



coworkers

a biblical study on women in missions

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Coworkers: A Biblical Study on Women in Missions

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Introduction: The Purpose of This Study

Serving as a missionary in South Asia since 2005, I have seen female missionaries of various seasons of life struggle to find their place in mission work. I have also seen team leaders struggle to provide clear direction and support to their female team members.

Most agree that women should be sharing the gospel and teaching other women, but questions about women's involvement in other spheres abound. What is a woman's role in church planting work? How should men and women on mission teams relate to one another? What role does season of life play in a woman's usefulness in missions?

We should not settle for vague, unclear expectations for how women should serve in the church and in missions. Clarity on this topic is essential. The extent to which women are empowered to serve as God designed greatly affects the biblical health of local churches and missions teams. Our expectations for how women should serve must come directly from God's Word, which provides sufficient information.

The purpose of this study is to provide biblical clarity on God's design for how women should serve in the church and in mission work. As we study God's Word on this topic, we should not study the passages specifically about women, such as Proverbs 31, 1 Peter 3 and Titus 2, in isolation. While these passages are important, drawing conclusions from these passages alone can result in unbiblically narrow expectations for how women should serve, and can undervalue single women's contribution to the work.

For a more biblically comprehensive picture of how women should serve, we must study the book of Acts and the epistles. Acts and the epistles tell the story of the first century church's establishment and expansion by the power of the Holy Spirit. As we study women's roles, we must understand them in the broader context of the growth of the early church.

Therefore, this study examines how God used women in the first century church and mission work. This study is divided into three parts. In part one, we follow the story line of the book of Acts, tracing the involvement of women in the expansion of the early church. In part two, we study pertinent passages in the epistles about Paul's female coworkers and women in the church, home, and community. In part three, we summarize our findings into several truths on women that can be used for application. We see many powerful and diverse ways women were used by God.

How to Use This Book

This book was birthed out of a self-discovery Bible study on women's roles in the church and missions in the New Testament. After several years of leading this study among various groups, I have become more convinced of the need for and value of this study in churches and on missions teams. To give more people access to these biblical truths, I organized the Scripture passages and observations into this book.

Having seen the value of self-discovery Bible study, I invite you to search the Scriptures for yourself before reading on. Appendix 1 is a list of all the Scriptures referenced. Using that list, search God's Word by answering two questions as you read:

- 1. How were Holy Spirit-filled women involved in their local churches and/or mission work?*
- 2. What else can we learn about women?*

Alternatively, you may prefer to read the Scripture passages as you work your way through the book. Before reading each chapter, read the designated Scripture passages and answer the two questions above for yourself. Then read the observations included in that chapter.

In addition to completing this study individually, consider completing it alongside coworkers in your church or mission team. This study is an effective team-building tool that brings unity and clarity to teams on how men and women should work together in ministry. Appendix 2 is a condensed list of Scripture passages designed for a 2-3 hour group Bible study. After reading through the Scripture passages in small groups, share your findings with one another, and use this book as a guide and supplement to your group discussion. Finally, discuss together how you can prayerfully apply the biblical principles to your churches and mission teams.

Five Prayers As You Begin

1. *God, whatever our differences may be, humble us and unite us as sinners saved by grace alone, undeserving, thankful, and happy in our Savior.*

2. *Holy Spirit, as we study God's Word, guide us into truth (John 16:12) and give clarity on how You want to use women to expand Your Kingdom.*

3. *Holy Spirit, increase our faith in Your powerful work in and through every believer, male or female.*

4. *Father, may the variety of gifts and service we find in early church women free us to rejoice in our sisters' unique gifts and service.*

5. *Lord Jesus, encourage our hearts through the Scriptures (Romans 15:4).*

PART ONE:

WOMEN

IN ACTS

1

Women in the Founding of the Jerusalem Church

Read: Acts 1-2

Men and women equally received the fullness of the Spirit upon salvation and had equal power for evangelism (Acts 2:1-21, 41).

In the first two chapters of the book of Acts, Luke describes the establishment and characteristics of the first church. We can learn so much about church women in just these two chapters! God established His church by pouring out His Spirit on *all* flesh, with no distinction (Acts 2:17). This full access to the Spirit was a new reality for the people of God. Every believer being filled with the powerful Holy Spirit resulted in *thousands* of men and women being saved and baptized—in just one day (2:41)!

When God sent the Holy Spirit to fill this group of around 120 believers, men and women (1:13-15), they immediately began testifying about the mighty acts of God in other languages (2:3-4, 11). Peter and the apostles led the church in preaching and evangelism, but every believer—men and women, young and old—had the Spirit’s power to evangelize. God can now use any believer to lead any non-believer to salvation because of the Holy Spirit’s power at work through the proclamation of the gospel.

This powerful event on Pentecost illustrates how Jesus could make the shocking promise in John 14:12, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” Furthermore, Jesus said, “It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you. And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:7-8). Christ leaving His disciples? Doesn’t sound like an advantage. Jesus’ disciples doing greater works than Him? Sounds impossible,

even blasphemous! Yet that's what this event of Pentecost showed us. The book of Acts shows instance after instance of this truth: When every believer is filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, God chooses to do more through the church than He did through Jesus when He walked the earth (Greear, 2014).

We tend to minimize the Spirit's power and expect so little—from ourselves, from our brothers and sisters, from *God*. But in Christ, every single believer has equal access to the Spirit that saved 3,000 in one day. There is *no distinction* when it comes to believers' access to the power of the Holy Spirit! God wants to powerfully use every believer to add more people to His Kingdom.

When God sent His Spirit and powerfully established His church on Pentecost, He chose to empower the men *and the women*. This was necessary in order to fulfill Joel's prophesy that both sons and daughters would receive the Spirit (2:17). This shows that every person has equal access to salvation and the Spirit's power, and it is God's desire to use every believer to expand His Kingdom. What a powerful and gracious God!

This truth lays the foundation for everything else we will read about women in the early church. As we look at the inspiring examples of Lydia, Phoebe, Priscilla, and others, let us give the powerful Holy Spirit *all* the credit! We must expect much from His powerful work in ourselves and in brothers and sisters in Christ. We must not trust in our own strengths and efforts but instead depend fully on Him to work in us and through us.

Men and women alike were important, involved members of the church (Acts 2:42-47).

These 3000+ new believers (men and women) began meeting daily in homes, sharing meals, listening to the apostles' teaching, praying together, sharing their possessions, praising God, experiencing signs and wonders, winning the favor of their neighbors, and seeing the Lord add daily to their

numbers. All of them were meeting together regularly, sacrificially giving and serving, and being used by God to reach more people.

The apostles were leading the church in teaching, making decisions, collecting and distributing money, and performing signs and wonders (Acts 1:15-26; 2:42-47).

The 12 apostles were the leaders of the Jerusalem church and were *men*. There is a consistent pattern in Acts of male leadership in the church. When Peter led the 11 apostles to replace Judas, he said that the replacement needed to be a *man* who had been with them from the beginning (Acts 1:21-22). The church was devoted to the *apostles'* teaching. As we continue studying Acts, we will see a consistent pattern of the apostles' and elders' authoritative responsibility of teaching and protecting biblical doctrine. We will also see many other examples of the apostles' leadership, such as collecting donations (4:35), disciplining Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-10), and addressing the circumcision issue during the Jerusalem Council (15:1-33).

To summarize, in just the first two chapters of the book of Acts, every church member was filled with the Holy Spirit and had equal access to the Spirit's power and work in their lives. Every church member was valued and involved in the life and ministry of the church, and the church was growing daily in number under the leadership of the 12 apostles.

