I believe that left-handed people are fully capable and called by God for ministry. I believe left-handed people can serve in ordained ministry or any other capacity, just as right-handed people can. However, some oppose left-handers. They believe that God made left- and right-handers equal in essence only, while denying them access to certain vocations. Ordained ministry is for the right-handers only, as the claim goes. Believe it or not, the Bible does portray left-handers in ministry. Take Judges 3:15: “Again the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and he gave them a deliverer — Ehud, a left-handed man.” I’m guessing you have never heard of Ehud, I know I hadn’t until I met a few left-handers trying to respond to their calling....

When I started attending Bethel University, I met Christians who thought, lived, and acted like me in many ways. It was refreshing to be doing God’s work all around me?... I grew up in a Lutheran church of the ELCA. My mother was involved in the local church ministry and in other city-wide ministries. I was raised to believe in the full equality of men and women in every aspect of ministry. Why would I question the role of women when many capable, called, and gifted women (including my mother) were doing God’s work all around me?

Returning to Ehud, our token left-hander, I should tell you that he helped bring freedom to the Israelites. They had been under the authority of Moab for 18 years. Sure, they were disobedient in the sight of the Lord, but they were fed up with being punished. They had learned their lesson this time, and they wanted God to know! So they cried out for deliverance. God answered their call by sending Ehud, the promised deliverer. But how could a left-hander get rid of that oppressive Moab and their pesky king Eglon?

Ehud decided to present a tribute to the Moabite king, who was of course happy to receive a gift. However, the narrator reveals something to readers that King Eglon didn’t know. Ehud made a double-edged dagger and fastened it to his right thigh under his clothing. After presenting the king with the tribute, and thereby earning his favor, Ehud told him that he had a secret message. Now, if there’s anything kings like more than tributes, it’s probably secret messages. And Ehud had a surprising one....

I devoted my time to studying refutations of complementarian arguments. I even enrolled in a class that explored gender and the Bible, where I was first exposed to the ministry of CBE. My professor offered the exegetical arguments that supported both the egalitarian and the complementarian view. Unfortunately, many dismissed her interpretation as “biased.” But I appreciated the logic of her points based on the biblical text. I read more books, found resources online, and even memorized responses to complementarian claims. I became very good at shooting down arguments that opposed women in ministry. But I forgot something along the way....

What I forgot was my experience. I had forgotten that to me — and many others in the global church — the issue of...
women in ministry, and even leadership, was not contested biblically. My experience had led me to the knowledge that women can be fully called by God to serve in any capacity. I focused on responding through argument. This approach is important, but it’s not exhaustive. I failed to invite my complementarian friends to experience the powerful way God was using women’s leadership in the church. Maybe they would have written off such experiences the same way they dismissed the so-called “bias” of a brilliant— and female — professor.

After Ehud off-ed King Eglon, he snuck away without the servants noticing. When they finally decided to enter, they found their king slain. Ehud returned to Israel and blew his trumpet to prepare the army. “Could Ehud have been a “deliverer” for Israel if he were right-handed?” many wonder. Most of the left-handed supporters argue that the Bible clearly shows the full potential and calling of those born left-handed. The guards would have frisked the left leg, where right-handers would have hidden weapons. So only a left-hander could have fulfilled God’s will. Right-handed supporters are quick to respond that God only used a left-hander in that particular situation because no right-hander was available. “The left-handers are always God’s second choice,” they claim. Doesn’t such a debate forget that God used Ehud, regardless of whether he was the first or second choice?

Entering seminary at Princeton, I encountered less resistance to women in ministry. Considering that just under half of my peers are women, I would hope that everyone can see the potential of these women. They are called and capable, and perhaps even over-qualified for many ministry positions. However, even if many seminaries, like Princeton, educate nearly equal numbers of men and women, the struggle in the church remains. Due to the theological restrictions of women in many denominations, people are not given the opportunity to experience the leadership of these seminary-educated women.

Israel experienced 80 years of peace after their victory over Moab (v. 30). But as most biblical stories demonstrate, the Israelites soon forgot their deliverance. Canaan became the new oppressors after the death of Ehud; Israel cried out again to God and God brought a deliverer: the prophet Deborah. She commanded Barak to assemble ten thousand men and led them into battle against Sisera, the commander of the army of Canaan. He replied that he would only go if Deborah would go also. Upon consenting, Deborah also prophesied something else: “But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.”

In many ways, Israel’s experience with women leaders is similar to my own. The narrative does not find Barak questioning Deborah on grounds of gender. Rather, he knows she is one who brings the Word of God. His obedience does not make him weak or submissive to women, but to God. It is God who provided the orders and the deliverance. The glory being given to a woman serves to teach both Barak and Deborah that the glory of victory is not their own, but God’s. Whether it is women or men in leadership, all are servants of God. A leader is only capable in the ministry of the church as long as they are willing to submit themselves to God’s Word. And as the Bible teaches us, both women and men have shared in that very capacity.

God uses people who are right-handed and left-handed. God uses men and women. God doesn’t use women as a second choice any more than God doesn’t use left-handers as a second choice. Admittedly, there are no such groups as the left-handers and the right-handers, because it is a little silly to think that being left-handed could ever discredit someone’s ministry. Being left-handed is circumstantial, like being a woman, and that alone will not dictate the extent to which God is able to work in and through someone. What our academic arguments might lose sight of is the simple and empirical evidence: we have women pastors, and women serving in all other areas of ministry. While we can argue back and forth about what is biblical, we could also allow ourselves to experience the powerful ways in which God is already using women in the church today.

Alex Bearden is an M. Div. candidate at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, N.J. This summer he is researching, writing, and speaking on behalf of CBE in conjunction with the Department of Field Education at Princeton. Alex enjoys reading philosophy, writing, traveling, and rugby.

of capable workers that are so greatly needed, not to mention robbing women of their call from God? Does Satan laugh, knowing he doesn’t have to do a thing to bring this about; he can let God’s people do it for him?

Prejudice means judging without study, without facts, without enlightenment. Prejudging. Obviously the cure is enlightening the unenlightened. But this is disheartening; the prejudiced see no need for study.

What can we do besides pray and weep? Could denominations do more to teach the truth about biblical equality? Could pastors preach more about the evils of prejudice and sexism? Could church leaders have the same expectation that young women will be called to preach, just as they expect young men to be? Would a series of small group Bible studies on prejudice and sexism help some people and churches? Could church libraries add books about biblical equality to encourage people to study the subject? If a discussion board were added to the church’s website, could members participate in on-line discussions about biblical equality, perhaps with a resource person or panel to moderate? Do women need to be added to deacon and elder boards? Is a special effort needed to add a woman to the church staff—and don’t most churches need one anyway to minister to the church’s women since men sometimes can’t?

I wish all of you could have a church like the one where I am a member. On a recent Sunday, ten deacons served the Lord’s Supper and half of them were women. I fear my church is one in a thousand Baptist churches. Ten thousand? Dear God, how long? How long?