

# How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership

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*By Alan F. Johnson | Reviewed by Lisa Baumert*

Alan F. Johnson's compilation of narratives entitled *How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals* is a particularly fresh, honest, and persuasive resource in the growing collection of books on gender equality and women in leadership. The recognizable evangelicals in this book speak humbly and clearly about how their theological convictions and understanding of Scripture, with reference to women in leadership, were transformed through personal experience. While maintaining a high view of the authority of the Bible and an allegiance to their evangelical traditions, they convincingly describe how the gospel message affirms gender equality.

Each chapter is an individual narrative that reads easily, as if one were having an honest and open conversation with a friend. While academic resources on gender equality in the church are vitally important, they are also plentiful and may not speak to certain audiences. Therefore, Johnson's conception for a compilation of personal journeys that also addresses the scriptural, rational, and historical basis of gender equality in an accessible way is very timely and important. *How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership* puts faces and lived experiences to theological doctrine about women in ministry in the same way that Jesus' parables brought to life the truth of the gospel.

Although the stories of these individuals are unique and varied, several important themes emerge throughout this work—themes which I believe provide insight into how the message of gender equality might be effectively spread and received. First, the narratives in the book testify that Scripture is not a stumbling block to our cause, but rather the reason for it. Many of the authors in this book were initially kept from supporting gender equality because of certain interpretations of particular scriptural passages. However, it was ultimately the Bible itself that solidified the transformation of perspective that they experienced. The Bible is a great and necessary resource for spreading the truth about women in leadership. The very tool that has been used to subordinate women is that which frees them to serve the church unhindered.

Second, *How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership* shows us that the role of experience in our faith is a significant yet often overlooked source for coming to a right and fuller understanding of the gospel. Almost all of the individuals featured in Johnson's book had experienced—through their mothers, wives, sisters, or daughters—the strength, spiritual vitality, and effective leadership of women. Their experience had confirmed what their churches and theological convictions had not—namely, that women are full and equal spiritual beings. In our quest to spread the truth of biblical equality, individual experience and personal stories must play

an important role in the dialogue we create. Narratives and personal experiences of strong, talented, and spiritually mature women will illuminate the illogic of keeping women from serving fully and freely in the church.

And finally, the stories in Johnson's book highlight to us that the transformation of one's beliefs about women's role within the church and home is ultimately the work of God. It was not abstract doctrines or systematic reasoning that propelled the authors to change their views, but rather a personal realization that manifested itself in a quiet moment of relation with God. Their stories should serve as humble reminders that the success of our efforts to spread the gospel truth about gender equality is dependent upon the grace and work of God.

*How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership* is an excellent resource for anyone wishing to know more about the basics of gender equality because it presents a coherent scriptural basis for women's leadership in simple and approachable ways. It also describes the hard and often painful struggle many have undertaken to accept and spread women's full and equal place in all spheres of life, while offering redemptive glimpses into the success of this message and insights into how it might be spread further. Thus, *How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership* is a powerful, encouraging, and persuasive resource, and I recommend it highly.

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