2

Women in the Beginning of the Church's Growth

Read: Acts 4:23-6:7; 7:54-8:4; 9:1-2

Men and women exhibited great faith and evidence of the Holy Spirit's power in them as they continued to preach the gospel in the face of much danger and at great cost to their families (Acts 4:23-31; 8:1-4; 9:1-2).

When the first act of persecution came against the church, the men and women responded by praying for continued boldness in the face of threats, and God abundantly answered that prayer (Acts 4:29; 8:4). Persecution rose far beyond mere threats to a church leader being killed (7:60) and an organized persecution breaking out against the church (8:1). Saul went to every believer's home he could find in Jerusalem, dragging men and women to prison, and presumably leaving vulnerable children behind (8:3). Believers began fleeing from Jerusalem, leaving their homes and livelihoods behind.

Yet these Jerusalem brothers and sisters didn't quiet down. As they fled to new places where their lives were in danger, they still "went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). For some, that preaching would result in prison or death. Their children were not sheltered from the consequences these families faced for following Christ. These were faith-filled, Spirit-empowered men and women.

Men and women were held accountable for their obedience by church leaders. Church leaders had equally high expectations of men and women's faithfulness and fruitfulness (Acts 5:1-11).

When Ananias and Sapphira secretly kept some of the proceeds from their property, Peter held them both equally responsible for their sin. While Sapphira was to submit to her husband, she clearly wasn't to follow

him into sin. Peter didn't let Sapphira off the hook for her sin because her husband was the leader of their home and the one who brought the money to the apostles. Peter had equal expectations of faithfulness and fruitfulness in Ananias and Sapphira's lives.

Women were valued and cared for by the church (Acts 6:1-7).

When the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose about widows being neglected in daily food distribution (6:1). The fact that there were widows in the church at all shows that widows were being cared for and reached with the gospel. Beyond meeting widows' spiritual needs, the church cared for their physical needs as well, using the donations given to the church. When some widows were accidentally overlooked, the apostles responded by empowering the church to choose seven men to be responsible for this service (6:3).

However, not every widow qualified to receive money from the church. In 1 Timothy 5:9-10, Paul explains the requirements for widows to receive the church's money: they had to have been faithful wives and mothers and full of good works. This is another example of men and women in the church being held accountable for their obedience.

The first seven people chosen to be deacons were men (Acts 6:1-7).

These issues of caring for widows and providing for physical needs of the church prompted the appointment of the first deacons. The apostles told the church to choose seven men. This is noteworthy because it displays the general pattern of male leadership in the early church. However, the biblical requirements for deacons allow for men and women, and Phoebe is a biblical example of a deaconess (Romans 16:1; 1 Timothy 3:11).

3

Faithful Church Women: Tabitha and Mary the Mother of John Mark

Read: Acts 9:36-43; 12:1-17, 25

“Ordinary women” in the early church, like the seamstress Tabitha, were known for their good works and were used mightily by God to draw others to salvation (Acts 9:36-43).

Tabitha, a disciple in Joppa, was a seamstress and a seemingly “ordinary” woman, but she was known for her good works and acts of charity (9:36). God chose to raise Tabitha from the dead and used her to draw many people in her community to salvation (9:40-42). In 1 Timothy, Paul instructs all women to be known for good works just like Tabitha was (1 Tim. 2:9-10; 5:9-10). God often used ordinary, faithful people like Tabitha to expand His Kingdom.

Women in the early church, like Mary the mother of John Mark, hosted church in a time of life-threatening persecution (Acts 12:1-17).

Mary, the mother of the apostle John Mark, hosted church in her home, and this was where some of the believers gathered to pray in a difficult time. Their leader James had been violently killed by a sword; their leader Peter was in prison (12:2-3); meanwhile, the church was gathered at Mary’s, praying (12:12).

The fact that Luke described the house as Mary’s house, with no mention of a husband, may suggest that Mary was a widow. Whether her husband was alive or not, Mary exhibited great faith and leadership by gathering believers in her home to pray in a time when believers were being killed. The fact that Peter

went directly to her house after being freed from prison suggests that Mary was an active, dependable member of the church.

So, can a woman host church meetings in her home if a husband isn't present or isn't a spiritual leader? Apparently so. We have no reason to believe that Mary was leading these meetings, but Mary opened her home to the church to gather there to pray.

As we continue reading, we will see hospitality consistently showing up in the lives of early church women. Let's remember that there were thousands of believers—men, women, and children—meeting and sharing meals together daily *in homes*.

Mothers in the early church, like Mary the mother of John Mark, released their children to preach the gospel in unreached places, in a time of life-threatening persecution (Acts 12:25; 15:39).

Mary's son John Mark joined Barnabas and Saul's missions team, assisting them in proclaiming the word of God. Mary released John Mark to proclaim the gospel, knowing he would face persecution. There is no mention of a husband to care for Mary while her son was gone, but this did not stop Mary from releasing John Mark for the work. Along with hosting prayer meetings in her home, releasing her son for the work is another way we see faithfulness in Mary's life.

4

Women in the First Missionary Journey

Read: Acts 13-14

Women were a part of the gospel movement in the first missionary journey as people heard the gospel, repented and believed, and formed new churches (Acts 13-14).

In the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in several towns in Asia Minor. In the midst of mixed responses and opposition, men and women in every town heard the gospel for the first time, responded in repentance and faith, received the Holy Spirit, and formed new churches (Acts 13:42-44, 48-49; 14:1, 6-7, 21-23).

Luke referred to these new believers, male and female, as disciples three times in Acts 14 (Acts 14:20-22). Men and women received the same instruction to persevere in persecution (14:21-22). Some of the female church members probably hosted Paul and his companions when they came back through their towns to encourage the churches (14:21-22). Some women may have tended to Paul's wounds when he was stoned almost to death in Lystra (14:19). Some women probably hosted church meetings in their homes. Some were probably married to men that were appointed elders in their new churches (14:23). Some women chose to follow Christ even when their husbands didn't, and they disciplined and sent out their children to preach the gospel (like Timothy's mom, Eunice, in Lystra—Acts 16:1-5; 2 Tim. 1:5). All these female disciples received the fullness of the Spirit and chose to follow Christ though it put their safety, and their family's safety, at great risk.

Leading women used their influence to stir up persecution and drive Paul and Barnabas out of their district (Acts 13:50).

In Pisidian Antioch, almost the entire city came to hear Paul and Barnabas preach and many Gentiles were saved. The Jewish leaders became jealous and incited leading men and women to oppose Paul and Barnabas and drive them out of the city. This event illustrates that women inside and outside the church carried influence and could use that influence to either further or oppose the expansion of God's Kingdom.

5

The Jerusalem Council

Read: Acts 15:1-35

Male church leaders met to make an important decision for the church, a decision specifically dealing with protecting the pure gospel message. Church members supported their decision and were encouraged by their leadership (Acts 15:1-35).

The Jerusalem Council is another example of the elders' special responsibility to accurately teach God's Word to the church and correct false teaching. When a disagreement on doctrine arose among believers, Paul and Barnabas were sent to meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem (15:2). After the Jerusalem church listened to Paul and Barnabas share, the apostles and elders met to further discuss the matter and make a final decision (15:6). The church accepted their decision and chose two leading men to send back to Antioch (15:22). They presented the decision to the church in Antioch, and the Antioch church was also encouraged (15:31). Strong male leadership, and the leaders' responsibility to accurately teach God's Word, is a clear, consistent characteristic of the early church, and is meant to be an encouragement to the church. Church members are to support and follow their elders' leadership.

