

Bridging the Gender Gap *by Glenda Malmin*

Last year in a Portland Bible College chapel service, one of the students called me forward before the group. He expressed to the group that he felt there needed to be a greater release of the ministry of women, and that it needed to begin with repentance from the men by for "holding the women back." As a representative of the women, he asked me if we would forgive the men for "holding the women back" in the church. As he did this, the young women began to weep. At that point, the young men began to ask for forgiveness and began to verbally release the women in their ministry gifts.

The Spirit of God moved in a very tender and awe-inspiring manner in the chapel service that day. This certainly was an unplanned "gender reconciliation" on our parts, but it was obviously designed by the Master.

Some men would have been perplexed by the overwhelming emotional response of the young women that day. The weeping and brokenness came not from a few, but from most. Most women would not be surprised at all by this response. Why the difference?

For decades now in many churches there has been what I would term as the unspoken wounding of the spirits of women. Why "unspoken;" and why "wounding?" "Unspoken" because the women in our congregations didn't want to be identified with the feminist movement. They didn't want their desires for ministry involvement to be interpreted as an attempt to "usurp authority" so they remained silent or discovered fulfilling careers out in the workplace. Here their gifts and talents were readily received. "Wounding" because they longed to feel needed and released to function in the church, but felt restrained to do so at times.

Many men may be surprised at the bruising some women have felt. They may sincerely feel they have released women in their congregations to lead in more ways than ever before. They may have genuinely released women in their own hearts, perhaps even verbally, as this young man did in the chapel service. However, sad-to-say, that often has not been followed with a functional release. This is where the confusion lies and the "unspoken wounding" continues to take place. Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." It is here that the healing rivers need to flow and bring reconciliation.

The reasons for the silence and the reluctance to release are varied and could generate much debate. Rather, we should prayerfully consider these and then, with the spirit of grace and humility, seek one another out on the issues.

Men, if you feel that you have honestly released the women in your own "near vicinity" to function freely in the church, ask them if they feel that you have done so. Next, ask if they feel you have limited their ministry in any way, and if so, how and why.

Women, if you feel that you have not been released to function in the way God has called you, ask the men in your "near vicinity" if they can see the Lord's gifting in you in the same areas that you see. Then, ask what they think you should adjust to be more effective.

Jesus said in Matthew 9:37,38 (Living), "The harvest is so great, and the workers are so few,...So pray to the one in charge of harvesting, ask him to recruit more workers for his harvest fields." Herein lies the call - not to either male or female, but to both; not to the young or the aging, but to all. May God help us to not hide behind gender excuses, age excuses, titles or lack of titles. May He help us to bend our knee a little lower, to stand a little taller and do that which He has called us to do as His disciples.

Just a word to the women:

May I have permission to gently say to you, if you have not already done so, get over the fact that God has made you a woman – a woman called to minister in His kingdom.

Last year I attended a Women's Conference in Chicago, and the title of one of the teaching sessions was "God Has Anointed You; Now Deal With It." What a great thought! God has called you; He has anointed you. Now, you need to "deal with it." In other words, He's done His part; now you need to do yours.

No person can stop you from fulfilling the call of God on your life except you. God may define your calling with a different description than you thought it would be, but if you look closely, it will be your call.

All too often, Christian women are hindered in their God-ordained calling by their own response to other peoples' perceptions of what women should or should not do in the church. Sometimes the hindrance is not actually others perceptions but rather how they think others perceive it to be. At other times it's a perception about the season of life one may be in. Seasons and others definitions of what women should or should not do can only hinder you from fulfilling the call of God on your life if you allow it to.

Perhaps God called you to "preach." When you heard that call, you immediately interpreted it as meaning preaching to large crowds of adults - not tomorrow - but today. You look around the room and lo and behold, you discover that you are preaching to 4 year olds on Sunday mornings.

If you're feeling hemmed in by this group of small-sized disciples, may the life of Henrietta Mears, founder of Gospel Light Publications expand your vision and definition of your calling.

Henrietta would be considered today as one of the most influential women in the mid-20th century Christian life. She was a high school chemistry teacher in Minneapolis in the 1920s. During this time, at the request of her Pastor, she accepted the challenge of teaching a Sunday school class of five 18 year old girls. As she faithfully taught those five girls, the class grew to over 500 in attendance. The church had to build a special hall to accommodate them.

In 1928 she became the Director of Christian Education at another church and then became involved in full-time Christian ministry. When she began her ministry there, the children's Sunday school enrollment was 450. In 2 ½ years that number increased to more than 4,000.

Soon after she began her ministry in this location she developed her own Sunday School curriculum. Within just a few short years, orders for her Sunday School lessons were coming in from all over the nation. This is where Gospel Light Press had its beginnings.

Besides Henrietta's writing and publishing ministry, she is well known for her teaching ministry - particularly her teaching of young men. Among her students were Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, Richard Halverson, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., Harold Ockenga, the noted evangelical leader in Boston. The late Clarence Roddy, professor of homiletics at Fuller Seminary, used to refer to Mears as the best preacher in Southern California. He said, "She was not ordained and had no formal theological training, but the impact of her life and teaching on her boys was comparable to the influence some of the world's greatest theologians had on their students." (Think about that!)

If you are truly called of God, no one can stop that calling but you. He is the God and creator of genders and the seasons of life. Yield your yearnings and your excuses to God. You're called! Now deal with it, yield to it, and let God define it!

John Wesley is known for saying, "Give me a hundred men who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I will shake the world. I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; and such alone will overthrow the kingdom of Satan and build up the Kingdom of God on earth."

In no way meaning to belittle this great statement, please allow me to rephrase it for our purposes here. "Lord, call a hundred men and women, who care not a straw about their gender in regard to Your calling, who will fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but You alone. Take them and shake the world with their unity under Your Lordship. Such alone will overthrow the kingdom of Satan and build up the Kingdom of God on earth."