time I read that quote, it stopped me in my busy ministry tracks. Although I often taught on prayer, my own prayer life had grown stale and, sadly, infrequent.

As a women's ministry leader, I had wandered into dangerous territory, trying to lead a large and thriving women's ministry that wasn't covered in prayer. For years I had faithfully been serving as a women's ministry director at our church, keeping busy teaching women's Bible studies, planning conferences, and encouraging other women to put their hope in Jesus.

But in the midst of all that out-of-breath-serving-Him busyness, I had lost the wonder and awe of the sacred privilege we have of entering His throne room in prayer.

Though I knew prayer needed to be a top priority, I was dropping the baton of prayer that had been passed on to me from my prayer warrior pastor dad and grandmother. The irony of that "baton drop" was it was mainly because I was so busy "doing" ministry.

In the midst of all that out-of-breath-serving-Him busyness, I had lost the wonder and awe of the sacred privilege we have of entering His throne room in prayer.

And I suspect that you also wrestle with the same issue as a ministry leader. We can be passionate about prayer, even teach about the importance of prayer . . . without actually praying!

In *The Screwtape Letters*, a Christian apologetic novel by C.S. Lewis, the demon Screwtape writes in his letter to his nephew and minion, Wormwood:



Once you have made the world an end, and faith a means, you have almost won your man, and it makes very little difference what kind of worldly end he is pursuing. Provided that meetings, pamphlets, policies, movements, causes, and crusades, matter more to him than prayers and sacraments and charity, he is ours—and the more “religious” (on those terms) the more securely ours.²

Now that might seem like an overly dramatic quote, but it resonates with the tyranny of the urgent for women in ministry leadership. Often we are so distracted by planning events, retreats, Bible studies—and even ministering to the women we serve—that our commitment to prayer becomes secondary or an afterthought.

What if things could be different? What if instead of prayer being a peripheral part of your ministry and calling, it became central to the work He has called you to do? Let's explore some practical ways to make prayer a central part of the ministry you lead.

1. Seek Out a Prayer Partner

First, seek out a prayer partner, someone who will not only hold you accountable to pray but who will actually pray with you consistently. As a women's ministry

director at a large church in the Detroit area, the Holy Spirit impressed on my heart that I was going to need a mentor who would also be a woman of prayer. Soon after, God brought Joanie across my path. She was about twenty years older than I was and asked if I knew anyone who was looking for a prayer partner. And I said, “Me!” Joanie had no way of knowing that God had already prepared my heart to meet her. We immediately began a commitment to pray together every week. Joanie is the one who taught me how to worship our God through prayer and not always jump in asking Him for help or blessings.

That was almost twenty years ago, and though I’ve moved far from Michigan, we still pray for each other often. She is the one who consistently prays for my daughters and grandson now that both of my parents are in heaven. What a gift! Be brave, dear leader, and ask someone to be your prayer partner, or let God open just the right door as He did for me, and watch what can happen.

2. Shift the Focus to Worship and Prayer

When I first took on a women’s ministry leadership role at another church, I sensed the Lord wanted us to focus more on prayer and worship. So the monthly gatherings the women had become accustomed to with dinner and crafts became a night of worship.

We saw our numbers triple. Our speakers were women who were passionate about God, His Word, and prayer. We invited some well-known authors in our area to teach as well as women within our own church family. We kept the focus on worshipping our God and praying together. This became a highlight of the ministry and had great impact in our community as women felt comfortable bringing their seeking friends. We also drew in many younger women to these nights of worship.

3. Start a Prayer Team

Though many women’s leaders long to have a team of women committed to praying for the ministry, it can seem hard to find those women. I wrestled with that when I started in ministry. Ask the Lord to open your eyes to women who love to pray. It didn’t take long before God showed me two staff members who served our church



in a different area than women's ministries.

I loved their hearts for prayer that were evident in our staff chapel times, so I asked them if they'd be willing to head up the prayer team for our women's retreat. They jumped at the chance and did a phenomenal job gathering a team who were committed to pray for the retreat in the months leading up to it. They also oversaw the prayer room at the retreat. They even prayed over every chair in the auditorium before the first night's session began, praying for the woman that God knew would be sitting in that chair. They then continued as a team, covering our nights of worship and other events in prayer.

PRAYING IN COMMUNITY

Now, I know that prayer partners, nights of worship, and prayer teams are not new ideas. But they are all strategic, measurable ways to make prayer a central part of the ministry you lead. As I've mentioned, a commitment to prayer can be pushed to the edges in the midst of a growing and busy ministry. I've been there and done that.

But what can guard against this happening is:

- A prayer partner holding you accountable to pray.
- A prayer team whose main purpose is to pray for the ministry.
- Prayer and worship becoming the core of the ministry.

Do you see the common thread of praying in *community* with one another with all three of those strategies? I can testify that Joanie and my prayer team holding me accountable to pray with them spilled over into my personal prayer time alone with my God.