6

Women in the Second Missionary Journey: Eunice, Lois, and Lydia

Read: Acts 16:1-40; 2 Tim. 1:5, 3:15

Mothers and grandmothers in the early church, like Eunice and Lois, knew God's Word, taught their children God's Word, and released their children to be missionaries (Acts 16:1-5; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15).

Paul met a disciple in Lystra named Timothy. Timothy was “the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:1). In Paul’s second letter to Timothy he wrote that Timothy had a sincere faith that dwelt first in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5). Timothy’s mom and grandma were probably saved when Paul proclaimed the gospel in Lystra on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:8-23). Eunice was saved, but it seems her Greek husband was not, and Paul gave Lois and Eunice credit for teaching the Scriptures to Timothy as a child. Timothy became one of Paul’s closest disciples and coworkers, his “beloved child in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2). Mary the mother of John Mark and Eunice the mother of Timothy are examples of faith-filled women who released their children to be missionaries in times of dangerous persecution.

Women were sometimes Paul’s primary audience for evangelism. Paul and his coworkers engaged a group of women with the gospel one Sabbath, and some were saved (Acts 16:11-15, 40).

When Paul, Silas, and Luke arrived at the “place of prayer” and found a group of women, they didn’t keep looking for a group of men; they sat down and began preaching to the women. Apparently, there aren’t hard and fast biblical

rules prohibiting men from sharing the gospel with women. Yes, men should be careful to do this in culturally appropriate and God-honoring ways; but the church has good news that every person urgently needs—and God can use any believer to lead any non-believer to saving faith.

Some women, like Lydia, were the first in their families to be saved, helped bring the gospel to their families, and hosted new churches in their homes, with no husband mentioned (Acts 16:11-15, 40).

One of the women that Paul and his coworkers preached to, Lydia, was a business woman (16:14). Lydia was saved, and then her entire family also placed their faith in Christ. Paul and his coworkers baptized Lydia's family, and Lydia insisted that they stay at her house (16:14-15). It seems that a new church began meeting in Lydia's home, because when Paul and his coworkers were released from prison, after having been stripped and beaten, they went straight to visit Lydia and to encourage the believers there (16:40). Lydia is another example of a hospitable woman hosting church in her home, like Mary the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12).

Like Mary the mother of John Mark, and like Eunice, Scripture does not indicate that Lydia had a spiritual leader as a husband. Lydia could have been married or single, but she seems to have been the most spiritually active member of the home. A husband's lack of involvement didn't stop Lydia from serving and leading out in the church; nor did it stop Paul from working alongside her and establishing a church in her home. In fact, Lydia was a dear sister to Paul and his coworkers (Acts 16:15, 40).

7

Influential Women's Responses in the Second Missionary Journey

Read: Acts 17:1-34

Paul and his coworkers often preached to mixed audiences of men and women. They were pursuing the salvation of men and women. Several times, Luke made note of leading women's responses to the gospel because of these women's potential influence in their communities for the gospel (Acts 17:1-34).

In all three of the towns we read about in Acts 17, Paul preached to mixed audiences of men and women. In Thessalonica, "not a few of the leading women" were persuaded and believed through Paul's preaching (Acts 17:4). In Berea, many "Greek women of high standing" believed (Acts 17:12). In Athens, Paul preached in the synagogue and in the marketplace to men and women, "with those who happened to be there" (Acts 17:17). And in Athens, even though Paul began his speech with the greeting, "Men of Athens" (Acts 17:22), he seems to be following a cultural norm of addressing a mixed crowd as "men" or "brothers." Luke mentions two people who were saved and who then joined them, one of whom was a woman named Damaris (Acts 17:34), indicating that there were women also in the audience to whom Paul was preaching.

Leading women's responses to the gospel were significant to Luke and Paul because of these women's potential influence in their communities for the gospel. Luke and Paul desired that every person be saved and powerfully impact their communities for Christ.

8

A Coworker from the Second Missionary Journey: Priscilla

Read: Acts 18:1-28

Women, like Priscilla, were Paul's coworkers, doing the same types of missionary work as Paul—traveling to unreached places, preaching the gospel, discipling new believers, forming new house churches, and moving on to new places (Acts 18:1-28).

When Paul met Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth, he was welcomed into their home, and he stayed with them for a year and a half (Acts 18:1-3, 11). Paul probably trained Priscilla and Aquila in gospel proclamation and church planting work in Corinth, because Paul took them with him to Ephesus, where they eventually hosted a church in their home (Acts 18:18-19; 1 Cor. 16:19). Later, Aquila and Priscilla moved to Rome and hosted a house church there as well (Rom. 16:3-5).

Neither Priscilla nor Aquila are ever mentioned individually. Paul refers to them many times in his letters, always as a couple. Paul commended Priscilla to the Roman church for her influential role in encouraging many churches: “Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house” (Romans 16:3-5).

Priscilla was a “fellow worker” (Rom. 16:3) who served and traveled with her husband doing the same missionary work as Paul. When studying biblical missions, we often talk about missionary leaders such as Paul, Barnabas, and Timothy. But when we look closely at Scripture, we find numerous

examples of women being used by God in the same gospel work. Female missionaries should be encouraged by Priscilla's example and Paul's commending words for her.

Priscilla took part in providing needed correction to Apollos (Acts 18:1-28).

Luke records that in Ephesus, Priscilla and her husband took the great teacher Apollos aside and "explained to him the way of God more accurately" (18:26). Priscilla knew God's Word well and helped correct a male preacher. Was Priscilla wrong to do this? The Scriptures record no hint of disapproval. Apollos received the teaching, traveled on, and "powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus" (18:27-28). Apparently there are biblically appropriate ways and situations for women to teach men God's Word.

But what about Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 2:9-15, that women weren't to teach or exercise authority over men? In 1 Timothy 2:9-15, Paul was writing in the context of instructions for how a *local church* was to function—with orderly meetings and male leadership. In church services, the male elders had the responsibility of authoritatively and regularly teaching God's Word to the people. Priscilla's teaching of Apollos wasn't in a church setting nor regular, and it honored the male leadership in her life. As Wiersbe writes,

Women are permitted to teach. Older women should teach the younger women (Titus 2:3-4). Timothy was taught at home by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). But in their teaching ministry, they must not "lord it over" men. There is nothing wrong with a godly woman instructing a man in private (Acts 18:24-28), but she must not assume authority in the church and try to take the place of a man. (Wiersbe, 2009, p. 42-23)

Furthermore, the fact that male leaders had a special responsibility to teach biblical doctrine to the church should not discourage women from knowing

God's Word well. Men were given the responsibility to lead the church in teaching the Bible not because women couldn't or shouldn't know the Word as well as men, but because of God's design and order in creating man and woman (1 Tim. 2:13).

Every believer is commanded to know and teach God's Word. Paul instructed the Corinthian church to have orderly services so that everyone could participate, learn, and be built up (1 Cor. 14:26, 31). In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he commanded all believers to know God's Word and teach one another in informal, situational ways: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). As women let the word of Christ dwell in them richly and work alongside brothers and sisters in Christ, they should be ready to teach their sisters and brothers as opportunities arise. Our churches and ministries suffer great loss when women shrink back from knowing and teaching God's Word.

9

Prophetesses in the Third Missionary Journey

Read: Acts 21:8-9

Some women, like Philip's four daughters, prophesied (Acts 21:8-9).

On his way to Jerusalem, Paul stayed several days with Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven deacons in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:5; 21:8-9). Luke specifically mentions that Philip had four unmarried daughters that prophesied. Luke doesn't tell us specifics about how or when these women prophesied, but he did intentionally include it, and we can assume that Luke and Paul approved of the women's prophesying.

