

# THE TEN SUGGESTIONS

By Mike Jentes

As a church planter starting with a small team in a liberal urban environment, I knew that our team needed to be functioning optimally. We needed “all hands on deck” to be doing the work of evangelism and discipleship.

Starting from scratch allowed us to experiment with new and moldable church leadership structures as the church was formed. Our church expression developed into a house church network. As far as leadership, we pursued male eldership in our house churches primarily through a godly married couple. Simultaneously for the network-wide leadership team we intentionally included women (beyond only spouses). We found this to be *biblical*, with regards to eldership in the church, and *better* for our ministry by including some of our best people—our ladies!

Through this experience and a variety of other ministry efforts over my 20 plus years of ministry, I would humbly submit the following suggestions toward empowering our ministries biblically with both genders for health, maturity and the glory of God.

## The Ten Suggestions

### 10. Identify Leaders

Identification is simple and yet essential. If you haven't done this before, write down the names of leaders and emerging leaders for your ministry in a list--both male and female (even students). The goal of identification is not to “rank” them, but to identify and “intentionalize” the development of each one! As a leader, you must be equipping and passing the baton (2 Tim. 2:2). Leadership development is too important to be left to chance. (Mark 3:14)

After you have a list, take a moment and observe the gender balance. Are you “mobilizing the other half of the army”<sup>1</sup> as one of my esteemed colleagues would say about women in leadership? If not, how do you identify women and intentionally develop them to be all that God wants them to be?

### 9. Encourage Appropriate Training and Learning Environments

While church planting, my wife complained that I was the one who got a ministry degree in college and seminary, yet she was the one expected to lead the ministry for women and children when I received all the training! I've taken her words to heart

1 Felicity Dale chose this as a title for a main session conference presentation on January 28, 2007 with Church Multiplication Associates. ( [http://www.cmaresources.org/videos/mobilizing-the-other-half-of-the-army\\_felicity-dale](http://www.cmaresources.org/videos/mobilizing-the-other-half-of-the-army_felicity-dale) ) This sticky title has become an oft-repeated phrase for me over the years.

by regularly challenging ministry leaders to take their spouses to training events and conferences. Because women often come into ministry through other vocations (or like my wife married into it) they often have less theological and practical training. In addition, fewer networking and ministry environments are open to women as well - whether this is intentional or just perceived doesn't really matter. The challenge of raising children also makes it more difficult to access formal training.

We need to encourage appropriate training and learning environments for women. How do we help a single mom with a young child grow in her leadership—not just for her child's sake, but for the church's sake? It is worth our effort to seek to provide training that makes sense and that can be delivered in a way that is accessible to both men and women.

### **8. Make Sure Everyone Can Use the Tools—Especially Technology**

Tools for ministry are vital: books, articles, worksheets, websites and even technology. One of the recurring themes of women in ministry is the lack of skill in using software and electronic tools unless they have another job in which they need to be competent with those tools. Usually lack of ability isn't the problem, it is lack of familiarity. Help your leaders be able to use the tools your ministry is using.

### **7. Stereotypes Have Truth, but Don't Let Them Dominate**

Depending on gender jokes, overusing stereotypes to define people and their behavior, and attributing individual reactions to gender, is not helpful. In fact, it keeps us from seeing people as unique individuals. We ought to be wise in understanding the differences between men and women. These differences aren't a detriment they are a compliment! Encourage the *compliments to dominate*.

### **6. Deference and Submission to One Another is Biblical**

Take a fresh look at a few Scriptures with gender in mind:

*Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.* Philippians 2:3-4 NLT

*And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.* Ephesians 5:21 NLT

In reflecting our Jesus, do we live in deference and submission even with saints across genders? On our church staff, our youth director has small children and finds it difficult to get childcare to attend staff meetings. One week, her kids were sick and her childcare bailed; yet we still wanted her to be part of our meeting. We just had her "attend" via video conference<sup>2</sup> from home. With technology, we can be even more gracious to one another with scheduling difficulties. It wasn't optimal, but we did so in deference to her because she's an important part of the team.

### **5. Recognize Meetings are Different with Both Genders Present**

Both women's and men's groups have a unique dynamic. It seems communication flows easier because we "get" one another. Sometimes more "license" is taken in those environments to be critical of the other gender. I'd suggest that there are times when those conversations go too far and are even sinful and need a corrective.

<sup>2</sup> In this instance we used Google Hangouts. Many internet-based video conferencing programs are available for free (Skype, FaceTime, etc.) or even paid versions (GoToMeeting, WebEx, etc.).

