



Rediscovering Women's History

They say history is written by the winners. Whatever your understanding of “winners,” I think we can agree that whoever holds power at any given time has great influence over what is remembered or forgotten. Events and people alike have fallen victim to this careful curation of the past, whether because they were deemed unimportant or because they were too out-of-the-box for their time.

The church is not innocent when it comes to this. Despite the Bible's careful work restoring women as equal to men in capacity as well as calling, throughout church history women's contributions have been belittled, ignored, and reinterpreted. “Deborah was only a judge because no men would step up.” “Mary Magdalene was a prostitute that Jesus permitted to tag along.” “There were no female disciples.” “Junia is actually a man's name.” “Phoebe was a servant, not a deaconess.” No matter how weak the argument, time after time, the stories of women both in the Bible and out have been reinterpreted in such a way as to devalue them and their contributions to Christianity.

Thankfully this is not the end of the story. Where modern church narratives may say one thing, biblical exegesis and careful historical study show something else entirely. Though these stories have been covered up, they have not been lost.

It should be noted that not all who repeat this version of these women's stories do so maliciously; many simply repeat what they learned growing up. This is how Nijay K. Gupta describes his experience that eventually led to his becoming an egalitarian:

I took for granted that this is the way things should be in the church and that this reflects what is in the Bible—men are leaders, women are followers and supporters. . . . So, for about the first decade of my Christian faith, I was content with the assumption that the church is for everyone to attend and participate in, but should be led by men, because that's the way it has always been according to the Good Book. Then I went to seminary.¹

Gupta goes on to explain that his seminary education gave him the tools to study the Bible and what it says about these women for himself. What he found in the text was quite different from what had been taught and role modeled in his church.

Today Gupta and others like him are working to right this wrong, bringing to light the stories of courage, leadership, and wisdom of our foremothers. Books like *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* (by Nijay Gupta), *Vindicating the Vixens* (by Sandra Glahn), and *Bible Women: All Their Words and Why They Matter* (by Lindsay Hardin Freeman) are just a few examples of the many resources now available. The contributions of women both in the Bible and out are being unearthed, corrected, and shared, opening our eyes to the long history of women's work and encouraging us in our own.

In this issue of *Mutuality*, we set out to do just that. Each article tells the story of a woman (or women) who faithfully followed God's call on her life, with no regard for the obstacles or sacrifices involved. From ancient Carthage and Ethiopia to New Zealand timber camps, China, and North America, each woman found in these pages had a lasting impact on her community that ripples out to us today. Finally, we have a review of Nijay Gupta's book mentioned above, as well as information on CBE International's upcoming conference on this same theme, both titled *Tell Her Story*.

Stories play a powerful role in shaping how we view the world around us. As we celebrate Women's History Month, we hope the stories shared here will inspire you to look beyond faulty modern narratives and curated history to see the women who have been there all along.

Notes

1. Nijay K. Gupta, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023), 2.

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