I'm not sure I'll ever "arrive" when it comes to prayer this side of heaven. I think I will struggle with making prayer a consistent part of my daily walk with God until I'm finally with Him in eternity. But my prayer for myself—and for you—is that at the end of our lives, we're able to look back and change one word in the opening quote I shared:

I have often thought about what my greatest surprise will be when I go home to be with the Lord. After much pondering, I have concluded that it will be the tremendous power and peace that was available to me through prayer on this side of heaven—and how FREQUENTLY I used it!

May it be so!

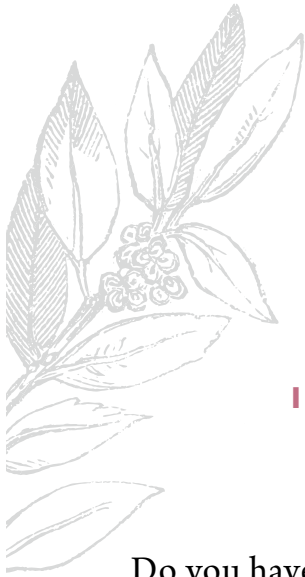


JUDY DUNAGAN served as a women's ministry leader for over twenty years before joining Moody Publishers as an acquisitions editor, overseeing the women's line of books and discipleship resources. She is passionate about discipling women and seeing God's Word come alive in everyday life. Visit Judy's blog at JudyDunagan.com



¹ Richard A. Burr, *Developing Your Secret Closet of Prayer* (Chicago: WingSpread, 1998), 8.

² C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperOne, 1942), 34–35.



Tool #3

IF YOU DON'T FEEL GIFTED TO LEAD

By Christina Fox

Do you have an “I will never” list? You know, one of those lists of things you will never do, either because you don’t have the desire or simply don’t think you are up to the task. At the top of my list is, “I’ll never jump out of an airplane at 1,200 feet in the air.”

One of the things I’ve learned about my “I’ll never” list is that God has other plans for me. If you had asked me when I was in college if I was called to teach, I would have said, “No.” If you had asked me if I would ever speak in front of an audience, I would have emphatically said, “No.” (As evidenced by the fact that I put speech class off to the very last semester of college.) Yet teaching and speaking are two things God has since called me to do.

It started when our church was in a bit of a crisis and everyone had to step up and help out. I found myself teaching for the first time, and I was terrified. I reminded God that teaching was on my “I’ll never” list. I reminded Him that I did not have the skills or training to teach. I pointed out that I am not a leader by nature; I’m more of a helper to those in leadership. But as I quickly learned, God called, and I had to respond.

GOD CALLS THE WEAK

Perhaps you find yourself in a place where you are called to serve in leadership in some way but you simply don’t feel gifted to do so. You don’t think you are up to the task. Maybe the thought of leadership terrifies you.

You might fear making mistakes and letting people down. Or embarrassing yourself. Or freezing because you just don't know what to do or say.

You are not alone.

Remember Moses? God called him to lead the Israelites out of slavery and into the Promised Land. The Moses we think of who parted the Red Sea and met with God on Mount Sinai didn't start out that way. When God spoke to him from the burning bush and told him he would rescue His people, Moses said, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue" (Ex. 4:10).

God uses the weak, insufficient, and incapable and makes them strong. And in so doing, God gets the glory.

Like me, Moses pointed out to God his insufficiencies and weaknesses. Then, God reminded Moses that He was the one who created man's mouth and said, "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak" (v. 12). But Moses insisted and asked that God send someone else. God was angry and said that Aaron could go and speak for Moses: "You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do" (v. 15).

God often uses the weak to carry out His will. He used the youngest and most unlikely of all Jesse's sons to be king of Israel. He used a poor young teen to be the mother of our Savior. He called an uneducated fisherman, who often said and did the wrong things, to take the gospel to the Jews. God uses the weak, insufficient, and incapable and makes them strong. And in so doing, God gets the glory.

What this means is that God calls and God provides.



GOD MAKES US CAPABLE

Personally, I like to know what to do before I face a task. I like to be prepared and know all the potential issues I might face so I can plan how I will address them. I like to feel confident and capable. When I was called to serve in leadership, I certainly didn't feel that way. I didn't know what I was doing. But God doesn't call us because we are already capable and sufficient; rather He makes us capable. This was true for Moses. It's true for you and for me.

God makes us capable by giving us what we need to fulfill His calling in us. Ephesians tells us He prepared good works for us, way back in eternity past ([2:10](#)). Whatever God plans and wills comes to pass. If He calls us to something, there is nothing that will impede that work. No insufficiency in us can keep Him from using us for His kingdom purposes.

In fact, God knows all that we need to fulfill those tasks. And just as He gave Moses all he needed, He provides what we need as well. "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence" (2 Peter 1:3). In Christ, we have all we need to serve Him in this work.

Those skills you lack? The Spirit provides them through His power at work in you. He gives gifts, things you and I don't have within us ([Rom. 12:6-8](#)). He also produces fruit in us, fruit which enables us to carry out our callings to His glory ([Gal. 5:22](#)). He strengthens and enables us to lead and teach and disciple and do our part to build up the church.

