

Becoming His Story: Inspiring Women to Leadership

Mary-Elsie Wolfe | Reviewed by LeAnn Van Cleef-Trimmer

Becoming His Story: Inspiring Women to Leadership presents a well-balanced introduction to New Testament foundations for women acting as leaders within the body of Christ. Mary-Elsie Wolfe encourages the reader to be a part of Jesus' example that includes women in the unfolding of God's redemptive plan for creation. Wolfe briefly shares her own journey and sets the cultural and historic framework for discussing the place of women in Jesus's ministry in the first century, acknowledging that context is important in discerning how God would have us act in the 21st century. The author re-introduces us to familiar women like Mary, Martha, and the Samaritan woman at the well, sharing personal reflections and applications, and challenging the reader to think differently about the implications of Jesus' interactions with them. Wolfe helps us to see that these female disciples were instructed and empowered as an integral part of God's redemptive plan for creation.

Section two, "To Live Like Jesus," speaks to the tension between the world as Jesus modeled it and the world as it is; a world in which women remain limited in their opportunities to lead. Wolfe draws us back to the ideal of men and women serving alongside one another as equals, in the way that Jesus modeled. She notes that, "with the loss of the imminent expectation of Jesus' return and, with it, the quest to live in Christ's finished work, the church transitioned" (92). The church lost sight of the ideals of equality that Jesus had so clearly modeled. Wolfe calls us back to Galatians 3:28, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female: for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (NRSV).

Wolfe then invites the reader to "become his story" by inviting men and women to lead together as Jesus modeled and God intended. She challenges the reader "to evaluate whether church culture is derived by human tradition or God's command" (99). I believe she brings the reader to the logical conclusion that church tradition regarding women's participation in leadership is derived from human tradition. We must reclaim a priesthood of *all* believers and in so doing reclaim the egalitarian heritage that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Wolfe also reminds us that Christian leadership is servant leadership and that any leader in God's church must first be ruled by love of God and of others. This wise counsel is especially applicable as women step forward and assume leadership within the church, asserting the privilege that is theirs in Christ while graciously and lovingly inviting others into becoming Christ's egalitarian story for creation.

To truly follow Jesus's example, Wolfe reminds us that not only should men and women lead side by side, but they must also teach and invest in other leaders. She reminds us of Jesus' call to some of the disciples to make them fishers of people and that "the promise is clear that leaders are developed—not born" (128). It seems a solemn duty to continue to raise up women and men to lead like Jesus and to remind the church of its heritage that values and empowers all. She challenges us to help unlock the potential of God's people, encouraging them to discover, use, and develop their gifts and skills.

Becoming His Story: Inspiring Women to Lead, is a good resource for readers who may be new to the topic of women's leadership within the church. Mary-Elsie Wolfe approaches the topic with conviction and in a manner which is readily grasped. She addresses the tension that can exist between Jesus's example and the reality of today's church, and she provides the reader with practical application and tools to help make this ideal a tangible reality.

LEANN VAN CLEEF-TRIMMER was ordained as a Salvation Army officer in 1991. She received her MDiv with an emphasis on spiritual formation from Northwest Nazarene University in 2016. She served, with her husband, in Salvation Army congregations for 23 years until taking appointments in The Salvation Army's Adult Rehabilitation Centers Command. She now oversees the center in Pasadena, California which provides a Christ centered rehabilitation program to 116 men and women without cost to them, and absolutely loves it! LeAnn is married to Darren Trimmer and is the proud mother of Zachary, Joshua, and Noah.