

Mutuality

A Publication from CBE International

Let Her Lead

Education Empowers Women



**The Power of
Accurate Teaching**

by Lynne M. Baab

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Paved My Path to Embracing
Biblical Equality**

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"Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom. 14:19, NRSV).

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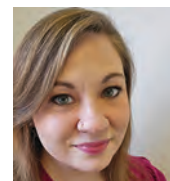
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Classrooms, Conferences, Libraries: Learning Leads to Growth Wherever It Happens



When we think of education, we picture classrooms, degrees, and diplomas. But education is so much more than a desk and a syllabus—it's a conference that introduces new ideas, a book that offers a fresh perspective, a conversation that penetrates the heart. It is through these tools that we at CBE work out our mission "to promote the biblical message that God calls women and men of all cultures, races, and classes to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world" and "to eliminate the power imbalance between men and women resulting from theological patriarchy."¹ Through podcasts, articles, books, and conferences, we strive to provide resources that encourage and empower.

One of our favorite projects at CBE is our annual conference. Each year we come together to learn about biblical equality, to meet other egalitarians, and to grow. This issue of *Mutuality* comes on the heels of our 2025 conference, held in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Through our incredible speakers, attendees had the opportunity to learn more in depth about the biblical foundation for women and men leading side by side. From sessions about women in the Bible, an up-close look at women's importance in the Exodus, and a better understanding of Priscilla and Aquila, to sessions on Bible translation and the challenges faced by women particularly in Latin America, attendees had the opportunity to see familiar passages in a new light, ask questions, and connect with others. We are excited about the impact we are already seeing in Argentina as we now turn our eyes to Chicago in preparation for our next conference, August 7–9, 2026.

Each year's conference brings a mix of attendees; some are already familiar with biblical equality, while others are learning about it for the first time. Our first article begins with a conference in which the author, previously unfamiliar with biblical equality, is deeply impacted by a presentation by CBE founder Catherine Clark Kroeger and is set on a new trajectory. The next two authors share their struggle from painful disillusionment to

embracing their God-given gifts and callings. Next, an insightful article sheds light on what Paul meant when instructing women to be silent. Then we learn about the powerful archaeological evidence showing that women have been involved in church leadership from the very beginning—stunning and uplifting news for those who may feel alone in ministry. Finally, we end with specific statistical evidence of the impact women have on their communities when they are allowed to pursue education, formal or otherwise.

In these pages of *Mutuality*, we will explore the transformational power of education. Whether discovering biblical equality for the first time, considering eye-opening books and conversations, or learning new ways to understand the Bible, our own church history, and our communities, we see how learning leads to a process of healing, growth, and wholeness.

It is just this that we will discuss in Chicago: "Made Whole: Healing the Body of Christ."² In these days, too many people consider women and men's biblical equality to be a less important, "secondary issue." But when half the church is hurting, the whole church is hurting. Following the principles we see in this issue of *Mutuality*, we hope to come together to listen, learn, and grow, promoting healing for the whole body.

Whether you have just discovered CBE or are a long-time subscriber, whether you have attended our conferences, read articles online, or listened to our podcasts, we hope we contribute to your education on the important issue of biblical equality. And we invite you to join us in Chicago so we can continue to learn together!

Notes

1. CBE's Mission and Values. https://www.cbeinternational.org/primary_page/cbes-mission/
2. Chicago 2026: Made Whole. https://www.cbeinternational.org/primary_page/chicago-2026

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THE POWER OF ACCURATE TEACHING

LEARNING THE TRUTH ABOUT WOMEN CHANGED MY LIFE

Lynne M. Baab

Dr. Catherine Clark Kroeger stands at the front of the room, putting transparencies on an overhead projector. She's showing us pictures of pottery from the second and third centuries AD. On the pottery are images of women standing over men: The men are lying down, and the women hold knives pointed down at them. Kroeger explains that the Greek word *authentain* was used to describe this kind of ritual murder that occurred in temples. She has already said that the word *authentain* was very rare in the first century and is used only once in the Bible. That one usage, in 1 Timothy 2:12, is often translated as "have authority" and has been interpreted as prohibiting women from being in leadership or teaching roles.

Kroeger also says that in 1 Timothy 2, *authentain* may refer to some kind of authority women were unethically exercising over men, perhaps related to ritual murder or usurping authority. The lack of clear meaning of that word in the first century, she concludes, indicates that modern audiences cannot base Christian practices regarding women's roles solely on that one verse.

AT THIRTY, I HAVE NEVER SEEN A WOMAN
MINISTER, ATTORNEY, DOCTOR, DENTIST, OR
BUSINESS OWNER.

It is 1982. I am thirty years old, sitting at the back of the room because I have my four-month-old baby with me. He's a placid little guy, always happy if I'm holding him, so I figure I can learn something from this conference on the equality of women and men in the Bible. My son nurses happily in some sessions; in others, he plays with my left hand while I'm writing furiously with my right. I also have a two-year-old. A friend and I hired a babysitter to stay with our preschoolers so we can attend the Friday sessions of the conference; our husbands have agreed to care for the two boys on Saturday.

At thirty, I have never seen a woman minister, attorney, doctor, dentist, or business owner. I had a handful of women teachers in high school and two in college, and I've seen a few women in Christian ministry positions working with children, youth, or college students. Most of my other female role models are homemakers. I am a part-time student at Fuller Seminary's extension in Seattle, working toward a master's degree in theology. I'm motivated to study mainly to keep my brain active while I'm a stay-at-home mom. I figure the master's degree won't hurt if I want to return to some kind of Christian ministry when my kids are older.

I was raised Episcopalian and didn't have any exposure to conservative interpretations of the Bible until I became



a committed Christian at nineteen and got involved in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF). At that time, my inability to picture myself as a church minister—or in any other major leadership role—came from a lack of models, not the Bible. During my twenties, as I studied the Bible in the company of evangelicals, I learned about the variety of opinions on women in church leadership, ranging from “no leadership over men” to John Stott’s position, which I adopted in my mid-twenties.

John Stott, whom I admired in multiple ways, believed women could do any kind of ministry, including preaching and teaching, as long as a man oversaw them. I took comfort in his position because my spiritual gifts clearly lay in teaching and leadership. I enjoyed using those gifts when I served as a campus staff member with IVCF for four years after college. I spoke at numerous conferences and led Bible studies for both female and male students. In my third and fourth years with IVCF, I mentored staff interns. My supervisor, a wonderful man who noticed and appreciated my gifts, encouraged or assigned me to perform each of those roles. I felt “safe” as a woman Christian teacher and leader because a man was overseeing me as I used my teaching and leadership gifts.

THAT 1982 CONFERENCE CHANGED MY LIFE. I GAINED CONFIDENCE AND SERENITY IN SERVING THROUGH TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP.

But at this 1982 conference, sponsored by many who would later found CBE, I learned from Catherine Kroeger and other speakers that passages like 1 Timothy 2:12 are challenging to interpret, not only because of a rare Greek verb but also because of their juxtaposition with other passages, like Romans 16. I had never before noticed the astonishing number of women in leadership listed in Romans 16. Various conference speakers discussed the difference between passages that address specific, local situations and those that present timeless theological truths, like that of Galatians 3:28.¹ This led me to a powerful realization that echoes to this day: If indeed in Christ there is no male and female, then I am an equal person in ministry and in every area of life with all other Christians, including men. My call from God will involve using my gifts in teaching and leadership wherever the Holy Spirit takes me and whenever communities of Christians commission me. I don’t have to look to men for validation or oversight!

That 1982 conference changed my life. I gained confidence and serenity in serving through teaching and leadership.



Three years later, I changed from the Master of Arts program at Fuller to the Master of Divinity (MDiv), which opened the possibility for ordination. Four years after that, at thirty-seven, I started the candidacy process for ordination in the Presbyterian Church (USA). Two years later, I had completed my MDiv, my ordination exams, and all the required interviews. I was “certified ready to receive a call,” but I knew I wasn’t ready to work as a pastor. My boys were nine and eleven, and they took up all the finite amount of extroverted energy that I—an introvert—had. So, I got two part-time jobs writing and editing publications for the presbytery and synod.²

I was ready for ordination in 1997 at age forty-five. I received a call to an associate pastor position in my Presbyterian congregation. Early in the morning of the congregational vote, I got a phone call from a person I knew pretty well. They said, “I want you to know I have to vote ‘no’ to your call today. I appreciate you and all the ways you serve our congregation, but I don’t believe women can be ministers, so I have to vote ‘no.’” I thanked them for honoring our relationship by phoning me, but inside I felt sad, demoralized, and a bit numb. Their vote was one of eight “no” votes. More than ninety congregants voted “yes”.