God also provides for us through the leadership in our churches. Our pastors and elders equip us through preaching and teaching us the Word. They lead and shepherd us in what is true and holy. "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12). God also provides older women—those experienced in ministry—to mentor and disciple us in leadership.

While I never thought I would teach or lead in women’s ministry, God did. And every time I’ve felt insufficient, weak, and incapable, He has graced me to do the work He’s called me to. Like Paul, I’ve come to embrace those weaknesses and boast about the God who does amazing things—even things I thought I’d never do.

So if you have one of those “I’ll never” lists, join me in casting it aside and instead wait and watch what God does as He uses us—despite our weaknesses—to advance His kingdom.



CHRISTINA FOX is an author, speaker, and blogger, and serves as editor of *enCourage*, the women’s ministry blog of the PCA. In her local church, she teaches women’s Bible study and leads a discipleship group of teen girls. You can find her at ChristinaFox.com





Tool #4

STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN MINISTRY INSIDE AND OUTSIDE YOUR HOME

By Kelly Needham

I need no convincing that my primary ministry calling is in my home. I know this, and it is this that haunts me. You see, I'm married to a man in full-time ministry, have three kids under the age of seven, two of which I homeschool, and currently have three young single women renting out our spare bedroom. Our life at home is busy and full of ministry opportunities.

And yet God continues to make it clear that obedience to Him also includes some ministry outside my home as well. Through the consistent encouragement of my husband and many friends, I also find myself writing regularly, teaching classes at church, leading a small group, and discipling women at my church. I'm haunted because I know the eternal value of the home and I also know how tempting it is to give precedence to my responsibilities outside of it. I'm haunted because I'm afraid I'll miss the mark in how I balance these two competing arenas. In truth, I've often missed it.

So where's the rulebook for handling these moments of home-ministry conflict? What should you do when your kids are sick the week of the women's retreat? When someone in your small group calls you in desperation when your in-laws are in town? When your pastor asks you to take on another task when you're barely making it through the laundry?

How can we discern when to say "yes" and when to say "no"? By recognizing the temptation of ministry, considering what our specific home needs to flourish, and by embracing our limits.

THE TEMPTATION OF MINISTRY

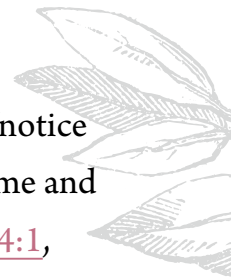
Though I know ministry in my home should trump ministry outside of it, my tendency is to bend to the demands of the former. Why? Partly because I feel those things give me significance. It feels good to be paid attention to and be appreciated. And the tasks I have at home don't bring much appreciation and, by their very nature, are repetitive and menial. Though investing in the home has weighty and eternal significance, it is a "marathon" investment. And there are many other avenues where my skills can be used with immediate payoff.

But there's another reason I'm tempted to prefer ministry over my home. I often forget that God doesn't need me. He is not looking down from His throne biting His nails because I can't answer that call from the woman who's struggling with depression. He's not worried about how the women of my church will be able to know Him because I couldn't teach that class on Bible study methods this semester. He is the author and perfecter of their faith, not me. God needs me to be obedient to Him. And if that means saying "no" to something that seems urgent, then I can trust that He will handle the aftermath of my "no."

AN ISSUE OF PRIORITY

If you read what the Bible has to say about women and the home, you'll notice it says little about how many commitments you can have outside the home and much about the *attitude* of a woman toward her home ([Prov. 7:11-12](#), [14:1](#), [31:27](#)). The home-ministry balance isn't an issue of payment or time but rather one of priority.

Prioritizing the home doesn't mean glorifying it. This is not about having Pinterest-worthy rooms and meals. And it isn't even about how much time you stay at home. You can tear your home down through a negative, critical attitude while also keeping it clean. And you can ignore the spiritual and emotional needs of your family from home just as easily as if you were working sixty hours a week.



The goal of prioritizing the home is to see it flourish. Flourishing is defined as “growing or developing in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as the result of a particularly congenial environment.”¹ Our responsibility is to foster that favorable environment for healthy and vigorous growth in our families—spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

THE PICTURE OF A FLOURISHING HOME

No two households are the same. What your family needs to flourish will depend on many factors, including what activities happen in your home and what each person's day-to-day looks like. This requires that you study your family to observe which needs are the most important and which ones can be overlooked at times without much negative impact.

There are three major areas where we want to see our households thriving: spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Consider where your home is at as you read the sections below.

1. Spiritual Thriving

You should care deeply about the spiritual climate of your home and be active in creating a Christ-centered environment. This is our calling as believers: to make disciples! Where better to start than at home?

This always starts with taking care of your own soul and creating space to seek God yourself. You cannot give what you do not have. Secondly, be aware of the spiritual condition of every family member and have a thoughtful consideration of how to impart truths about God through daily activities and traditions. Lastly, actively take precautions against the influences of the world, the flesh, and Satan.