In Peter's great sermon on Pentecost, he preached on the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that the Holy Spirit would fall on all flesh, and sons and daughters would prophesy and see visions (Acts 2:17). Philip's prophetess daughters are another recorded example of God's fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. These women were filled with the Holy Spirit and presumably used the gift of prophecy to edify the church, as Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. There is no biblical reason to think that women didn't have access to all of the gifts of the Spirit. Women were praying, prophesying, and fully participating in the early church (1 Cor. 11:5; 12:4-11; 14:26).

This concludes part one, our survey on women in the book of Acts. We learned that men and women have equal access to the Holy Spirit's filling, empowering, and gifting. Women served in a variety of powerful ways, both in the church and in missions. Women shared the gospel and hosted church in the midst of life-threatening persecution. Tabitha, Mary the mother of John Mark, and Eunice were examples of faithful church women. Priscilla and her husband were coworkers with Paul in mission work. Women were admonished to know and teach God's Word, and some were known to prophesy.

In part two, we turn to the epistles for more instruction on how women served in the church and in missions. As we look at these passages, we take a more topical approach. First, we study Paul's female coworkers in mission work. Then we look at instructions for women in the church, home, and community.

PART TWO:
WOMEN
IN THE
EPISTLES

10

Women as Missionary Coworkers

Read: Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:2-3; Col. 4:14; Philemon 1:1-6; 1 Cor. 9:5

Paul refers to several female coworkers by name in his epistles.

Phoebe: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well” (Rom. 16:1-2).

Prisca (Priscilla): “Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house” (Rom. 16:3-5).

Mary: “Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you” (Rom. 16:6).

Junia: “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles” (or “among the apostles”) (Rom. 16:7).

Tryphaena and Tryphosa: “workers in the Lord” (Rom. 16:12).

Rufus’s mother: “who has been a mother to me as well” (Rom. 16:13).

Julia and Nereus’s sister (Rom. 16:15)

Euodia and Syntyche: “I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life” (Phil. 4:2-3).

Apphia and Archippus: “To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house...I thank my God always...Because I hear of your love...And I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective...” (Phm. 1:1-6).

Paul’s female coworkers labored side by side with him in missions work.

Paul’s female coworkers served on missions teams doing the same type of work as Paul—going to unreached places, preaching the gospel, discipling and training new believers, planting churches, and moving to new places. Paul’s female coworkers included married and single women. Priscilla is always mentioned alongside her husband Aquila. Many of Paul’s other coworkers, however, seem to be single women, as no husbands are mentioned along with them.

In addition to the title of coworker, several of Paul’s fellow missionaries, such as Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14) and Timothy (1 Thess. 2:6), were also referred to as apostles (or “sent-out ones”). Many missiologists recognize this class of apostle not as official eyewitnesses, but as missionaries going to unreached places. According to missiologist Craig Ott:

The term *apostolos* was used flexibly in the New Testament for people beyond the Twelve and Paul. Most if not all of them were Paul’s missionary coworkers... The Bible uses the term *apostolos* in such passages to refer to itinerant evangelists, church planters, and helpers in the spread of the gospel to the nations. This is quite similar to the traditional usage of the term missionary. (Ott & Strauss, 2010, p. 233)

Missiologist Eckhard Schnabel argues that Junia is an example of a female coworker also referred to as an apostle. Junia was imprisoned with Paul, and Paul wrote that Junia was well-known “to” or “among” the apostles (Rom. 16:7). According to Schnabel, this verse should be translated “well known *among* the apostles,” and Paul was likely referring to Junia as an apostle (Schnabel, 2004, p. 284). While the exact interpretation of this verse isn’t clear, what is clear is that women like Junia served prominently on missionary teams.

Schnabel notes the valuable contribution these female coworkers made to the mission work:

Mary, Tryphaena, and Tryphosa ‘worked hard’ in Rome (Rom. 16:6, 12), comparable to the hard work of Paul’s own missionary ministry. In Philippi, Euodia and Syntyche ‘struggled’ beside Paul ‘in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers’ (Phil. 4:3); that is, they were actively involved in spreading the gospel and winning people for faith in Jesus Christ, and evidently they were involved in the intellectual, theological, and spiritual battle with the opponents with whom Paul had to contend (Phil. 1:27-28). (Schnabel, 2004, p. 514-515)

Women being used by God to take the gospel to unreached peoples and places—alongside husbands or as single women—is clearly validated and commended in Scripture. From these examples, it is evident that female missionaries can serve with confidence that their involvement is biblical and important. By Paul’s example, modern mission teams should incorporate both sent-out men and women in their work.

Women effectively shared the gospel and were influential in starting churches among the Gentiles (Philemon 1:1-6; Rom. 16:3-4, 7).

In the epistles, we see women sharing their faith effectively and contributing significantly to church planting work. In our survey of the book of Acts, we saw examples of women sharing the gospel boldly in times of life-threatening persecution (Acts 4:28-29; 8:4), and Priscilla working alongside Paul in church planting work (Acts 18:1-28). In Paul's epistles, we see more examples, such as Apphia, Priscilla again, and Junia. In Paul's letter to Philemon, Paul prayed that the sharing of Apphia's faith would become effective (Philemon 1:6). All the churches among the Gentiles gave thanks for Priscilla and Aquila's influential service in church-planting work (Rom. 16:3-4). Similarly, Junia was well known among the apostles for her gospel work (Rom. 16:7). Again, all these women were influential in gospel-proclaiming, church planting work with fellow brothers in Christ in many places.

Women were imprisoned and risked their lives for the gospel (Rom. 16:4, 7; Acts 8:1-3).

In our survey of Acts, we saw that during the organized persecution that broke out after Stephen's stoning, many men and women were dragged off to prison by Paul himself (Acts 8:1-3). In Paul's epistle to the Romans we see that Junia suffered in prison beside Paul because of her involvement in gospel work. Junia's committed faith and service was "well known to/ among the apostles" (Rom. 16:7). Priscilla also risked her life for Paul (Rom. 16:3-4). According to these women's examples, bold gospel proclamation that results in imprisonment and danger isn't only for men.

Junia and Priscilla are powerful examples of female coworkers in mission work. We can expect current day missions teams to include males and females, as men and women alike are called by God and sent out by local churches to take the gospel to unreached peoples and places. We can have equal expectations of faithfulness and fruitfulness from male and female coworkers. Commitment to God's command to take the gospel to unreached

peoples results in male and female missionaries engaged in bold gospel proclamation and church planting work even in the face of persecution.

Junia is also an encouraging example for persecuted women in unreached places. Missionaries serving around the world know that while life-threatening persecution isn't the norm in western countries, it is a reality in many other places. Missionaries should encourage their persecuted brothers and sisters to stand strong for Christ in persecution. When Paul was imprisoned, he wrote to the Philippian church that everyone knew that his imprisonment was for Christ, and it was causing believers to preach the gospel even more boldly (Phil. 1:13-14). When women, like Junia, have a faith that compels them to keep preaching amid much sacrifice or persecution, Christ is glorified and others are spurred on to greater boldness.

Women in the church and on missionary teams were valued and cared for by Paul (Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:2-3; Philemon 1:1-6).

Paul valued his female coworkers, included them in the work, thanked God for them, prayed for them, cared for them, and commended them to the churches. Paul commended Phoebe to the Roman church and told them to welcome her and provide for whatever she needed (Rom. 16:1-2). Paul spoke affectionately of Rufus's mother, saying that she had been a mother to him as well (Rom. 16:13). He told the Philippian church to help Euodia and Syntyche, because they had labored side by side with him in the gospel (Phil. 4:2-3). Paul's letter to Philemon was addressed not only to Philemon, but also specifically to a sister Apphia, and Archippus (Philemon 1:1).