A few months later, our church called another woman associate pastor and she, too, received eight “no” votes. Those “no” votes weren’t about her or me. They were a sign of the slow pattern of change in my congregation and, perhaps, the wider church as well.

I served as an associate pastor for seven years in that lively church. In my last year, I felt a clear call to pursue teaching at a seminary. I left that church, earned a PhD in communication at the University of Washington, and, from ages 55 to 65, taught pastoral theology at a university overseas. I also filled an adjunct tutor role at a Presbyterian seminary there.



Now, at seventy-three, eight years after moving back home to Seattle, I teach one class a year as an adjunct professor, and I guest-preach several times a year. I speak at church seminars and retreats. I write devotionals for Westminster John Knox Press, weekly blog posts about prayer, and occasional books. I got such a late start as a minister, professor, and author that I have no desire to retire. My energy has reduced as I have gotten older, so I work about half-time.

I remember the handful of spiritual gifts inventories I took in my twenties. Service, the spiritual gift many people expect from women, was always last on my list of gifts. Teaching, administration/leadership, and encouragement were always at the top of the lists. That pattern has played out throughout my life. I will always be grateful to the numerous wise teachers who embraced women in ministry and gave me the information and perspective to confidently use those gifts as a full equal in community with others who are also serving and using their own unique gifts.

In our faith communities, I'm sure other women hold back like I did, afraid that they might initiate leadership inappropriately or overstep the limits supposedly mandated by the Bible. Because of this tendency to hold back, women often don't contribute what they could. In the church, then, we are missing out on the gifts, vision, and energy of many individuals who might make a significant difference in an area of ministry they are

passionate about. Our faith communities are poorer, and our congregational ministries to the wider community lack resources that could make them more effective. Nonprofit ministries also suffer when women feel they can't use their leadership and teaching gifts fully.

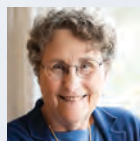
Women are freed to step out in faith when they hear and assimilate accurate teaching about women in the Bible and the gifts of the Holy Spirit poured out on all Christians. Women can then bring our joyful energy and vision to serve our Christian communities and the wider world. For me, that empowering teaching happened at a conference. Later, I offered that same teaching in sermons, retreats, seminars at churches, and in academic settings. I hope and pray others—both women and men—will do the same.

In addition to giving full access to the gifts women have to offer to churches and the wider community, accurate teaching can also gift individuals with the delight that comes from serving with joyful abandon and full energy. My writing, teaching, speaking, and preaching illuminate my life, center me in Christ, and compel me to rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance, wisdom, and words. I am filled with gratitude to God who calls us into service alongside others and gives us spiritual gifts to fulfill our calling.

Notes

1. "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28, NIV.
2. *Presbytery* and *synod* refer to regional and larger governing bodies (respectively) in the Presbyterian church that oversee and support local congregations.

WOMEN ARE FREED TO STEP OUT IN FAITH
WHEN THEY HEAR AND ASSIMILATE
ACCURATE TEACHING ABOUT WOMEN IN
THE BIBLE AND THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT POURED OUT ON ALL CHRISTIANS.



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**“Throughout the
history of humanity,
God chose women
to lead.**

**Learning that
set me free.”**

**Khongorzul
is communications
director at Bloomberg
TV Mongolia – and a
student in DAI’s Master’s
in Organizational
Leadership program.**

Discover how you can

***EQUIP* MORE WOMEN
around the world to follow their
GOD-GIVEN CALL to *LEAD.***



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Learning Through Heartbreak Paved My Path to Embracing Biblical Equality

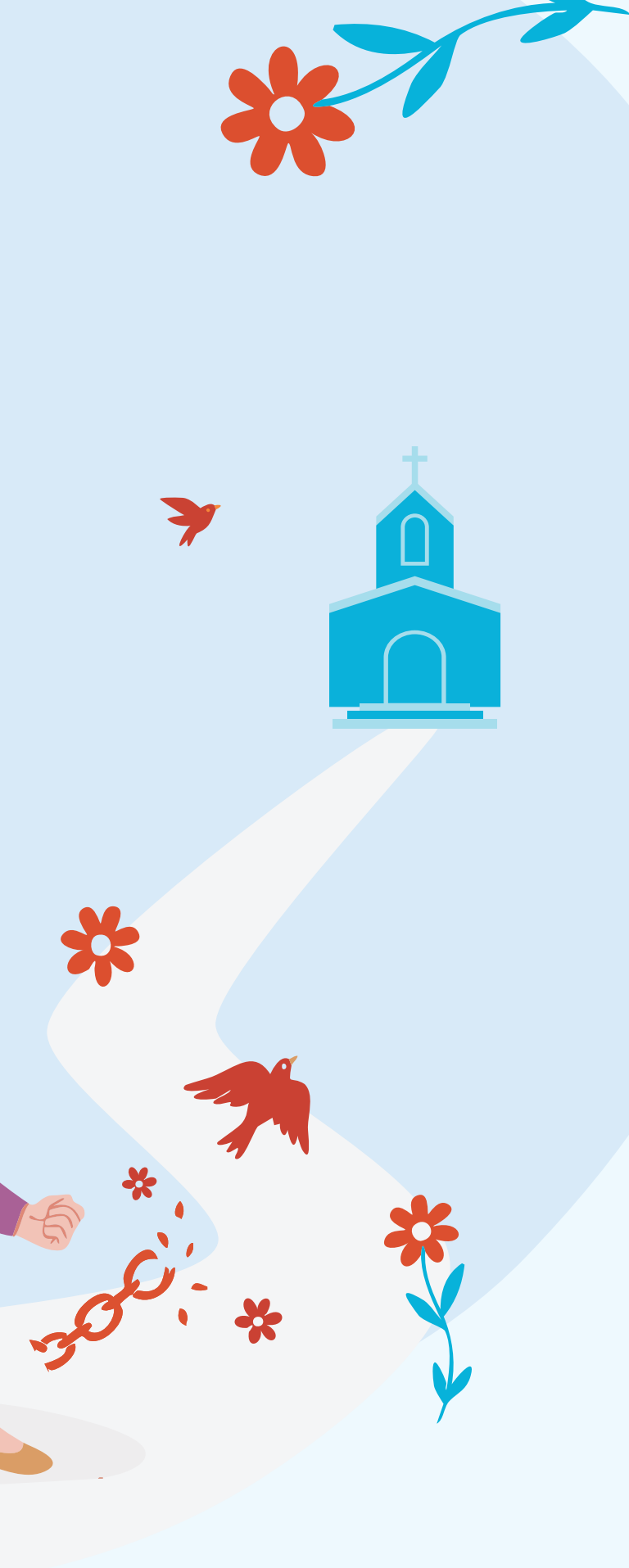
Amy Hendy

I sat across from her at the dining room table, never imagining that *this* friend would be the one giving insight and questioning the biblical basis for my traditional beliefs about women in ministry. I had always considered her to be somewhat “progressive,” and I assumed any opportunity we might have to discuss the Bible would involve *me* correcting *her*. I shudder sharing these honest-but-humiliating words. My journey to embrace biblical equality involved not just a scholarly re-education, but learning a heart posture of humility born from failure and loss.

Holding a minor degree in Bible, a bachelor’s degree in psychology, a master’s degree in counseling, and a law degree, education was my playground. My story proves that it’s not just a matter of having **access** to information, but it’s also the **type** of information we absorb that forms our perspective.

In 2018, I found myself in a small New England church, far from my conservative midwestern roots. My then-pastor asked if I would speak alongside six men at our Good Friday evening service. At this point in my life, I was a stay-at-home mom of three daughters, running a side-hustle style blog on Instagram. I had begun attending a local Bible study and fell in love with Jesus anew through Matthew’s Gospel. Despite having been raised in church and graduating from a Christian university, I had never formally worked in ministry and hadn’t often read the Bible on my own for pleasure. Now I found myself studying Scripture and reading theology books one after the other. I began to develop a reputation as a bold women’s ministry leader in my affluent, largely unchurched, harborside town.





Heartbreak: When Gifts and Beliefs Collide

My church was egalitarian in practice, but that meant little to me. Having been raised in patriarchal church environments and attended a highly conservative evangelical university, I would have said without hesitation that Paul was clear about the place of women in churches: far from the pulpit. I believed women should submit to their husbands, serving under their authority by teaching women's Bible studies, leading worship, greeting guests, or working in kids' club.