WITHOUT SPIRITUAL THRIVING: Your house may be organized and your family well cared for, but they may lack in a knowledge of God's Word and understanding of the gospel of Jesus.

2. Emotional Thriving

Our homes should be safe places for those who live in them. So how can we ensure that our families feel secure and free to be themselves?

Be sensitive to each family member's personality. Pay attention to how each person handles stress and consider ways to refresh and encourage them. Be a peacemaker in your home. This means being aware of any relational difficulties within your home or any conflict and unrest, and pursuing peace. Be an intercessor. Pray for those in your homes and look to God for direction on how to minister to each person.

WITHOUT EMOTIONAL THRIVING: Your home may be organized and growing in a knowledge of God, but it may be fractured, with each person feeling isolated, uncared for, and like they must fend for themselves.

3. Physical Thriving

A flourishing home is much more than taking care of the physical house, but it is certainly not less. The physical space you live in impacts the activity of those who live in it. This encompasses all the tangible aspects of your home: food, cleanliness and order, decoration and room layouts, and schedule management. It's easy to forget to be strategic in this area because most of these things happen no matter what. But when thoughtful planning is given to the basic physical and tangible aspects of the home, it can be an incredible blessing to the family.

WITHOUT PHYSICAL THRIVING: Your family may be growing in a knowledge of God and each person may feel cared for, but it may be chaotic, dirty, and overly busy with little sense of purpose and direction.

LIVE WITHIN YOUR LIMITS

You cannot do everything. Not only that, you may not be able to do



everything your neighbor or friend can do. Understanding and living within your limits requires humility. We are not limitless like our God; we are not omnipotent. We need to humbly accept that every “yes” we give also requires a “no.” If you say “yes” to leading a Bible study, what should you say “no” to in order to make space for that? If you say “yes” to adopting a child, what responsibility can you say “no” to in order to make space for that?

A “yes” to ministry may mean cutting out unnecessary things like hobbies, entertainment, or social engagements. It may mean delegating a few things in your home that don't affect the flourishing of your home, like regularly hiring a cleaning service or choosing more easily prepared ready-made meals. Saying “no” and delegating tasks is a way to humbly embrace our limits as finite creatures.

REGULARLY REEVALUATE

As the lives of those within your home change, adjust with them. Ministry outside the home may fit well in one season but not another. Make efforts to regularly check your heart motives and the “climate” of your home so that ministry doesn't become a mindless habit, but an intentional effort.

Lay all your “yeses” before the Lord often. Write down all the areas you are responsible for and ask God for wisdom. Ask others in your life what they

Understanding and living within your limits requires humility. We are not limitless like our God.

think about all you do. Ask your husband and kids how they feel about your other commitments. Seek the Lord with all your heart and fear Him only, and He will be sure to lead you in every season and every decision.

With God's help, we can find peace and victory in this dance between ministry at home and ministry outside the home. Whatever we do, let us

do so with all our hearts as though working for the Lord and not for man. Glorify Him in your “yeses” and your “nos” knowing He will give you strength to walk in obedience in each season.



KELLY NEEDHAM is a writer, speaker, a leader in the college and women’s ministry at her local church, and a wife and mom to three young kids. Her go-to survival tool is twenty minutes of focused prayer time and a strong cup of coffee.



¹ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/flourish>



Tool #5

LEADING DIFFICULT WOMEN

By Shannon Popkin

Jane loves serving on her church's worship team, but lately she has become frustrated. Her new pastor seems to unravel all of their efforts to cultivate a worshipful tone by spending the first half of his sermon telling silly jokes and stories. So now whenever he launches into a second or third joke, Jane rises from her usual spot in the third row and walks out.

Her exits have not gone unnoticed. Several friends have come to her with their concerns. They have begun meeting in the prayer room during the sermons to pray for spiritual awakening.

• • •

Jacqueline has been doing "Susie Smith" Bible studies for years now and loves them. She's seen firsthand how impactful these studies can be. So when her church's leadership announces that they will no longer be using Susie Smith's studies, Jacqueline is outraged. Why would her church revoke resources that have been such a catalyst for such spiritual growth?

Jacqueline contacts several friends to see if they would like to start an "underground" Bible study group at her house instead of church.

• • •

Cindy has hosted a table at her church's Christmas tea outreach for the past eight years. It's a highlight for Cindy to use her grandmother's china to decorate her table. But this year, the director has said that no china will be allowed. Everyone must use paper plates, so that the tables can be cleared more quickly after the event.

Cindy is horrified! Paper plates? She can't even fathom it. She bypasses the director and takes her complaint straight to the pastor (who happens to be her son-in-law).

CONTROL GIRLS AT CHURCH

Men and women can both be controlling; we just go about it differently. Men tend to be more openly confrontational and direct. They are generally more overt about conflict. Controlling men might belittle, intimidate, or become dismissive. But not controlling women.