Paul consistently showed value, care, and affection for his sisters in Christ and wanted the churches to do the same. He genuinely loved them and related to them as mothers and sisters. Yes, men in the church should be careful to relate with women carefully and honorably, but not to the extent that women are held at a distance. Male missions team leaders do well to care for, commend, and protect their female teammates as sisters and mothers in Christ.

Some of the apostles, including Peter, had wives traveling and serving with them (1 Cor. 9:5).

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul lists several rights that he gave up in order to win more people to Christ. One of those rights was a believing wife. But other apostles, including the brothers of Christ and Peter, had believing wives they took alongside them as they served, preached, and traveled. These apostles could have left their wives at home, but at least some of the time, their wives (and probably children as well) traveled with them. And this is validated in Scripture by the same man who wrote that women were responsible to love their husbands and children and manage their households well (Titus 2:2-5; 1 Tim. 5:9-10). Priscilla is an example of a female missionary traveling with her husband (Acts 18:18-19; Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19). Apparently some wives were able to serve in gospel work alongside their husbands without neglecting their God-given responsibilities to manage their households well. And as we look at instructions for women in the epistles, we will see an expectation that women should serve others outside the home (1 Tim. 2:9-10; 5:9-10).

Missionary wives have the privilege of loving their families and managing their households and working alongside their husbands in mission work. While varying life seasons are a factor in the balance of these two types of service in a missionary wife's life, there is no reason to think that only one should be pursued. Both serving their families and taking the gospel to the lost are God-given and important responsibilities.

In conclusion, Paul commends women who worked side by side with him in mission work. These women made significant contributions to church planting work and Paul commended them for their hard work and faith. He cared for them and spoke of them affectionately as mothers and sisters. From these examples, we can conclude that men and women alike are called by God to take the gospel to unreached peoples and places. And we can expect faithfulness and fruitfulness from both male and female missions team members.

11

Women's Participation in the Church

Read: 1 Cor. 11:3-5; 12:4-13; 14:1-5; 26-40;
1 Tim. 2:8-15; 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-6

Men and women participated in church meetings through singing, praying, prophesying, sharing lessons, and speaking and interpreting tongues (1 Cor. 11:5; 12:4-11; 14:26-31).

Paul's instructions on church worship assumed active participation by those present. Men and women came with hymns, lessons, revelations, tongues, and interpretations to share with one another to build one another up (1 Cor. 14:26). Paul instructed women to pray and prophesy in a way that honored male leadership (1 Cor. 11:5). Men and women were all exhorted to participate in an orderly way that allowed all to learn and be encouraged (1 Cor. 14:31-32, 40).

The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to every believer—men and women—for the building up of the church (1 Cor. 12:4-13).

Paul explained to the Corinthian church that spiritual gifts were given to every person in the church. There are varieties of gifts, service, and activities, all empowered by the Spirit for the upbuilding of the church (1 Cor. 12:4-7, 11). Men and women are given gifts such as wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing spirits, tongues and interpretation (1 Cor. 12:8-10). In Acts 21:9, we saw that Philip's four daughters were prophetesses. Every believer has equal access to the Holy Spirit, and God wants to use every believer to build up His church and expand His Kingdom.

The elders of the church were to be men. Men and women served as deacons/deaconesses (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-6; Rom. 16:1).

When explaining the qualifications of elders, Paul assumed that they would be men. The elders of the church, as the authoritative leaders and teachers, were always men (1 Tim. 3:1-2; Titus 1:5-6).

The first deacons were chosen by the church to serve the church's needs, freeing the apostles to focus on prayer and teaching the Word (Acts 6:2-4). While the apostles' (and later elders') role is more authoritative and focused on teaching the Word, the deacons' role is focused on serving the church.

The qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3 allow for men and women deacons. The Greek word "gune" in 1 Tim. 3:11 can be translated as wives or women, and is used interchangeably for women and wives, depending on the context. 1 Tim. 3:11 reads: "*Gune* likewise must be dignified," suggesting that there may have also been female deaconesses.

Paul spoke highly of Phoebe, who was a deaconess in her church. He told the Roman church to welcome her "in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints," and to provide for her needs (Rom. 16:1).

Male elders had the special responsibility of teaching and protecting sound doctrine in the church. Women were not to teach in an authoritative way over men in church services, but were encouraged to learn and participate in a respectful way (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15).

The elders held the special responsibility and authority of regularly teaching and protecting sound doctrine in the church. Kostenberger writes, "Teaching here involves the authoritative and public transmission of tradition about Christ and the Scriptures...The elders in particular are to labor in teaching, so that they can refute the false teachers" (Kostenberger, 1995, p. 127).

As previously mentioned, Paul refers to the creation narrative in Genesis as the reason women weren't to teach in church (1 Tim. 2:13). "When Paul read Genesis 2, he concluded that the order in which Adam and Eve were created signaled an important difference in the role of men and women. Thus, he inferred from the order of creation in Genesis 2 that women should not teach or exercise authority over men" (Kostenberger, 1995, p. 135).

Men and women are created equally in God's image. Both have equal access to the filling and power of the Spirit, and equal value in God's Kingdom. Yet God gave men a special responsibility to lead in the home and in church. Women are encouraged to teach in many situations and settings (Titus 2:2; Col. 3:16; Acts 18:26), but not in the same authoritative way as male elders in a local church setting.

Paul wrote that women are to learn "quietly" or "silently" (1 Tim. 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 14:34). According to Kostenberger, "Most scholars today argue that this word does not actually mean "silence" here but refers to a quiet demeanor and spirit that is peaceable instead of argumentative. The use of the same word in 1 Timothy 2:2 supports this argument, for there absolute silence is not intended, but a gentle and quiet demeanor" (Kostenberger, 1995, p. 123). Paul was not prohibiting women from speaking or participating in church; rather, he was encouraging them to participate in an orderly way that honored male leadership.

12

Women in the Home and Community

Read: Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Tim. 2:9-10; 5:1-16;
Titus 2:2-5; 1 Pet. 3:1-7

Married women were to, like Sarah, by faith submit to and follow their husbands, wherever their husbands led them, without giving into fear (1 Pet. 3:4-6; Eph. 5:22-24).

Paul and Peter taught that husbands were to be the leaders in the home (Eph. 5:22-24; 1 Pet. 3:1). Husbands were to love and serve their wives like Christ loves the church; wives were to submit to their husbands as to the Lord (Eph. 5:22-25). Peter gave the example of Sarah, whose husband led her in leaving everything she knew and moving to an unknown land (1 Pet. 3:5-6). Sarah didn't give in to fear; she trusted God and followed her husband down an unknown path. Sarah is an encouraging example for missionary wives following their husbands into new, unknown places. And Sarah is an example for all women to trust God and follow Him wherever He leads.

Married women in the church were to be faithful wives and mothers, submitting to their husbands, loving their children, and managing their households well (Titus 2:2-5; 1 Tim. 5:1-16; 1 Pet. 3:1; Eph. 5:22-33).

Paul is clear—married women weren't to neglect their families. They are commanded to respect and follow their husbands' leadership, to love their husbands and children, and to manage their households well (Titus 2:2-5; 1 Tim. 5:9-10; 1 Pet. 3:1; Eph. 5:22-24). Paul commanded women to teach and encourage one another to love their families well (Titus 2:2-3).

We also see evidence of the priority of family in the requirements for widows: if widows weren't faithful wives and moms, they didn't qualify for the church's distribution (1 Tim. 5:9-10). This command to prioritize family is the same for men too, as elders and deacons were required to be faithful husbands and manage their households well (1 Tim. 3:4, 12).