That Good Friday invitation led to another opportunity to preach on a Sunday morning. Teaching the Word felt like the perfect culmination of my personality, gifts, and training. Still, I wrestled internally with a growing understanding that came from my personal study of Scripture and my steady diet of complementarian theological resources: Women were to teach only women. I couldn't dismiss the idea that Sunday preaching meant I might be disobeying the Lord, despite knowing that I hadn't sought the pulpit platform and felt the Spirit guiding me down this path.

But the Lord's timing is perfect; he allowed me to sit in this cognitive dissonance as he slowly, gently softened my complementarian-aligned heart. After preaching that first Sunday, I continued to lead mainly women and eventually planted a non-denominational church in my town, hoping to replicate the solid Bible teaching, vibrant worship, and Spirit-filled atmosphere I had grown to love in my church. When its doors opened in fall 2021 with a male friend as pastor and me as women's ministry leader, we had filed "soft" complementarian bylaws:¹ A woman could teach from the pulpit, but she could not serve as an elder. I was still unsure about this concession, but the inclusion of male headship gave me peace.

As I ministered in that church, egalitarian and complementarian discussions became living and breathing realities that took on complex flesh in my life. I discovered that what we believe about a woman's role in Christian leadership and in the home often resides deep in our bones and guides our daily behavior. These beliefs further stem from our understanding of how God himself views women. It would take the loss of a ministry dream and a faith identity crisis for me to be willing to examine my own deeply ingrained beliefs about the Bible's position on gender equality among women and men.

A Re-Education

Over time, I began to realize the complementarian fences of my church plant were stifling my vision and voice,

and my ever-present cognitive dissonance over women's roles was keeping me from my calling. So there I found myself, at an egalitarian's dining table, as she listened to my story and expressed empathy for my profound sadness and utter confusion. She hinted at the impact of my dissonant views on women in ministry. I thought I was clear on what the Bible says and stubbornly believed that this situation was not about biblical equality, but my own pride and selfish motivations. "I just need a good therapist, not a reinterpretation of Scripture." But I was broken and curious, so at my reluctant request, she suggested a few resources that would help educate me on women in ministry from another perspective.

The journey was hard, lonely, and confusing. I battled a righteous anger that questioned how I (and many other women for that matter) had been taught a biblically inaccurate, oppressive system of silencing female voices for decades, by people who claimed to love God and women. At my friend's suggestion, I launched my theological re-education with Lucy Peppiatt's book *Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women*.² With each page, I almost stopped reading. It felt like a betrayal, both of my life-long belief structure and the individuals who espoused this structure, whom I admired. Sometimes I even felt like I was betraying God. I recall saying to my husband something along the lines of, "If Lucy and like-minded scholars are right—women are in fact equal to men in any church role and in marriage—what does that mean about any number of influential pastors, their comrades, that infamous statement on manhood and womanhood,³ and a system of oppressive Bible teaching that has led to the majority-held, hierarchical church structure in America?!" It was as if everything I had known, believed, and taught others was unraveling.

I started listening to *The Bible Project* podcast, wanting to see Scripture as a "unified story that leads to Jesus,"⁴ rather than a rulebook. Eventually, I was introduced to and read additional books like Scot McKnight's *The Blue Parakeet* and began to grasp how deeply our interpretation of Scripture matters.⁵ Beth Alison Barr's book *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* gave me solace

that I was, in fact, not alone in my journey.⁶ Nijay Gupta's book *Tell Her Story* guided me through the presence of women in Scripture and provided a great deal of fuel for my fire to share with others what I was learning.⁷ Finally, Pastor Terran Williams's book *How God Sees Women* was an invaluable resource, as Williams shared the story of his own change of mind regarding women in ministry.⁸ He offers a readable but well-researched, biblically based foundation for breaking apart patriarchy within the church and home, which gave me solid arguments to share with some of my complementarian-minded friends as they wrestled with my sudden shift.⁹

Embracing Biblical Equality

Over time, I studied, listened, wrestled, prayed, and submitted to the Spirit. My background in patriarchal environments, the theologians I was drawn to, and my own personal preference for black-and-white answers had kept me from a willingness to engage with the perspective of those who thought about women differently. The truth was that I was comfortable in my complementarian world. I was personally thriving under that structure—until I wasn't, until I wanted too much leadership authority and freedom to use my own vision and voice at the church I had helped birth. Only then, when I had no meaningful choice, would I consider that I had been wrong and that God was much larger and freer than the box I had placed him in.

If my first roadblock on the path to biblical equality was fully embracing that women can teach men, I navigated it rather quickly: I re-educated myself on interpretation and learned to study Paul's letters in historical context, while also relying upon my own lived experiences. Simultaneously, evangelical women and men were beginning to slowly, publicly proclaim their agreement that women could teach, and women were doing so.¹⁰ But, even with what felt like a newfound, more accepted freedom, there was another roadblock which felt impossible to pass: male headship. Could women serve mutually alongside and even **lead** men? In my own personal experience and journey with the church plant,

**The journey was hard, lonely, and confusing.
I battled a righteous anger that questioned
how I had been taught a biblically inaccurate,
oppressive system of silencing female voices.**



I was comfortable in my complementarian world; I was thriving under that structure—until I wasn't.

eldership was the fault line: Women could preach and lead worship, women's ministry, or missions, but they could not serve as elders because of their gender. They also could not lead equally alongside their husbands in the home.

Thanks to the books and resources I was gathering, I began to navigate this final roadblock. Women in the Old Testament (like Deborah)¹¹ and in the early church (like Priscilla and Junia)¹² held positions of leadership that God championed and that are comparable to the positions of pastor or elder in today's church. Additionally, in August 2023, Bridgetown Church in Portland, Oregon, released a statement announcing their decision to affirm women as elders.¹³ Their thorough explanation supporting their decision to champion women elders was a timely Godsend and "sealed the deal" in my heart and mind. Genesis did not curse women to lifelong positions of subordination to men in church or in the home. Rather, "[t]he biblical story is one of the recovery of all that was lost in the fall, the restoration of Eden, and the renewal of all things (Col. 1:15–23)."¹⁴ Jesus "reversed the curse," and as new covenant believers, we now live out of a place of bringing heaven to earth, to our churches, and to our homes.¹⁵ "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."¹⁶ I am quite certain there will be no unilateral submission of women to men in heaven! At last, my experiences and my education had fully collided, and I knew and embraced the truth that women are equal to men in all roles, in the home and church, under God's loving eyes.

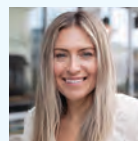
The impact of my transformed thinking was profound, and it continues as I further educate myself in seminary with the resources of new-to-me scholars, train my three daughters to lead, and pray about avenues for using my voice and my story to empower more women and men toward biblical freedom. Despite what many may claim, the pursuit for biblical equality of women and men in our homes, our churches, and our world is a worthy, even if costly, endeavor. This is far from a "second-tier issue" where we can (and should) simply agree to disagree.¹⁷ The Scriptures

proudly proclaim mutuality; to teach and live otherwise is a disservice to the body of Christ, a detriment to furthering his earthly kingdom, and far from his good design.¹⁸

Notes

1. I.e., "Women In Leadership, The Approach of Mariner's Church," September 2022 at https://ericgeiger.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/WomenInLeadership_v3.pdf, 2.
2. Lucy Peppiat, *Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women: Fresh Perspectives on Disputed Texts* (IVP Academic, 2019).
3. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Crossway, 2021), <https://document.desiringgod.org/recovering-biblical-manhood-and-womanhood-en.pdf?ts=1620230082>.
4. "BibleProject," <https://bibleproject.com/>, BibleProject 2025.
5. Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet, 2nd Edition: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Zondervan, 2018).
6. Beth Alison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Brazos Press, 2021).
7. Nijay Gupta, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* (InterVarsity Press, 2023).
8. Terran Williams, *How God Sees Women: The End of Patriarchy* (The Spiritual Bakery, 2022).
9. Williams, *How God Sees Women*.
10. I.e. Rick Warren, "My Apology to Christian Women," X, June 10, 2023, <https://x.com/RickWarren/status/1667620086251925505>.
11. Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 19.
12. Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 128–152.
13. Bridgetown Church, "Defining a Biblical Decision on Women and Eldership," Portland, Oregon, August 2023, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6314e00979f8094598b9dbab/t/64e465ab45ec2453882f910e/1733441855266/Defining+a+Biblical+Position+on+Women+and+Eldership+-+Written+Statement.pdf>.
14. Bridgetown, "Defining a Biblical Decision."
15. Bridgetown, "Defining a Biblical Decision."
16. Matthew 6:9–13.
17. Rick Ridcock, "Let's stop treating the dignity of women as a secondary issue good Christians can disagree on," March 22, 2023, <https://baptistnews.com/article/lets-stop-treating-the-dignity-of-women-as-a-secondary-issue-good-christians-can-disagree-on/>.
18. Luke 22:25–27, Ephesians 5:21, 1 Corinthians 12:12–26

**The pursuit for biblical
equality of women and men
in our homes, our churches,
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even if costly, endeavor.**



Amy Hendy is zealous for the church to know the truth of how God sees women. Amy is a wife and mom to three daughters. She recently relocated from New England to North Carolina and began a master's program at Denver Seminary. She loves to read, travel, and style.