Women tend to be more subtle. We gossip, recruit supporters, and use emotion to get our way. We might become stiffly resistant or keep hidden agendas—not because we intend to be divisive or create conflict. We're just trying to make everything turn out “right”! Especially at church.


At church, we're not merely contributing to an organization. We're serving God! These are our spiritual gifts we're pouring on the altar. So our investment is deeply personal and meaningful. It's costly, also. No one pays us to sing, lead, organize, or help. We do these things because we love Jesus!

So when someone sends the message that we're “doing it wrong,” or that our contributions are not needed or valued, it's personal. We take offense. We become turf oriented and defensive. We dig in our heels, cross our arms, and tighten our grip. We act like “Control Girls,” even as we're trying to serve the Lord.

LEADING CONTROL GIRLS

Division and conflict naturally arise when committed but flawed believers try to minister together. Conflict is common. Control Girls are common. Even among leaders.

When I encounter a difficult, controlling woman, my first inclination is to yank



control back. *I'm the leader!* I think. *It's up to me to set things straight!* Fueled by conviction, I become dogmatic, guarded, and firm. It feels good and right to snatch control back from that other "Control Girl." But is it?

Over the past decade, God has been opening my eyes to the fact that I'm a Control Girl, too. I see the problem in myself, and I see it as a current running beneath many of the conflicts that arise. Oh what havoc we women (whether leaders or not) wreak on the peace and unity of the church when we try to wrench control out of each other's hands.

As leaders, we can't make others' choices for them, but we can use our influence. We can break the cycle by laying down our own burden of control, which invites others to do the same.

CONTROL VS. SURRENDER

Jesus lived the epitome of a surrendered life. At the point of greatest conflict, instead of taking control, He said, "Not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). Do you hear the sweet surrender in those words? Surrender is the antidote to control.

Both control and surrender are catching. When we're around controlling people, we're compelled to become controlling. And when we're around people who are deeply surrendered to God, we are compelled to surrender our hearts as well.

Here are three ways you can influence the Control Girls you serve toward surrender:

1. Identify similarities.

It's easy for me to focus on the other difficult women in my church or ministry and be blind to my own tendency to clamp down or dig in my heels. Often when someone else is provoking me, it's because she wants the same thing I do: control.

Once, I was frustrated by a conflict with a ministry sister named “Sonia.” I felt Sonia was being so controlling! When I called a friend to get help and clarity, she said, “I want you to list all of the similarities between you and Sonia. Then pray through your list, and ask God to work in you both.”

Surrender is the
antidote to control.

The result was remarkable. I realized that Sonia and I were very alike! When I prayed, I pictured both Sonia and myself at the foot of the cross with our shared weaknesses. I sobbed with fresh grief over my sense of superiority and surrendered my burden of trying to control Sonia. What freedom this brought!

When conflicts arise, I am always the first person I must invite to surrender. How easy it is to relapse and begin trying to control the situations and people that trouble me. God wants me to remember that He’s already in control so I don’t have to be.

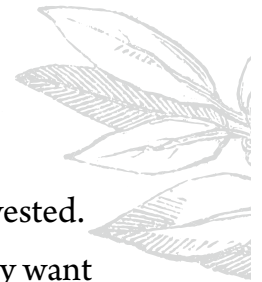
Is there another Control Girl who gets under your skin? Make a list of shared weaknesses. Pray earnestly that God will transform you both.

2. Affirm good intentions.

Often the women who struggle most with control are also the most invested. They care deeply about the ministry. They have history. Ultimately, they want to serve God! But over time, they’ve made God’s ministry into their ministry.

When conflict arises, it’s so helpful to begin by affirming my sister’s good intentions. I might say, “I know that this matters to you because you’re devoted to spreading the gospel.” Or “I appreciate your passion for God and your deep love for the women of our church.”

I can’t expect that my Control Girl sister will immediately see her sin. God must open her eyes, and often that takes time. My goal should be that she walks



away from a conversation with me knowing she is heard, valued, and loved.

Do you have a woman who is overstepping or undermining? How can you affirm her intentions? By doing so, you clear obstacles that might keep her from surrendering to God.

3. Strive for unity, not uniformity.

Uniformity is when everything is the same, with no deviation or variety. But God designed the Church to be unified, not uniform! Unity wouldn't even be necessary if we were all the same.

Unity happens when people who are very, very different—in perspectives, passions, gifts, and callings—become single-minded. Unity is not the result of one person taking control. That's uniformity! Unity is the result of everyone giving up a measure of control. As leaders, we should go first.

Do you have a Control Girl in your church or group contending for her perspective? Instead of saying, "She needs to do it the right way!" consider, "How has God designed her to do it a different way?" Ask God to show you what you should give in on. Anything without a Bible verse to back it up is fair game.

Leading by example, though, is not enough. Your Control Girl sister might need to be challenged and invited to surrender for the sake of the ministry. Oh, how you'll need to prepare your heart for this conversation. Be careful to overcome an attitude of reluctance or begrudging irritation you may be harboring. Instead, eagerly pursue unity!