Women in the church were to be known for their good works, hospitality, and care for others (1 Tim. 2:9-10; 5:9-10).

According to 1 Timothy 2:10, church women were to "adorn" themselves with good works. They were to be so preoccupied with good works that others noticed their good works more than their outward appearances (1 Tim. 2:10). In Acts, Tabitha was an example of a church woman known for her good works and acts of charity (Acts 9:36).

To qualify for financial support from the church, widows were required not only to have been faithful wives and mothers, but also to be known for their good works, hospitality, and care for others (1 Tim. 5:9-10). We have already noted many hospitable women in the early church, such as Mary the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12), Lydia (Acts 16:15, 40), and Priscilla (Acts 18:3).

So, while married women were to prioritize their service to their husbands and children, Paul also expected them to serve others outside of their immediate families. There is no biblical reason to think that women's only sphere of influence should be her home. From these instructions in 1 Timothy and the examples of women in Acts, it is clear that God wants to use women powerfully in their families, churches, communities, and unreached places. The breadth of this task can be overwhelming for women, but they must remember that the Holy Spirit empowers them for this work.

Women were to teach and learn from one another. Older women were to teach and train younger women on wifedom and motherhood, hospitality, and kind, virtuous living—so that God's Word wouldn't be reviled (Titus 2:2-6).

Paul commanded women to teach and encourage one another. While Paul's command emphasizes teaching on wifedom and motherhood, this principle of women teaching women applies to both married and single women. Women can teach and encourage one another in a unique way that male leaders in the church can't. This reaches far beyond sharing fellowship and homemaking tips; its ultimate purpose is "so that God's Word won't be reviled" (Titus 2:5). Relationships and families in the church are to be pictures of God's love and character to those around them. Believers' lives are to make God's Word look attractive to others, for the furtherance of His Kingdom, for His glory.

This concludes part two, our study on women in the epistles. In Paul's missionary letters to churches, he commended his female coworkers for their contribution to mission work. Paul also gave instructions for women's participation in the church, including using their spiritual gifts to build up the church and following the male elders of their churches. Paul and Peter gave instructions for women as wives and mothers, and also instructed them to reach out to their communities.

In parts one and two, we noted that when it comes to salvation, there is no distinction between genders. Men and women are “one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28), brothers and sisters in God’s family. As God’s children, men and women have equal worth. Men and women are also coworkers in God’s mission, equally useful because of access to the Holy Spirit and God’s Word. God’s design is for male and female coworkers to serve together with their commonalities and distinctions.

In part three, we summarize our findings, noting key truths on women in the church and in missions. We list five commonalities between men and women in the church, four special instructions for women in the church, and five truths for women in missions. These truths can be prayerfully applied to churches and mission teams today.

**PART THREE:
TRUTHS FOR
TODAY'S
COWORKERS**

13

Five Commonalities Between Men and Women in the Church

Because of equal access to the Holy Spirit and God's Word, and the pattern given in the book of Acts, we should expect God to use both men and women in the church in powerful and diverse ways.

1. Men and women have equal access to the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit. This was clearly illustrated during the establishment of the church on Pentecost, when women were filled with the Holy Spirit and testified to the mighty acts of God (Act 2:4, 11, 17-18). Spiritual gifts are given to all believers for the upbuilding of the church (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

2. Men and women alike have access to the Holy Spirit's power for evangelism. Early church women shared the gospel boldly and effectively in the face of life-threatening persecution (Acts 4:28-29; 8:1-4; Phm. 1:2, 6; Rom. 16:7; 1 Peter 2:9). Because of the indwelling Holy Spirit, God can use any believer to effectively share the gospel with any non-believer.

3. Men and women alike are to be fully involved members of the church. Men and women in the early church were meeting regularly, sharing meals, prophesying, praying, giving sacrificially, learning from God's Word, worshipping, proclaiming the gospel, and sharing hymns and lessons (Acts 2:42-47; 1 Cor. 11:5; 14:26).

4. Men and women are to be held equally accountable for their obedience by their leaders. The fact that men are to be leaders in the home and in the church should not result in decreased expectations of women's faithfulness nor fruitfulness (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Tim. 5:9-10).

5. Men and women alike are to know and teach God's Word. All believers are commanded to let God's Word dwell in them richly and to exhort one another with God's Word (1 Cor. 14:31; Col. 3:16). Women have a special command to teach one another (Titus 2: 3-5). To be clear, while men and women are both to know and teach God's Word, male elders have a special authority and responsibility to teach pure biblical doctrine in the church. Women are to teach in a way that shows submission to the male elders of their church.

14

Four Instructions for Women in the Church

According to the New Testament pattern, hospitality, good works, and caring for the home and family should characterize church women. However, these commands are not exclusively for women. God's design is for men and women to work together in the home and church.

1. Church women are to be hospitable. Hospitality was a significant part of early church women's lives (Acts 2:42-47; 1 Tim. 5:9-10). Many women such as Mary, Lydia, and Priscilla hosted churches in their homes (Mary—Acts 12:5, 12; Lydia—Acts 16:13-15, 40; Nympha—Col. 4:15; Priscilla—Acts 18:2-3, 18-19, 24-28; 1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-5; Apphia—Philemon 1:1-2). The absence of a male spiritual leader in the home was not a deterrent to a woman hosting church.

2. Women are to be known for their good works for others. Tabitha is an example of an early church woman known for her good works (Acts 9:36). While wives and mothers have a responsibility to care for their families and manage their homes, they are expected to serve others as well. In order for church widows to qualify for the church's financial help, they were required not only to have been faithful wives and to have brought up children, but also to have a reputation of good works for others (1 Tim. 2:9-10; 5:9-10). Phoebe was commended for her service as a deaconess in her church (Rom. 16:1).

3. Wives are to submit to their husbands as to the Lord and follow their husbands without giving in to fear (Eph. 5:22-24; 1 Pet. 3:1-6). As wives submit to their husbands, they are still fully responsible to know and obey God's Word and never follow their husbands into sin (Acts 5:1-11).

4. Wives and mothers are to love and care for their husbands and children and manage their households well so that God's Word won't be reviled (Titus 2:2-5; 1 Tim. 5:1-16; 1 Pet. 3:1; Eph. 5:22-33). Mothers are to teach their children God's Word (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). While working hard at home is clearly to be a priority for women, managing the home and instructing the children are also responsibilities for husbands (1 Tim. 3:4-5, 12).

15

Five Truths for Women in Missions

Paul's missionary teams included women who were hard-working and effective in the work. These women were valued coworkers of various life seasons, doing the same types of mission work as Paul. We must expect no less from modern-day female missionaries.

1. Women serve as coworkers on missions teams. Paul's missionary teams included women such as Priscilla, Junia, Tryphaena, and Tryphosa, and he consistently addressed them as coworkers in the gospel (Priscilla—Rom. 16:3-5; Junia—Rom. 16:7; Tryphaena and Tryphosa—Rom. 16:12; Euodia and Syntyche—Phil. 4:2-3). Paul's female coworkers were involved in the same types of work as Paul—traveling to unreached places, preaching the gospel, discipling believers, helping start new churches, and moving on to new places (Acts 18:2-3; 18-19; 1 Cor. 16:19). (See Appendix 2 for more examples of women's involvement in the different parts of mission work).

2. Female coworkers are to be valued and cared for by male leaders and coworkers on mission teams. Paul cared for his female coworkers and spoke of them affectionately. In the last chapter of Romans, Paul commended many female coworkers. He commended Phoebe and told the Roman church to welcome her and provide for all her needs, because she had been a patron of many (Rom. 16:1-2). Paul greeted and thanked Priscilla for risking her life for him (Rom. 16:3-4), and Junia, a fellow prisoner with him (Rom. 16:7).