Invitation to the Table

Cindy Degrie

Desolate. Disconsolate. Adrift.

I sat on my couch just a day after the decision to separate from my husband. I had been in ministry for almost the entire thirty years of our relationship. On this fall day in 2013, I was at a loss for what to do or what was next. I opened my computer thinking that I might be able to work on a project and soothe my emotions, but the first thing that I saw as I tried to log into my website was the header: “Cindy is the wife of her very best friend, mother of Matthew and Elisabeth, Mimi,¹ and writer . . .” I burst into tears. My children were grown, and my marriage had ended. Who was I, and what could God’s purpose be for me outside of these relationships? Could I even have a ministry apart from a man now that I was getting divorced?

There it was. I was questioning my very foundation: my purpose, identity, relationships, ministry, vocation. What I didn’t realize was that this questioning did not begin the day before, but *years* before.

Back to the Beginning

I was saved at eight years old and surrendered to a call to ministry from God. That may sound strange—not only a child hearing a call into ministry, but a little *girl*. What did that mean? Fully engaged in my complementarian church, I had no idea that a woman could be a leader, much less what God could do through me.

Fast forward to 1986: Nineteen and newly married, I didn’t see how God could use me in ministry since my husband wasn’t a pastor or a missionary. That fall, I attended a local women’s retreat. It was a pivotal moment in my story—for the first time, I heard clear, practical teaching on “biblical womanhood,” something I’d never

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encountered in any teaching in my church. Though the teaching was complementarian overall, it stirred something within me. In spite of feeling the call to study Scripture more deeply and ultimately teach, I felt boxed in. I believed that without being the wife of a preacher or a missionary, teaching Sunday school or serving as a “Titus Two” mentor were my only options for serving the church.

After that weekend, I entered a long season of solitude, studying Scripture daily and serving in my church. At twenty-eight, God moved me from running a home business into full-time ministry, though I carried the same theological expectations and patriarchal rules: not on the platform at my church, only under “authority” of male leaders, teaching women or young children, and certainly not teaching doctrine. Within those confines, I published books, spoke at conferences, hosted retreats, and podcasted for Christian wives and mothers, never realizing that the theology guiding me wasn’t rooted in Scripture. Despite striving to serve God, this faulty theology would play a big role in the desolation and despair I would come to feel.

Steps Forward

Sitting on my couch in 2013, every step before me felt impossible, but each one led me back to the path I had sensed as a girl, back to God’s design all along. The most pivotal was returning to school at age forty-nine. I’d left college after one year to support my husband’s education, even turning down a full scholarship because I believed his education mattered more than mine. Losses like that revealed the lies I believed about being a woman. I had unknowingly chained myself to a theology that caused real harm—not just to me, but to my family and those I ministered to. Now at last I recognized that I deeply needed to return to my education.

Returning To God’s Design

During the first semester of my doctoral program, I asked one of my professors how I could improve my writing and research. His answer was pivotal: I needed to share *my voice*. He emphasized that people want to know what I think and know, what I believe and agree or disagree with. Tears flooded as I flashed back over my life to all the moments I was told that I “talk too much,” was criticized for having “an opinion about everything,” or was encouraged “to be quiet and listen to the men in the room.” I realized this journey was not just about academics; it was about embracing and learning to trust my voice—a voice long silenced. School wasn’t just a path to a degree; it was an invitation to step into the woman God designed me to be.

Every step felt impossible, but each one led me back to the path I had sensed as a girl, back to God's design all along.

Another foundational moment took place a year later. One of my relatives called to ask why I thought I could preach and lead at church. My answer was simple: God called me into ministry. She asked me about 1 Corinthians 14:34–35,² commonly used to keep women silent and secure within “glass walls” and under “glass ceilings.” I struggled to answer her. As we got off the phone, an interview with a church historian, Beth Allison Barr, began to play on the YouTube stream I was listening to. In it, she discussed her book, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*, and whether what was commonly taught as “biblical womanhood” was truly biblical. This birthed what later became a paper in one of my courses and eventually expanded into my doctoral dissertation.

Throughout my doctoral program, the papers I wrote became much more than assignments. They took me on a journey toward God’s design for my life—my purpose, identity, relationships, mission, ministry, and vocation. Through my research, I was forced to confront the errors I had believed from my childhood. This transformed me and led me to accept the Bible’s good news for women.

Education Leads to Transformation

The connection between education and transformation is emphasized by scholar and theologian Katharine Bushnell (1855–1946). She saw up close the damaging consequences of distorted theology and misconceptions about women, linking these ideas to historical shifts and theological presuppositions perpetuating the problems of sexism, abuse, sex slavery, subjugation, gender, and oppression. She believed that these problems would continue as long as women and men believe that a gender-based caste system is “rooted and ordained in the Bible.”³ One of her solutions was to promote the biblical education of women and elevate their influence in the

discussion of God's design for women. As a result, in 1921 she published *God's Word to Women*, a compilation of one hundred masterfully researched and developed lessons, originally developed as an early twentieth-century correspondence course. This course examined fallacies regarding womanhood (and manhood), equipped women with knowledge of the Bible, and challenged them to see "their need of knowing the Bible in its original tongues."⁴ She argued that:

The world, the church, and women are suffering sadly from woman's lack of ability to read the Word of God in its original languages. There are truths therein that speak to the deepest needs of a woman's heart, and that give light upon problems that women alone are called upon to solve. Without knowledge of the original, on the part of a sufficient number of women to influence the translation of the Bible in accordance with their perception of the meaning of these truths, these needed passages will remain uninterpreted, or misinterpreted.⁵

Bushnell is not alone. In 2022, Joy Schroeder and Marion Ann Taylor published *Voices Long Silenced*, introducing readers to the women theologians and Bible interpreters spanning the past two thousand years, documenting both those who supported women's education and work, and those who actively erased or silenced their voices. Thousands of women have diligently studied and interpreted the Bible from the early church to the present but remain forgotten, often known only to a handful of specialists. Schroeder and Taylor urge more than just learning about these women; they provide tools to resist efforts to regress on women's roles, citing Nehama Leibowitz as an example of how one woman's demonstrated competence opened doors for countless others, ensuring "there was no going back."⁶ This is a call for women not only to walk through the open doors, but also to take their seat at the table sharing their voices.



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more essential for
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seat at the table.**

Theologian Sandra Glahn also documents this in her ground-breaking 2023 book *Nobody's Mother: Artemis of the Ephesians in Antiquity and the New Testament*. Glahn, a Dallas Theological Seminary professor with a PhD, explored her understanding of what it means to be a woman and asked, "What was I made for?" Her research, based on recent scholarly and archaeological discoveries, clarified debated New Testament passages, challenging complementarian interpretations. Glahn connects these contributions directly to women's entry into higher education, noting that an "influx of women doing academic work has *influenced the questions and expanded the subject matter* in areas that directly aid studies of historical backgrounds in both Testaments."⁷

It has never been more essential for women to take their seat at the table. Katia Adams goes so far as to describe the marginalization of women as a strategy of the Enemy. She writes, "The Enemy knows that undermining women is an efficient way of incapacitating the whole body of Christ. No wonder this is such a war-ridden issue."⁸ The Enemy employs the marginalization of women as a strategic assault against the kingdom of God at a time when both the church and the culture desperately need all laborers in the field (Matt. 9:37). Many gifted and called women are excluded, leaving a significant void within the Church. Susan Hyatt echoes this concern:

The church has a divine mandate, and only when believers confront the realities all around them and truly embrace the equality inherent in the Spirit-empowered mandate will it minister in the fullness of the Spirit's power and thereby be an adequate voice of Christ's redemption of both men and women, equally, to all people everywhere.⁹

Conclusion

The discussion about what it means to be a woman is far from over. It compels a revision to the theology of womanhood and every sphere of theology it impacts. Our understanding of God and the Bible will only grow as women are invited to the table to study, ponder, ask their questions, share their insights, and continue to discover the beautiful design for women. Looking back, that desolate day on the couch marked not an end, but the powerful beginning of a journey to find my seat and voice at that theological table—to ask questions, learn shoulder to shoulder with women and men, grow and transform into the fullness of God's design, and boldly contribute to the discussion. And, to every woman who has ever *questioned her place or purpose*: You are invited to the table as well.