Read these verses aloud, filling in the blanks as appropriate:

"I, _____, am to walk in a manner worthy of my calling to serve as _____. In my relationship with _____, I must be humble, gentle, and patient. I must bear

with _____'s weaknesses in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Taken from [Ephesians 4:1-3](#).)

Control Girls can cause angst, strife, and division. But as we surrender ourselves first and invite others to join us, we can be leaders who are willing to do everything within our power to live at peace with everyone ([Rom. 12:18](#)).



SHANNON POPKIN is a wife and mom, author and speaker, Bible teacher and small group leader. In her Bible study, *Control Girl*, Shannon reminds you that God is in control so you don't have to be.





Tool #6

FACING MINISTRY CRITICISM LIKE JESUS DID

By Erin Davis

As I scanned her email, my stomach tied itself in knots. I was a women's ministry leader, gearing up for the big kick-off of our spring women's ministry efforts. I'd already invested countless hours and resources in planning an event and organizing studies that would be both engaging and challenging. I was expectant, excited, energized. Her critical words sucked the wind right out of my sails. I'd be lying if I said I didn't take it personally. In my flesh, I wanted to throw up my hands and quit. "Who needs this?"

Been there? Done that?

THREE TEMPTATIONS TO AVOID

We see the first criticism in the Garden of Eden, moments after the first sin ([Gen. 3:12-13](#)). It seems that finding fault with our fellow image bearers is a contagious by-product of the Fall. This can feel especially painful when criticism comes from within our ministry teams or from the women we are trying desperately to serve. For me, criticism often presents three temptations.

1. Circle the wagons.

We all have women in our ministry we love and trust. They are our key volunteers, our "Tituses" and "Timothys." We know they have our backs. When I am criticized, I am tempted to circle these women around me for protection like a wagon train. I *only* ask these women to serve. I *only* plan events with these women in mind. I don't

reach outside of this circle, for fear I will be snakebit.

I am grateful Christ did not minister this way. As a Gentile and a sinner, I don't belong in Christ's inner circle. I was once hostile toward His gospel and critical of His teaching, but He welcomes me in anyway. He is teaching me to do the same.

2. Set a trap.

Every ministry leader needs this tattooed on her heart:

The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe (Prov. 29:25).

When our ministry decisions are motivated by a fear of criticism, we will quickly find ourselves entangled. Our goal is to glorify God and serve His Church. This will come with a side helping of criticism. When we keep our eyes glued to our calling and mission, we are able to hear critical words without succumbing to the temptation to constantly test the wind.

3. Play the telephone game.

This temptation embarrasses me most of all. I know it is petty. When I'm criticized, my temptation is to tell somebody (anybody) about it. I may want to tell my prayer partners under the guise of "pray for me." I may want to tell my fellow staff members under the guise of "have you had any issues with so-and-so?" I may want to tell my women's ministry volunteers so they can "watch out for her." Instead, Scripture begs me to keep my mouth shut.

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear (Eph. 4:29).



Think back to the Garden. Adam and Eve passed the buck and exchanged insult for injury. Did it help? Did it ease their guilt? Nope. Let that be a lesson learned.

THREE BIBLICAL RESPONSES

I don't want to respond to criticism in ways that are ugly or unhelpful. I know you don't either. So how should we respond? God's Word recommends these three responses:

1. Commiserate with Jesus.

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:11–12).

Rejection is a blessing.

Persecution is a blessing.

False accusations are a blessing.

Criticism is a blessing.



I know this is a bitter pill. Christ asks us to swallow it anyway. The truth is He faced more intense and undeserved criticism than we ever will. Still today, the world loves to discuss “what’s wrong with Jesus.” His character is questioned. His authority is questioned. His deity is questioned.

When you are wounded by the words of another, you can rest in the knowledge that you’re in His company. He understands. Ask Him to help you to turn from your critics and run to Him.

2. Be humble.

Don't skim this familiar passage. Sit in it for a while.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each

of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:3–7).

We are not just women’s ministry leaders. We are women’s ministry *servants*. Our job is to humbly care for the flock. Pride rises up in us when we are criticized, and we want to respond with defensiveness or action. Humility calls to us from the low road, asking us to empty ourselves like Christ did.

When we are criticized, we need Christ’s help to ask: What can I learn from this? How can I use this to serve better?

3. Handle with care.

But I say to you, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44).

The words “enemies” and “persecution” might derail us from the heart of Christ’s words here. I doubt the naysayers of your ministry are your enemies and a critical comment or email is not the same as persecution, but sometimes it feels like it. Am I right? Those jabs can leave us bruised, though not beaten, bound up, though not jailed. The level of opposition we face isn’t nearly as important as our response.

What shall we do?

Love and pray. Love and pray. Love and pray.

That woman who is critical of every event you plan? Do you pray for her? Are you actively looking for ways to love her?