Paul addressed Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Mary as workers in the Lord (Rom. 16:6, 12). He affectionately said of Rufus's mother that she had been a mother to him as well (Rom. 16:13). In Paul's letter to the Philippian church, he told them to help Euodia and Syntyche, who had labored side by side with him in the gospel (Phil. 4:2-3). Paul valued his female coworkers' contribution to the work, cared for them, and commanded the churches to as well.

3. Female missionaries are to be hard-working, bold, and effective in the work. When Paul refers to his female coworkers, he implies that they were working hard alongside him for the sake of the gospel. Tryphaena and Tryphosa were “workers in the Lord” (Rom. 16:12); Euodia and Syntyche labored side by side with Paul in the gospel (Phil. 4:2-3).

Some of Paul’s female coworkers carried considerable influence among the churches as well. All of the apostles had heard about Junia, who was a fellow prisoner with Paul, presumably for her labor in the gospel (Rom. 16:7). All of the churches of the Gentiles were thankful for Priscilla and Aquila, who risked their lives for Paul (Rom. 16:3-4). Many other nameless early church women were faithful and bold in gospel proclamation that resulted in persecution and imprisonment (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2). The Holy Spirit empowers every missionary—male and female—to work hard, preach boldly, and stand firm in persecution.

4. One way that mothers contribute to missions is by teaching their children God’s Word and sending their children out as missionaries. Mary released her son John Mark to join Paul in taking the gospel to unreached places, where they faced much persecution (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13). Eunice, the mother of Timothy, and Lois, the grandmother of Timothy, were commended by Paul for their sincere faith that they passed down to Timothy. Timothy learned the Scriptures as a child and became one of Paul’s most beloved coworkers (2 Tim. 1:5, 3:15; Acts 16:1-3). The absence of a male spiritual leader in the home did not hinder Mary nor Eunice from releasing their children as missionaries (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 16:1-3; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15).

5. Life season is not a decisive factor in a woman’s usefulness to God in mission work. Single and married women engaged in mission work in the early church. Married women’s biblical responsibilities to care for their homes and families did not necessarily mean women were uninvolved in mission work, kept at home, or kept safe from persecution (1 Cor. 9:5; Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2; Rom. 16:3-4, 7). For example, Priscilla was fully involved in the work alongside her husband (Acts 18:2-3, 18-19, 26; Rom. 16:3-5).

Furthermore, the presence or absence of a male spiritual leader in the home is not a deciding factor in women's usefulness to God. For example, Paul writes about many female coworkers such as Junia, Tryphaena, and Tryphosa without mentioning a husband, which may suggest that they were single or that their husbands were not believers (Junia—Rom. 16:7; Tryphaena and Tryphosa—Rom. 16:12; Euodia and Syntyche—Phil. 4:11-12). Also, women such as Mary and Lydia hosted church, with no mention of a male spiritual leader in the home (Mary—Acts 12:5, 12; Lydia—Acts 16:3-5, 40; Nympha—Col 3:15). Whether married or unmarried, old or young, women were engaged in mission work in the first century and were used mightily by God.

Conclusion

We do not have to settle for vague or small expectations for how God wants to use women in the church and in missions. When we look to God's Word as our guide, we find the clarity we need.

Men and women are brothers and sisters in God's family, and *coworkers* in God's mission. Women serving alongside men as coworkers is a thread that begins in the establishment of the church in Acts 1 and continues throughout the entire book of Acts and the epistles. In the ministry of the early church and in the missionary journeys, women were fully involved and used by God in powerful and diverse ways.

Likewise, in modern day churches and mission teams, we must expect women to labor side by side with men, and to be used by God in various ways. May this biblical survey increase our faith that the Holy Spirit wants to do so much more than we could ask or imagine—through women in local churches, through women on missionary teams, and through women in unreached places who will become coworkers in the future.

All for the furtherance of His Kingdom, for His glory.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

Self-Discovery Bible Study

Read through the passages below, and record your answers to these two questions:

- *How were Spirit-filled women involved in their local churches and/or mission work?*
- *What else can we learn about women? (i.e., their character, their value, how they were treated in the church, etc.)*

1. Acts 1-2

2. Acts 4:23-6:7; 7:54-8:4; 9:1-2

3. Acts 9:36-43; 12:1-17, 25

4. Acts 13-14

5. Acts 15:1-35

6. Acts 16:1-40; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15

7. Acts 17:1-34

8. Acts 18:1-28

9. Acts 21:8-9

10. Romans 16:1-16; Phil. 4:2-3; Col. 4:14; Philemon 1:1-6; 1 Cor. 9:5

11. 1 Cor. 11:3-5; 12:4-13; 14:1-5, 26-40; 1 Tim. 2:8-15

12. 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 5:1-16; Titus 2:2-6; Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Pet. 3:1-7

Self-Discovery Bible Study for Groups

Divide participants into seven small groups and distribute the following Scripture passages among the groups. Have the groups answer two questions:

- *How were Spirit-filled women involved in their local churches and/or mission work?*
- *What else can we learn about women? (i.e., their character, their value, how they were treated in the church, etc.)*

Group 1: Acts 1-2 (the establishment of the church and the Spirit for all)

Group 2: Acts 5:1-11 (Sapphira); Acts 9:36-42 (Tabitha)

Group 3: Acts 12:5, 12-17 (Mary), Acts 16: 11-15, 40 (Lydia)

Group 4: Acts 18:1-4, 18-19, 24-28 (Priscilla); Acts 21:8-9 (prophetesses)

Group 5: Romans 16; Phil. 4:2-3 (Paul's coworkers)

Group 6: 2 Tim 1:5; 3:15; Acts 16:1-3 (Eunice and Lois); 1 Cor. 9:5 (apostles' wives)

Group 7: Instructions for women: 1 Cor. 11:3-5 (women praying and prophesying); Titus 2:2-5 (women teaching women); 1 Tim. 5:9-10 (requirements for widows)

Leaders: Give the groups 10-20 minutes to read their passages and record their answers. Then have each small group share their responses with the entire group. Record the answers on a white board. Have columns on the white board for the six main parts of mission work—entry, evangelism, discipleship, healthy church formation, leadership development, and exit. Record how women were involved in each part, and discuss how to prayerfully apply these truths to your own teams and ministries. Please also refer to Appendix 2 on women's involvement in each part of mission work. This group study can be completed in 2-3 hours.

Appendix 2:

Women's Involvement in the Different Parts of Missions

In the New Testament, we see a pattern of how the missionary teams carried out their work. This pattern followed six main parts: Entry (entering into relationships or places for evangelism), Evangelism (gospel proclamation), Discipleship (teaching and training believers to know and obey God's Word), Healthy Church Formation (gathering believers into groups that mature into healthy churches), Leadership Development (developing and appointing leaders in the church and missions), and Exit (moving on to unreached places after a foundation of churches has been laid) (IMB Foundations Magazine, 2018). For greater clarity on how women served on missionary teams, let's look at the ways women were involved in each of these six parts of mission work.

Before we begin, let's remember that mission work is organic, fluid, and doesn't always fit neatly into different categories. There is also a lot of overlap between the different components of mission work. But we still see the general pattern of these six parts in the work of the first mission teams. Studying biblical examples of how women were involved in each of the six parts provides clarity for how women can serve on modern day mission teams.