Notes

1. "Mimi" is a variation of "grandmother."
2. "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."
3. Katharine C. Bushnell and Amy Francis, *God's Word to Women: With Fresh Historical Background of the Biblical Sources* by Amy Francis (Crowning Educational, 2016), 8.
4. Bushnell and Francis, *God's Word to Women*, 29.
5. Bushnell and Francis, *God's Word to Women*, 33.
6. Schroeder and Taylor, *Voices Long Silenced*, 279.
7. Sandra Glahn, *Nobody's Mother: Artemis of the Ephesians in Antiquity and the New Testament* (IVP Academic, 2023), 29.

8. Katia Adams, *Equal: What the Bible Says about Women, Men, and Authority* (David C. Cook, 2019), 29.
9. Susan Stubbs Hyatt, *In the Spirit We're Equal: The Spirit, The Bible, and Women—A Revival Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Press, 2022), 473.



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Womanhood: Examining Purpose, Identity, Relationships, Mission, and Ministry for the Twenty-first Century Woman".

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★ Susan Harris Howell ★

Psychologist. Author. Speaker

My passion is to help others recognize the impact of gendered socialization and to empower them to create more egalitarian homes and churches.

I'd love to speak at your event!

Let's have a conversation!

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Author of *Buried Talents: Overcoming Gendered Socialization to Answer God's Call*



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WHAT DID PAUL MEAN BY SILENCE AND SUBMISSION?

PAUL'S INSTRUCTION IS A CALL FOR WOMEN TO LEARN

Cheri Dale

This article was originally published Jan 6, 2016.

One of the primary passages used to silence women is found in 1 Timothy 2. But is that Paul's goal? What do we need to know about the Ephesians in order to better understand Paul's meaning in 1 Timothy 2:11?¹ First, we need to know that the letter was written to address the influence of false teachers (vs. 1:3–4) and second, we must understand the cultural background of the Ephesians.

A major trade route city on the coast of Asia Minor, Ephesus was home to several house churches drawn from Jewish synagogues. Members included Hellenistic Jewish Christians, Greek proselytes, and converted pagans from surrounding cults.²

The worship of Artemis was a serious challenge to the new church. Acts 19:23–41 describes riots against the Ephesian church. *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* by Stanley Grenz provides a vivid picture of Artemis worship involving hundreds of sacred prostitutes.³ Greek society included *hetaerae*, highly paid and educated non-citizen women who were the regular companions and extramarital sexual partners of upper-class Greek men.

Hetaerae were female entertainers for *symposia*, drinking parties where poetry and song contests were held, and for family sacrificial rites. They were accustomed to speaking in front of men, and were adept in the art of repartee. Some were respected teachers and many are named in Greek literature. They enjoyed enviable and respected positions of wealth and were protected and taxed by the state.⁴

Conversely, married women were uneducated and lived secluded lives, raising children and managing their homes. Women were an exploited productive class and restricted in their property rights. The prevailing male-centered ethos of Greek culture reduced the value attached to women.⁵ Jewish women were much like their married Greek counterparts, uneducated and restricted to the home. Women were even relegated to a balcony in the synagogue.⁶ The “shame-honor culture” of Ephesus, exemplified by

the two-pronged cultural milieu in Jesus Ben Sirach's *Ecclesiasticus* gives further understanding to the social context of the Ephesian church: 1) Men feared that their own sexual attraction to women would result in loss of control, and 2) men feared that women's out-of-control sexuality would dishonor men. Women were viewed as over-determined symbols of male honor and manliness.⁷

Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 2:11 contained two primary pieces of information for the Ephesian church: 1) a radical and countercultural imperative that women learn, and 2) the *how* of their learning experience, i.e. “silence and submission.” What did Paul mean by “silence” and “submission”?

Paul's command in vs. 11 likely surprised the male Ephesian believers. C.S. Keener argues, “Given the bias against instructing women in the law, it is Paul's advocacy of their learning the law, not his recognition that they start as novices and so had to learn quietly, that was radical and countercultural.”⁸

Aida Spencer remarks, “Paul does not simply say that women ‘may learn’ or ‘should learn’ or that women should be ‘allowed to learn.’ Women must learn. Therefore they must be instructed and this departure from the cultural norm may be why Paul couches the word *manthanō*, which means “to learn,” in the present imperative active tense of the verb.”⁹

Gordon Fee takes a more relaxed view of this verse, suggesting that Paul was presupposing that women were already a part of public worship and were thus included in the instruction. Paul was not creating a new social position for women in vs. 11 because “the rest of the data in the NT makes it clear that had already happened among most Christians.”¹⁰

Paul completed his instruction that women must learn with a description of how they must learn, “in silence with full submission.” The word used in the beginning of chapter two to describe the kind of life Paul desired for the church was *hēsychios*, the same word he uses to describe

PAUL DOES NOT SIMPLY SAY THAT WOMEN "MAY LEARN" OR "SHOULD LEARN" OR THAT WOMEN "SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO LEARN." WOMEN *MUST* LEARN.

how women should learn. *The New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionary* defines *hēsychios* as “stillness, quiet, a quiet fashion, or quietly.”¹¹

Philip Payne chooses “quietness” as the meaning for the word *hēsychia*, not “silence,” precisely because of Paul’s previous use of the word at the beginning of the chapter. According to Payne, Paul expresses a consistent desire for peace without trouble (2:2, 8, 11, 12, and 15) throughout the passage. Gordon Fee likewise agrees with the choice of quietness.¹²

Even if the English word “silence” is used for translation, it still modifies “learn.” “Learning in silence” defined the viewpoint of “rabbis and the early church fathers [who] deemed silence appropriate for rabbinical students, wise persons and even leaders.”¹³

Spencer elaborates, “Before, throughout and after Paul’s time, the rabbis were agreed that silence was an admirable attribute for the pious scholar.” Early church fathers such as Ignatius, third bishop of Antioch in Syria, and Clement of Alexandria wrote in support of the value of silent learning as well.¹⁴

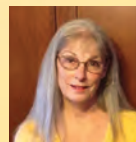
The addition of the prepositional phrase “with full submission” modifies the verb “learn” as well and is “synonymous with Paul’s other descriptive word, ‘in silence’ connoting an attitude of receptivity.”¹⁵ Payne agrees that the phrase modifies the verb “learn” and implies submission to the truths they were learning.¹⁶ Spencer proposes that the women “have not been silenced out of punishment but silenced out of conviction because their teachers are worthy of respect.”¹⁷

Though gender issues may have motivated Christians to argue with one another in the Ephesian congregation, it is clear that Paul is not addressing gender issues. Rather, he is defending the Ephesian church against false teaching by insisting that those who have been led astray, mostly women in this particular church, be taught sound doctrine, and that they learn theology quietly and respectfully from their teachers in line with the tranquil/peaceful life.

This verse is an instruction to the church to teach women and an admonition to the women on how to approach their task of learning with humility regarding their own lack of knowledge and respect toward teachers who knew more about the gospel than they, the women, did at that time. First Timothy 2:11 should not be interpreted as a universal principle for silencing women for all time nor should it be upheld as a universal directive requiring women to be submissive to men in Christian churches. Rather, both men and women are called to learn Scripture quietly and in full submission.