The one who likes to remind you

We are not just women’s
ministry leaders. We are
women’s ministry servants.

that “this isn’t the way we used to do things”? Do you pray for her? Are you actively looking for ways to love her?

The woman who doesn’t participate in women’s ministry and bluntly tells you why? You know what I’m going to ask next, right? Do you pray for her? Are you actively looking for ways to love her?

We cannot do this on our own. We are desperately dependent on the Holy Spirit to help us respond in ways that are counterintuitive to our sin nature. I’d love to take a moment to pray for you as you face criticism in your ministry. I’d be honored if you’d do the same for me.

Jesus,

Thank You for the criticism You endured for our sake. As we face criticism from the women we want to reach with Your truth, teach us how to respond like You. Empower us by Your Spirit to love the women who criticize us and to pray for Your blessings upon their lives. We love You. We need You. Amen.



ERIN DAVIS is a popular author, blogger, and speaker and has the privilege of serving women in her local church as the women’s ministry director. When she’s not writing, you can find Erin chasing chickens and children on her small farm in the Midwest.



Tool #7

WHEN MINISTRY BECOMES YOUR IDOL

By Chiree Patterson

If someone had asked me a few years ago, “Is ministry an idol to you?” I would have emphatically told them, “Absolutely not. I’m committed; I’m passionate. I have a purpose and a calling. But ministry is *not* an idol to me.”

However, I found out that my heart had deceived me.

Through a series of circumstances, God showed me that indeed, my heart had exalted ministry to a place where it should have never been. It was a gradual progression, so subtle that I could not detect it.

This idol disguised itself as passion, mission, vision, drive, and concern for the least and the lost. But when the ministry where I was serving dissolved, I saw for the first time how “ministry” had become the thing in which I found my identity and my worth.

Whether it’s a ministry, a relationship, a position, or a job, all of us are inclined to exalt things—even good things—above Christ. In God’s faithfulness, here are some lessons I learned (and am still learning!) about idolatry in ministry.

IDENTITY—IT’S ABOUT BELONGING, NOT DOING

I hadn’t struggled with “identity issues” in the past. I knew who I was in Christ, and I knew what He wanted me to do. Then the ministry where I served ended, and I began to question, *Who am I?*

What I found is that my identity had become more closely tied to what I did rather than to *whom I belonged*. Ministry activity equaled my identity. Somewhere in my journey I began seeking the approval of my leadership more than God’s approval. I found more

satisfaction in my work than in Christ's work.

But here's the truth that brought me freedom: Identity is not found in the people I help or the cause to which I am committed. Identity must be found and rooted in the character of Christ and who I am in Him. The people, the cause, or the organization might change, but Christ never changes. My life that is "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3) is my ultimate identity, not the things that I accomplish for Him.

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE OF PRIDE

Having a high view of self—pride—leads to isolation and idolatry. Pride appeared when I thought things like, *I'm the only one who can do this task or help in this capacity*. When we think that we are the only humans on the planet that can accomplish something or help someone, we're on a slippery slope into sin.

King Nebuchadnezzar showed the same type of thinking as he looked out on his kingdom and declared, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" (Dan. 4:30). No, Nebuchadnezzar didn't build all of Babylon by himself, and neither do we accomplish all our work on our own.

As we serve in ministry, we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us and those who walk beside us. We are not the only ones God equips for certain tasks. If He chooses, He can provide other people to serve in our area.

Certainly, Jesus calls and equips us to do good works for His glory. But serving Him never includes self-aggrandizement (pride) or self-deprivation (isolation). God is glorified through the contrite, humble heart and through the person that esteems others as better than themselves. As Philippians 2:3 says, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or

Fruitfulness isn't measured by activity and involvement; rather it's measured by obedience to God's Spirit and faithfulness to Christ.

conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."

Sometimes the best way to conquer this type of pride is to let others into your corner. Let them bear your load in ministry. Let them use their

gifts to serve the Body of Christ with you. Bring them alongside you and encourage their God-given gifts. And don't forget to ask for help when serving in ministry. Chances are, there is someone who wants to be involved and doesn't yet know how she can.

WHAT'S YOUR POSTURE?

Everything—every possession and every position—must be held with open hands. God has the right to change how you function in your particular ministry, the people on your team, or the organizational structure of your outreaches. For me, this meant letting go of nine years of hard work because God saw that this season and service was complete.

It certainly did not feel “complete” at the time. It felt wrong, and it was painful to see the years of investment vanish. But in God's wisdom, it was completed. God knew that it was more important for me to learn the lesson of surrender—having open hands—than it was for me to continue serving with the heart attitudes I had in the previous years.

A BETTER ENDING

When the idol of ministry came crashing down in my life, I thought that perhaps my “season of ministry” was over. However, ministry never stopped. Instead, a more fruitful season of ministry began. It looks completely different for me than it did in previous years. But I'm finding that fruitfulness isn't measured by activity and involvement; rather it's measured by obedience to God's Spirit and faithfulness to Christ.