Entry (entering relationships and places for evangelism):

- Acts 16:11-15: Paul and his team went out to share the gospel in Philippi, met Lydia, and shared the gospel with her. Lydia believed and her entire household came to saving faith.
- Acts 18:2-3, 18-19; 1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-5: Priscilla and Aquila worked alongside Paul in tentmaking and mission work. Paul stayed with them in Corinth and then he took them to Ephesus where Priscilla and Aquila

started a church. Later Priscilla and Aquila traveled to Rome and started a church there as well. Priscilla was one of Paul's "fellow workers," doing the same types of missionary work as Paul—entering new places, sharing the gospel, gathering and discipling new believers, and forming churches.

- 1 Cor. 9:5: Peter and some of the apostles had wives traveling with them in gospel work.
- Phil. 4:2-3: Euodia and Syntyche were Paul's fellow workers, laboring side by side with him in the gospel.

Evangelism (gospel proclamation):

- Acts 2:4, 11, 41: Women testified to the mighty acts of God on Pentecost.
- Acts 2:42-44: The church was winning favor with people and the Lord was adding daily to their number.
- Acts 4:28-29: The church prayed for boldness in the midst of persecution and continued to preach the gospel with boldness.
- Acts 8:1-4: The believers were scattered due to persecution and continued to preach the Word.
- Acts 9:31: The church continued to spread and multiply.
- Acts 16:11-15: Lydia heard the gospel through Paul's team, and then her entire household was saved.
- Acts 18:2-3, 18-19; 1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-5: Priscilla was one of Paul's fellow workers, doing the same types of missionary work as Paul—entering new places, sharing the gospel, discipling new believers, and forming churches.
- Rom. 16:7: Junia was a fellow prisoner with Paul, and well known "to" or "among" the apostles for her part in gospel work.
- Rom. 16:12: Tryphaena and Tryphosa were also called "workers in the Lord," doing the same type of gospel work as Paul.
- Phil. 4:2-3: Euodia and Syntyche were Paul's fellow workers, laboring side by side with him in the gospel.
- Philemon 1:2, 6: Paul's letter to Philemon was also to Apphia and the church in their home. He prayed that the sharing of their faith would be effective.
- 1 Peter 2:9: All believers are priests and should proclaim the excellencies of Christ who called them out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

Discipleship (teaching and training believers to know and obey God's Word):

- Acts 2:42-47: All the believers were meeting daily and devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, prayer, fellowship, sacrificial giving, and reaching out to their communities.
- Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:36-39: Mary hosted church meetings in her home, and her son John Mark went out to share the gospel in new places with Paul and his teammates in times of dangerous persecution.
- Acts 16:1-5; 2 Tim 1:5; 3:15: Paul gave Eunice credit for teaching her son Timothy the Scriptures in his childhood and leading him to faith in Christ. Timothy went on to become one of Paul's coworkers, and he did the same type of gospel work as Paul.
- Acts 18:2-3, 18-19, 24-28; 1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-5: Priscilla was one of Paul's fellow workers, doing the same types of missionary work as Paul—entering new places, sharing the gospel, discipling new believers, and forming churches. When Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos preach and saw that he needed correction, Priscilla took part in correcting Apollos and teaching him more accurate doctrine.
- Acts 21:8-9; 1 Cor. 12:4-11: Philip had four daughters who prophesied. Prophecy was one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit available to men and women for the upbuilding of the church.
- Titus 2:3-5: Women are to teach and train one another in loving their families and virtuous living, that the Word of God may not be reviled.

Healthy Church Formation (starting new groups that mature into healthy churches):

- Acts 2:42-47: All the believers were meeting daily and devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, prayer, fellowship, sacrificial giving, and reaching out to their communities.
- Acts 12:5, 12: Mary hosted church meetings in her home, and her home was where believers were gathered to pray when Peter was in prison.
- Acts 16:13-15, 40: Lydia was saved through Paul and his team's personal evangelism, and then her entire household also believed. When Paul and

Silas were released from the Philippian jail, they went to Lydia's to encourage her and the brothers. It seems that the church in Philippi began meeting in Lydia's home.

- Acts 18:2-3, 18-19, 24-28; 1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-5: Priscilla and Aquila moved to Ephesus and had a church in their home there. They later moved to Rome and had a church in their home there as well.
- Rom 16:1-2: Phoebe served as a deaconess at the church in Cenchreae.
- 1 Cor. 11:5; 12:4-11; 14:26: Early church women fully participated in the church through praying and prophesying, exercising spiritual gifts, and sharing hymns and lessons.
- Col. 4:15: Nympha hosted church in her home in Laodicea.
- Philemon 1:1-2: Apphia hosted church in her home along with Philemon and Archippus.

Leadership Development (developing and appointing leaders in churches and mission work):

- Acts 18:2-3, 18-19, 24-28; 1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-5: Priscilla worked alongside her husband in church planting in at least two different places (Ephesus and Rome). When Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos preach in Ephesus and saw that he needed correction, Priscilla took part in correcting Apollos and teaching him more accurate doctrine.
- Rom 16:1-2: Phoebe served as a deaconess at the church in Cenchreae, which suggests that women were developed as leaders in the church.
- Rom. 16:7: Junia was a fellow prisoner with Paul, and was well known “to” or “among” the apostles for her gospel work.
- Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13: Mary hosted church meetings in her home in a time of life-threatening persecution. Her son John Mark went out as a missionary alongside Paul and his team. Mary is an example of a woman leading informally in the church.
- Acts 16:1-5; 2 Tim. 1:5, 3:15: Eunice taught Timothy the Scriptures, and Timothy went out as a missionary along with Paul and his team.

Exit (leaving a certain place after a foundation of local churches has been laid):

- Acts 18:2-3, 18-19, 24-28; 1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-5: Priscilla and Aquila did gospel work in Corinth with Paul. They traveled to Ephesus with Paul, where they had a church in their home. They later went to Rome, where again they had a church in their home.

In conclusion, there are biblical examples of women's involvement in every part of mission work. Women on first century mission teams were entering unreached places, preaching the gospel, discipling others, helping plant and host new churches, leading and developing leaders, and moving on to new places. Women were valued, hard-working, faithful coworkers on mission teams.

Appendix 3: Using this Study on the Mission Field with Local Believers

Studying the role of women in the church and in missions is equally (if not more) important for local believers in less-reached places. Because of cultural differences and a lack of access to gospel truth, believers in less-reached places often have low expectations for how God can use women to expand His Kingdom. Here are a few suggestions for doing this study with local churches on the mission field:

1. Do not attempt to do the entire study in one session. When possible, break the study into smaller portions, such as studying only two of the Scripture passages or two biblical women in a weekly meeting for a month.

2. During your Bible study meetings, always include homework and accountability. Divide your meeting into 3 parts:

- Looking Back – Review what you learned in the previous meeting and check on the participants' completion of homework from the last meeting. This is also a time for participants to share their lives and prayer requests.
- New Teaching – Go through the new teaching for that meeting using a simple, participative Bible study method.
- Looking Forward – Give homework to be completed before the next meeting. The homework can be a step of obedience to a main observation from that week's passage, teaching that Bible passage to someone else, or sharing the gospel with a certain number of people.

3. For the new teaching, use a simple, participative, group Bible study method. Have one person read the focus Scripture passage aloud; have another person read the Scripture aloud again; have another person tell the story in his or her

own words; and answer the two questions given in the study guides. Guide the participants in drawing out the main meanings of the passages.

4. Do not lecture or preach long sermons. Do not draw upon all of your Bible knowledge or refer to a lot of other Scriptures. Instead, keep to the focal passage and facilitate self-discovery and group participation. Ask questions and wait for group members to answer. The goal is not only to teach the meaning of the focal passages, but also to teach the participants how to study the Bible for themselves.

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