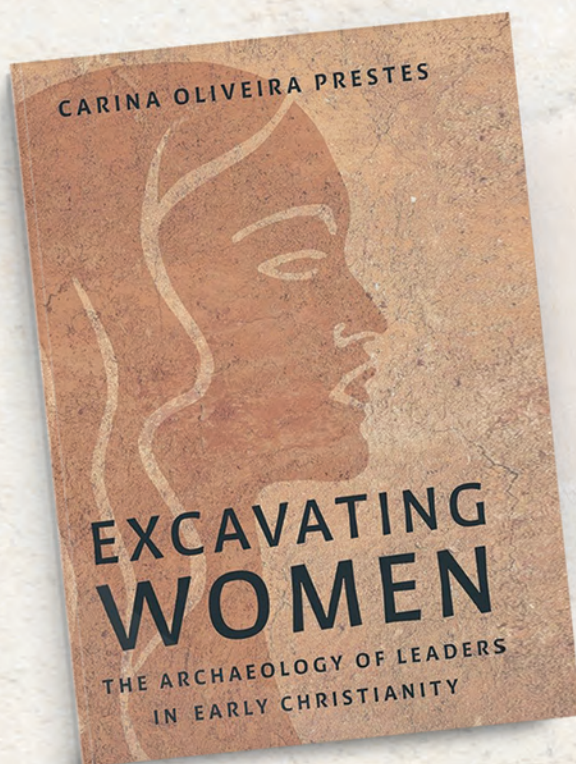
Notes

1. “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.” 1 Tim. 2:11 (NIV).
2. Andreas J. Kostenberger, L. Scott Kellum and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown* (B & H Academic, 2009), 642.
3. Stanley Grenz, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (InterVarsity Press, 1995), 126.
4. “Hetaira,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 07 Apr. 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hetaira>; James Grout, “Hetairi,” *Encyclopaedia Romana*, February 11, 2012, https://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/greece/hetairai/hetairai.html.
5. “Ancient Greek Civilization.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 25 Apr. 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/place/ancient-Greece>.
6. Aida Besancon Spencer, “Eve at Ephesus,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Volume 17 (Fall, 1974), 215–222.
7. Claudia V. Camp, “Understanding Patriarchy: Women in Second Century Jerusalem Through the Eyes of Ben Sira,” *Women Like This: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, Amy Levine (Scholars Press, 1991), 38 “Ecclesiasticus.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Inc.*, 2012. Web. 20 Apr. 2012.
8. C. S. Keener and InterVarsity Press, “1 Ti 2:11,” in *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (InterVarsity Press, 1993).
9. Aida Besancon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Baker Academic, 1989), 74.
10. Fee, 72.
11. Thomas, *Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries*.
12. Payne, 297; Fee, 72.
13. Grenz, 128.
14. Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry*, 80.
15. Grenz, 128.
16. Payne, 316.
17. Spencer, 77.



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BREAKING THE SILENCE ON WOMEN LEADERS IN THE EARLY CHURCH



A Review of *Excavating Women: The Archaeology of Leaders in Early Christianity* by Carina Oliveira Prestes

Reviewed by
Mimi Haddad

Archaeology uncovers the stories that history has overlooked or buried. Rooted in evidence and inquiry, it challenges assumptions and invites us to re-examine the past with fresh eyes. Many support complementarian theology based on tradition and a misunderstanding of women's historical participation in the church and society, believing the push for equality between women and men to be the influence of secular feminism in the church. The archaeological evidence begs to differ. As scholars bring to light artifacts and inscriptions long obscured—sometimes deliberately suppressed—a fuller picture of women's leadership begins to surface.

The book *Excavating Women: The Archaeology of Leaders in Early Christianity* does just that. Exquisitely researched and thoroughly reasoned, this book traces the archaeological markers used to honor women leaders

in pre- and early Christian centuries. From Greek and Roman temples to tombs, churches, and catacombs, archaeologist and professor Dr. Carina Prestes excavates examples of women's leadership at odds with literary texts of their day. As her analysis unfolds, we learn how one generation speaks to another in the language of archaeology, repeating and repurposing leadership markers in clothing, objects left in tombs, mosaics, and inscriptions that, once seen, are impossible to ignore. As ancient stones cry out, *Excavating Women* is a book whose time has come!

A New Methodology Yields New Evidence

Each chapter stress-tests Prestes's methodology to yield impressive results. In the first chapter, "Introduction: Context, Scope, Method," Prestes begins by noting the

scarcity of historical research on women—a bias that is all too common. Because of this, she has developed a process that assesses archaeological artifacts depicting women’s lives and leadership alongside relevant texts in the same timeframe. She writes:

There is currently no publication that documents the chronological development of women’s participation in Christian communities based on a broad analysis of evidence from different artifact classes including a wide variety of artistic media. (4–5)

In chapter one, Prestes begins by describing her methodology and the scope of her work, which she has pioneered.¹ She recognizes two leading scholars—Dorothy Irvin and Christine Schenk—both of whom are archaeological experts on women leaders in the early church.² As archaeologists, they have the freedom to ask not “*should* women be ordained?” but “what was the role of women in Early Christianity?” and what does “a broad analysis of the material evidence in its context suggest?” (7). Through a multi-disciplinary analysis coupled with new “methodologies and approaches” (9), Prestes demonstrates the capacity of archaeology to minimize the risk of bias from “a single media to illuminate as many aspects as possible” (9).

Titled “Women Before Christianity: An Unexpected Strength,” chapter two considers prominent examples of women’s overlapping leadership in cultic and civic spheres and clarifies how culture rewarded women’s status as well as influence with financial, legal, and social benefits, as well as through public recognition in the form of statues, inscriptions, and artwork. Prestes guides readers in learning the language of archaeology to identify women priestesses as frontal facing and with hands “lifted in prayer suggesting piety” (18). Pre-Christian symbols of leadership also include the wreath, “laurel branch, libation bowl (or jugs) . . . vestments, jewelry, a fancy headband or crown, and a draped mantle under the right arm” (18). Christians later adopted these symbols to identify women leaders in early churches even as Greek and Roman culture had held different expectations for women’s public behavior in pre-Christian centuries.

WOMEN LEADING HOUSE CHURCHES MERGED BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERES

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE SHOWS WOMEN LEADERS WERE FAR FROM SILENT WHEN IN CULTIC AND CIVIC SPACES.

Whereas Greek women were sometimes honored for their cultic and civic leadership, Roman women were expected to be modest, “quiet, subordinate to men, passive members of society . . . they were not allowed to speak in public” (20). However, archeological remains indicate that, in times of war and political instability or if they were wealthy and high in social status, women entered public life. They ran shops, spoke for civic leaders, and served as city patrons (21ff.). Rome also had its women priests—the Vestal Virgins who wielded remarkable power (23). Prestes examines the remains of women priestesses, patrons, and benefactors as they were honored with statues at the front of temples and with “inscriptions in prominent places in the city . . . the forum and the city gates” (29).

Brilliantly, this chapter shows how women leading “house churches” merged both “public and private spheres” (45). This not only honored cultural expectations for women alongside their lived experiences, whether Greek or Roman, but also how women “evangelized within their social network” (50) to the point that they outnumbered men in these communities. By the second century, “an estimated 60 percent of the members of Christian communities . . . were women” (50). As women thronged to religious leadership, the emperor Augustus (63 BC–AD 14) issued laws curtailing women’s behavior (54). Prestes points out that “when Paul advises women to be silent it is not because this was the expected behavior of modest women in that society or in Jewish circles” (55). On the contrary! The archaeological evidence shows women leaders were far from silent when in cultic and civic spaces. Prestes joins the scholars who suggest something else was behind Paul’s silencing of women in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy.

Chapter 3, “Women and the Evidence of Early Christian Burials: An Unexpected Bishop,” demonstrates how early Christians harnessed pagan and Jewish symbols of leadership to depict women leaders serving churches. A tomb located close to an altar where church leaders were honored contained gold earrings, a gold diadem, and a

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silver medallion that belonged to an influential, wealthy woman in Sicily (64). According to Prestes, since the Greeks were influential in Sicily, and as they also accepted priestesses, the leadership of women from Greek temples spilled over to Christian churches.

But as church hierarchy strengthened, so did the limits on women church leaders. By the fourth century, the Council of Laodicea prohibited women presbyters and forbade women from approaching the altar, thus confirming the existence of both practices (76)! These prohibitions parallel the archaeological evidence from inscriptions that honor women “leading religious communities” along with their “Christian clerical titles” (77). One example is the woman Kale—a presbyter, and a “woman without reproach”—a phrase used for leaders holding religious office. Equally, Prestes shows that women leaders were also honored by symbols (wreaths and crowns) with inscriptions marking them as presbyters, prophets, and apostles.

Turning to the catacombs, Prestes unearths a trove of early Christian art to examine symbols marking women in ecclesial offices, “realities not always expressed in the written record” (84). “Christian catacombs not only contain a disproportionately greater number of images of dead women in comparison to men” (85), but also that the many “women portrayed in these frescoes seem to suggest the strong engagement, presence, and agency of women in the Christian communities” (85). Two prominent women featured in the San Gennaro catacombs in Naples are Bitalia and Cerula. Both are frontal facing “with open arms and raised in a prayer-like orans position” (87), with what is likely the Gospels opened above their heads—indicating their literacy and, most likely, ordination as priests, deacons, or bishops. Symbols like

the alpha and omega further suggest that both women were either deacons or bishops. Prestes argues that when mosaics, tombs, frescos, and inscriptions are analyzed, the combined evidence reveals that ordained women led churches at high offices, even as their leadership was prohibited by the writings of male clerics at the time.