I would not trade those first years of ministry for the world, but I'm grateful to have had my identity reoriented in Christ, my pride exposed, and my posture changed from being clenched-fisted to open-handed. May my idolatry serve as a valuable reminder to you to exult only Christ, and not the idol of ministry. Only He is worth our all!



CHIREE PATTERSON has a passion to help others see and obey the truths of God's Word through visual stories and video content. She serves on the video production team for *Revive Our Hearts* and enjoyed many years of volunteering in a women's prison before becoming a wife and mom.



Tool #8

HOW TO HONOR GOD AND INFLUENCE YOUR LEADERS

By Linda Green

In God's kind providence, He called me over a decade ago to begin a women's ministry at the church where I had been serving in a children's ministry role. Without a doubt, this was God's doing because, while my leaders gave their full support to me, there was not much clarity on what that ministry should look like. Yet even as God began to give me a gospel-oriented vision along with a passion to help women learn how to glorify God distinctly through their womanhood, I began to see that He had many lessons to teach me as well.

Perhaps God has laid a burden on your heart for women to understand their God-given design and redemptive calling to be a life-giver in their sphere of influence. If so, be encouraged that—while this is a high and holy calling—some may not appear as enthusiastic as you are.

The reality is that our churches are filled with women and men who have been greatly influenced by the culture and may hold differing views on biblical womanhood. Along with that, your pastors and elders may have other areas of focus that seem more urgent for them to invest energy and resources into. While God calls us to lead in truth, He also clearly calls us to submit to our leaders.

5 LESSONS I'VE LEARNED

Thus, the question I want to speak to is this: *How do we influence our pastors while still respecting and submitting to their leadership?* Here are some of the valuable lessons God has taught me in my own journey.

1. This is God's church, not mine.

While I have been at our church for thirty years and may think I know what our people need, I must continually remind myself that this is God's church and He is sovereign over all that concerns it. I admit that when something appears clear to me, I often wonder why it isn't as clear to others. But I have learned to take my concerns to God before anyone else.

Clearly, as we all know, God usually doesn't work on our timetable. He entrusts His people with the gospel and appoints leaders to keep watch over the souls of those they lead. When God gives us the privilege of working alongside godly men, He commands us to do so in the context of our divine design and under the authority of His Word.

2. God created us to complete, not compete with, the men we serve alongside.

Something that is important to understand is how feminism has affected not only our women but the men in our churches. When you think about the confusion in the culture, it's no wonder. Men don't know whether opening the door for a woman will bless or offend her. Today's women are bolder and feel free to express their opinions, often in a way that undermines the leaders God has placed over us.

The truth is that while God may have given us strong leadership skills, He has not changed His mind regarding who is to lead and make final decisions in the home and church. I have learned that leading by influence rather than a loud voice, manipulation, or intimidation is far more effective.

Leading by influence
rather than a loud voice,
manipulation, or intimidation is
far more effective.



3. Submission does not mean we have no voice or that we never speak up and share ideas.

Submission is an attitude of quiet trust that comes from believing that God knows the needs better than we do and will work all things out in His time and for His glory. It is Christ's submission to the cross which both motivates and informs our submission ([Phil. 2](#); [1 Peter 2](#)). While we can appeal to our leaders when we see something that concerns us, in the end (unless we see blatant sin at work in a leader) we are to submit to the authority God has given them in the church.

4. Our leaders will listen and respond much more quickly when our encouragement outweighs our suggestions about how they could do ministry better.

It's easy to complain and grumble about what we think our leaders should or shouldn't be doing. But [Hebrews 13](#) tells us that this will be of no advantage to us. Our pastors have been entrusted with the weighty responsibility of caring for the souls of their church members.

While that doesn't mean they don't fail at times (they are sinners just like us!), it does mean that they need our encouragement far more than our critical spirits. Once our leaders learn to trust us and know that we are for them, I have found that they will gladly listen to any burdens God has laid on our hearts regarding ministry to our people.

5. There is power in prayer.

The greatest thing I have learned over the years is to pray for my leaders and wait on the Lord to bring about the things He has laid on my heart. In the past few years, I have had the joy of seeing answers to prayers I began praying years ago. While movement has sometimes been slower than I'd like, I have learned to wait patiently, knowing that His plans are always better than mine and He is always at work.

If God has entrusted you with ministry to women, rejoice and 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 Jesus Christ ([Col. 3:23–24](#)).

Gracious Father, thank You for the privilege of using the gifts You have given us to serve Your church for the glory of Your name. We pray that You will equip and empower our leaders to humbly and boldly teach and shepherd Your people according to Your sovereign purposes. Finally, we ask that, by Your grace, our words and actions would be helpful and encouraging, that they might do their work with joy. Amen.



LINDA GREEN is the Director of Women's Ministries at The Orchard Evangelical Free Church where she's served on staff for twenty years. She is passionate about helping women live out the gospel according to their God-given design and purpose. Linda and her husband, Ray, have been married almost forty years.





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