In chapter 4, “Women and the Christian Mosaics of Late Antiquity: An Unexpected Counterpart,” Prestes examines women portrayed in the mosaics in early Christian worship. She reveals a consistent pattern of women leading church worship as elders. One well-preserved example is the mosaic of empress Theodora (490/500–548) and her emperor husband Justinian I (482–565), which is prominently featured in San Vitale, a church in Ravenna, Italy. Both spouses are frontal facing and close to the altar—in the apse—where clergy served communion. On one side of the apse, Theodora holds the chalice for wine, while on the other side, Justinian holds the bowl for bread. According to Prestes, the apse was a holy space most often reserved for the clergy; the portrayal of Justinian and Theodora, then, suggests that both men and women served the communion. Prestes observes how the mosaic of this church depicts the vision of the throne of God registered in Rev 4 and 5—elements include the four living creatures (Rev 4:7), the scroll with seven seals (Rev 5:1), and the Lamb (Rev 5:6), indicating that the processions led by Theodora and Justinian could depict female and male elders. The theme of the coronation of Christ (Rev 4 and 5) also appears in another building in Ravenna, San Apollinare Nuovo. It likely depicts elders casting their crowns before the throne. These mosaics also imply that both men and women were “perceived as part of the twenty-four elders (*presbyteroi*) of Revelation—leaders of the community bringing their crowns before the one sitting

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on the throne” (126). Prestes concludes by examining women’s clothing in a mosaic panel retelling Mary’s visit with Elizabeth. In this image, both women are located in the apse, and each wears a long white scarf under her cloak with the Greek cross that scholars use to identify a bishop (137–38).

Mounting further evidence, Prestes considers two churches in Rome named after women, and both are also featured in the apse—the church of Santa Pudenziana and Santa Praxedis. Prestes notes that Santa Pudenziana was located “on top of a second-century house” believed to be a house church with the “earliest surviving apse with mosaics in Rome” (138). Citing other mosaics that portray women “performing all ministerial activities that men performed” (143), a tipping point of women leading as elders and bishops is reached. This chapter alone is worth the price of the book!

The last chapter, “An Unexpected History,” evaluates Greco-Roman archaeological remains through the sixth century. Here, Prestes highlights significant patterns. First, the literary accounts diverge from the archeological evidence. Second, whereas women leaders are either prohibited or under-represented in written texts, the archaeological remains tell their story as elders, deacons, and bishops. Third, “literary accounts” favor “the ideologies of the author or of the patron” (147) over and against the actual work and lived experiences of women. While the bias of the written texts is rehearsed, strengthened, and passed on as historical fact across the centuries, archaeologists like Prestes have a powerful tool and a unique opportunity to challenge longstanding bias by excavating women’s leadership through the language of archaeology. Chapter 5 is a delightful review of these material remains that free women’s leadership from bias by those who have controlled the past to control the future. *Excavating Women* tells the story of women’s authentic leadership from pre-Christian to early and Christian times, bringing light and life on every page.

The book’s strengths are manifold, including the author’s innovative methodologies tracing markers of women’s leadership in pre-Christian centuries through the early church period. Prestes’s original thesis is supported by substantial evidence and is accessible to a wide range of readers. Despite some minor weaknesses, *Excavating Women* is a pioneering achievement that demonstrates the power of archaeology to accurately recover the history of early Christian women. Readers will come away from this book encouraged, empowered, and armed with ample evidence to correct the long-held misunderstandings of women’s participation in the church.

Notes

1. Compare the publications of Ally Kateusz, including “Women Leaders at the Table in Early Churches,” *Priscilla Papers* 34/2 (Spring 2020) 14–22.
2. See Jamie Manson on Dorothy Irvin, <https://ncronline.org/blogs/grace-margins/women-priests-demonstrate-profound-faithfulness-god>. Christine Schenk’s book, *Crispina and Her Sisters: Women and Authority in Early Christianity* (Fortress, 2017), won the Catholic Press Association’s first-place award in the history category. See also <https://cbeinternational.org/resource/bitalia-ancient-woman-priest/> and <https://cbeinternational.org/resource/religion-women-and-children-christian-womans/>.
3. “Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past” is a quotation from George Orwell’s 1949 novel, 1984.



Mimi Haddad serves as president and CEO of CBE International. She has taught as an adjunct associate professor of historical theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, Olivet University, and has taught for churches, institutes, and organizations worldwide. She is a graduate of the University of Colorado and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Summa Cum Laude) and holds a PhD in historical theology from the University of Durham, England. Mimi received an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity from Palmer Theological Seminary of Eastern University in 2013. She was a founding member of the Evangelicals and Women Study Section at the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) and Evangelicals for Justice. She continues to serve on the leadership of ETS’s Evangelicals and Women.

ARCHAEOLOGISTS LIKE PRESTES HAVE A
POWERFUL TOOL AND A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY
TO CHALLENGE LONGSTANDING BIAS BY
EXCAVATING WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP THROUGH
THE LANGUAGE OF ARCHAEOLOGY.

Humanity Flourishes When We Invest in Girls' Education



Originally published September 5, 2019

In desperate need of medical expertise, a patient was referred to a woman with extraordinary skill and training in a specialized field. Hesitantly, he made an appointment. After that first appointment, the patient admitted that despite the woman's training and reputation, he could not overcome his view that men are more competent and objective than women. Lacking trust in women, he asked to be treated by her male colleague. Sadly, his view is not an anomaly. Research suggests that many men are reluctant to view women as equally competent to men, despite their education.

According to *Forbes*, women must obtain an advanced degree to earn as much as men for the same work.¹ While women account for fifty-six percent of all college students in the US, they are paid eighty cents to men's dollar for performing the same job after they graduate.² The pay disparities are even greater for women of color. Women in the US are not only earning higher degrees for the same pay, but they also often face doubt about their skills compared to men both in school and at work.

Educational disparities outside the West also have significant—even life-threatening—consequences for women and girls. Data from the United Nations demonstrates that removing educational barriers for girls and women leads to significant humanitarian gains. Raising the rate of women's and girl's education is shown to lower maternal mortality because educated women are less likely to be in relationships with men who want more children than the women do. What is more, overcoming educational barriers to girls and women also drives economic growth, according to the United Nation's Commission on the Status of Women.³ For this reason, humanitarian organizations intentionally pursue practical steps to keep girls and women in school. Even more, women often lead endeavors to ensure that girls and women have educational opportunities equal to boys and men. Consider the first woman to head an African country, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. After becoming president of Liberia, Sirleaf not only provided free elementary education to both boys and girls, but she also made it mandatory! She herself is a model of academic achievement, having received an advanced degree from Harvard University.⁴ In a similar way, women-led change in the church begins with education. CBE's founders recognized that leveling the ground for women in the church would require women earning academic degrees not only in seminary but also at the PhD level.

Almost immediately upon enrolling in seminary, I realized that as a woman in an academic community divided over women's ordination, every academic gain made was not only a personal achievement but one that served a movement. It is with a tremendous sense of responsibility that women seminarians face their academic work. Because of this, many of us organized and worked collaboratively

on projects aimed to bring awareness and change. Spending hundreds of hours each year promoting women's equality, it was exhilarating to watch attitudes evolve. It was even more gratifying when our seminary acknowledged our leadership—three of us received a president's scholarship and one of us earned our department's highest academic award. Two of us found our life's calling through these educational experiences; both of us now also teach seminary students. We have come full circle.

I now have the responsibility to support women students and their allies. Seminarians today are armed with many more resources and strategies than were available to me as a student. While so much has changed for the good, there remains a heavy burden in my heart for single women in seminary and especially women of color. Many of these women feel isolated as they quietly and courageously hone their gifts and callings in a world of married, white seminarians.

All women in seminary and higher education need our support. For this reason, CBE has established the Alvera Mickelsen Memorial Scholarship (AMMS). Now in its eighth year, the AMMS aims to place women beside men in churches and ministries, knowing that adding educated women to all-male leadership teams lowers rates of unethical practices and improves productivity and organizational effectiveness. Students who win this reward have a passion for biblical equality, Scripture, and social justice, and go on to transform the communities in which they serve as pastors, teachers, non-profit leaders, and more.

God's plan for human flourishing is that women and men work side by side in all professions (Gen. 1:27, Gal. 3:28, 1 Corinthians 12:4–11). For this to become a reality, we must support women's education globally, especially women-led initiatives to challenge gender disparities in school. From grade school to graduate school, through scholarships, conferences, and new research, the education of women is a foundational ministry. We invite you to be part of this work and the blessings that follow. Will you join us?

Notes

1. Janet Napolitano, "Women Earn More College Degrees and Men Still Earn More Money," *Forbes*, September 4, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/janetnapolitano/2018/09/04/women-earn-more-college-degrees-and-men-still-earn-more-money/>.
2. Katherine Haan and Kelly Reilly, "Gender Pay Gap Statistics," *Forbes*, March 1, 2024, https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/gender-pay-gap-statistics/#sources_section.
3. *Commission on the Status of Women*, "Ministerial round tables: Good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls, including through access to education, infrastructure and technology, food security, and nutrition" (United Nations, 2018), <https://docs.un.org/en/E/CN.6/2018/13>.
4. "Ellen Johnson Sirleaf," The Nobel Prize, August 13, 2025, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2011/johnson_sirleaf/facts/.



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Congratulations!

**to CBE's 2025
AMMS Recipient!**

Stephanie Barrett is a Master of Divinity student at George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas. A native of Jamaica, she is actively involved in ministry both at home and in Waco. At her church in Jamaica, Stephanie served faithfully on the worship and prayer teams and contributed theological research to support the young adult ministry. In Waco, she discipled college students, serves on the young adult leadership team, and regularly leads worship.

Though raised in a Christian home, Scripture only came alive to her after a personal encounter with Jesus. That transformation awakened a hunger for the Word and a desire to teach it faithfully. Stephanie approaches the Bible with curiosity and reverence, studying its languages, historical context, and theological depth.

What began as informal moments of sharing insights from quiet time became Spirit-led opportunities to teach at prayer meetings, young adult gatherings, and Bible studies.

Over time, God confirmed her call to ministry. Her passion is to help others see Jesus clearly in the Word and to walk with them into the redemptive wholeness he offers.

Stephanie longs to see the land and the people that inhabit it renewed through ecological discipleship—cultivating virtue through Scripture, community, and creation. Her theological imagination has been shaped by the garden, where wonder, humility, and the Holy Spirit's transformative work grow together.

Receiving the Alvera Mickelsen Memorial Scholarship will empower Stephanie to complete her seminary education and step more fully into her call to teach, disciple, and cultivate restorative ministry. It will allow her to embody and advance the values of biblical equality, justice, and Spirit-empowered leadership that Alvera Mickelsen championed.



Empower More Women to Lead in Ministry!

CBE has the only scholarship program that supports women in ministry! The Alvera Mickelsen Memorial Scholarship (AMMS) was created to help women answer their call to ministry. CBE has awarded a total of \$111,000 of scholarship funds to twenty-three women over the past seven years through our AMMS Fund.

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**Thank you for equipping
women to lead and serve!**



Praise and Prayer

Praise

- We praise God for the 2025 Let Her Lead conference in Argentina. Attendees were able to learn from a variety of speakers and focus on the biblical basis for women in leadership and how it applies to their Latin American culture.
- We are thankful for the translation of Ronald W. Pierce's book, *Partners in Marriage and Ministry*, into Spanish. God continues to equip CBE to provide resources in various languages worldwide!

Prayer

- We ask for God's wisdom to guide our planning of CBE's 2026 conference in Chicago.
- We ask God for generosity among CBE's supporters as year-end giving approaches. Your generous gifts allow CBE to create resources, such as the mobile app, radio spots on women in Scripture and history, fund the AMMS scholarship, and produce CBE's podcast and *MutualityMatters*.
- We ask for prayer as CBE staff members attend the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) Conference this winter.

Would you be willing to pray regularly on behalf of CBE? Join our prayer team to receive a full list of prayer needs on a quarterly basis, plus occasional urgent prayer needs. Please email us at cbe@cbeinternational.org to sign up.



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CBE INTERNATIONAL (Christians for Biblical Equality)

CBE International (CBE) is a nonprofit organization of Christian women and men who believe that the Bible, properly translated and interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of women and men of all racial and ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all ages, based on the teachings of Scriptures such as Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (NIV 2011).

MISSION STATEMENT CBE exists to promote the biblical message that God calls women and men of all cultures, races, and classes to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world. CBE’s mission is to eliminate the power imbalance between men and women resulting from theological patriarchy.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

- We *believe* in one God, creator and sustainer of the universe, eternally existing as three persons equal in power and glory.
- We *believe* in the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.
- We *believe* that eternal salvation and restored relationships are only possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.
- We *believe* the Holy Spirit equips us for service and sanctifies us from sin.
- We *believe* the Bible is the inspired word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.
- We *believe* that women and men are equally created in God’s image and given equal authority and stewardship of God’s creation.
- We *believe* that women and men are equally responsible for and distorted by sin, resulting in shattered relationships with God, self, and others.
- Therefore, we *lament* that the sins of sexism and racism have been used to historically oppress and silence women throughout the life of the church.
- We *resolve* to value and listen to the voices and lived experiences of women throughout the world who have been impacted by the sins of sexism and racism.



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CORE VALUES

- Scripture is our authoritative guide for faith, life, and practice.
- Patriarchy (male dominance) is not a biblical ideal but a result of sin that manifests itself personally, relationally, and structurally.
- Patriarchy is an abuse of power, taking from women and girls what God has given them: their dignity, freedom, and leadership, and often their very lives.
- While the Bible reflects a patriarchal culture, the Bible does not teach patriarchy as God’s standard for human relationships.
- Christ’s redemptive work frees all people from patriarchy, calling women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership.
- God’s design for relationships includes faithful marriage between a woman and a man, celibate singleness, and mutual submission in Christian community.
- The unrestricted use of women’s gifts is integral to the work of the Holy Spirit and essential for the advancement of the gospel worldwide.
- Followers of Christ are to advance human flourishing by opposing injustice and patriarchal teachings and practices that demean, diminish, marginalize, dominate, abuse, enslave, or exploit women, or restrict women’s access to leadership in the home, church, and world.

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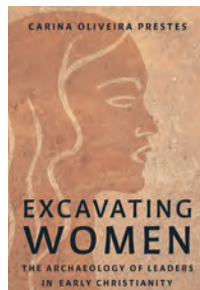
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Sarah and the Garden: And the Time God Heard Her

Tricia Hayes

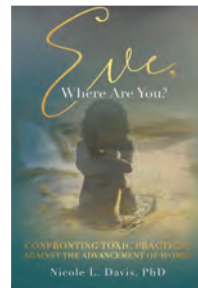
Why did Sarah laugh? God asks, but no one answers. Is there even an answer to such a question? Sarah's story is not simple. This thoughtful study looks at Sarah with fresh eyes. Beautiful writing and artistic images bring Sarah out of the shadows traditional interpretation has hidden her within to reveal green garden newness born of dust and desolation.



Excavating Women: The Archaeology of Leaders in the Early Church

Carina Oliveira Prestes

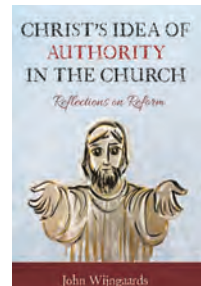
Modern readers often look at the past with distorted presuppositions about women's participation in early Christianity. However, women had a prominent role in society and in religious leadership in the Greco-Roman world. *Excavating Women* investigates the leadership of women in Christian churches during the first six centuries of the common era through a study of the archaeological remains. The archaeological evidence is placed in historical and sociocultural context to avoid characteristic biases of certain media and to allow a nuanced perspective of the history.



Eve Where Are You: Confronting Toxic Practices against the Advancement of Women

Nicole L. Davis

Without question, having competent women in leadership can certainly enhance the vitality of any organization. Sadly, too often women are not given equal opportunities and are left doubting their sense of self and their abilities. Dr. Davis explores causal effects of toxic practices against women and then offers strategic solutions and guidance to both women and church organizations to facilitate reconciliation, creating opportunity for the church to regain influence and effectiveness in our culture.



Christ's Idea of Authority in the Church: Reflections on Reform

John Wijngaards

The Catholic Church—like other churches—has created institutions to support its spiritual mission. The exercise of authority plays a central role in how they function. The truth is that ugly accretions have attached themselves to that "authority" over the centuries. This booklet identifies what is wrong by going back to Jesus' original intentions. Find out how Jesus wanted the spiritual authority he gives to be exercised in practice.

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