When meetings include both men and women, the dynamics are different. These dynamics go beyond discretion and decency, like when one might hear a gentleman say, "I won't say this with a lady present." That is appreciated, but is cursory.

An intriguing article in October 2015 with the title "In Mixed Gender Groups, Can You Guess Who Talks The Most?" began with the following statement:

*Men speak 70 percent of the time in mixed gender groups, with degrading effects on group decision-making. Women are rarely viewed as among the most powerful, influential, or relevant speakers. Their introduction of topics, or attempts to shift conversation, are frequently ignored. And their speech is routinely interrupted.*<sup>3</sup>

As a man, my response is "Ouch, let me reexamine myself." The author was addressing the public and secular sphere advocating for gender equality in meetings. The observations of this article and supporting studies should alert us to our propensities as men in mixed gender groups.

I hope that in the Christian sphere we might have a better track record, but I'm suspicious that this description rings true for many women leaders who have been front-runners in ministry spheres. Much more can and should be said about the particular topic of mixed gender meetings, but these should suffice for us to recognize the challenge ahead.

#### 4. Everyone has Emotions

Our God has emotions, and in crafting us He gave them to us for fullness of life. Ministry pushes us to experience the gamut of emotions from elation to despair. We must understand that emotion plays a role in how both genders respond to, and deal with success, problems and conflict. It just may look different.

Controlling our emotions is part of our maturity process in discipleship and in leadership. Self-control is part of the fruit of the Spirit along with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness. Let all these "fruits" be evident in our leadership.

#### 3. The Harmony of Male and Female is More Like God

Don't limit this to just marriage, God's image is better expressed through men and women together—He said so.

*"So God created human beings in his own image.  
In the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them."* - Genesis 1:27 NLT<sup>4</sup>

We are missing something in the image of God if we are imbalanced! Let's express His image better together.

#### 2. Create Space for More than Tokens

If we want to grow the number of women leaders, we have to grow the number of opportunities where they can lead. Make sure there are multiple spots on the team, leadership opportunities, decision-making roles, etc. We can't just add symbolic roles

<sup>3</sup> "In Mixed Gender Groups, Can You Guess Who Talks The Most?" by Soraya Chemaly posted October 22, 2015. Retrieved on May 1, 2016 at <http://www.rolereboot.org/culture-and-politics/details/2015-10-in-mixed-gender-groups-can-you-guess-who-talks-the-most/>

<sup>4</sup> One more thing to consider is using a gender inclusive Bible translation.

that don't have impact. Take risks on placing the right people in "mission critical" roles.

The "funnel" for more high-caliber women leaders starts with a broad base of places for women to lead and serve in smaller yet influential roles. For instance, in a variety of conferences where I was part of the planning team, there seemed to be a small number of articulate and trusted women presenters. This number was limited because of the limited number of opportunities for women to speak/lead in their local contexts. The simple equation is: More opportunities = more development = more capable influence!

### **1. Don't Worry about the Past; Start Today**

As you read this and think about your current ministry spheres, you might be in a role that has decades of history. On the flip side, you might be in a ministry start-up like I was and able to "lay some new tracks" for leadership and leadership structures. Regardless, if you are a leader you have influence.

I'll say it again; "Don't worry about the past, start today!" Begin now with a clear step of empowerment for leaders in your context. Write down what the Lord is compelling you to do in your sphere. Then share it with a trusted friend or teammate and begin working it out.

I affirm the action of finding ways in your ministry to empower, develop, and lead both men and women toward fruitful ministry for the glory of God!

# A MISSIONAL MOSAIC



An anthology presented by the WoRTh Project:

**WORKING TOWARDS A  
ROBUST THEOLOGY OF  
WOMEN ON MISSION**

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A Missional Mosaic: Working Towards A Robust Theology Of Women On Mission

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Edited by Louise Klawitter and Becky Schwan

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**P R E F A C E**

**HISTORY,  
PURPOSE,  
INTRODUCTION,  
AND SUMMARY**

# THE WORTH PROJECT:

## Working Towards a Robust Theology of Women on Mission

### History

In November 2013, a Task Force on the Role and Dignity of Women was mandated and funded by Encompass World Partners. I was privileged to chair the Task Force composed of 8\* Encompass women missionaries. One of the major conclusions of the Task Force was that women in Encompass are "all in" regarding mission but would appreciate more opportunities to use and be recognized for their diverse callings, giftings, and training. The Task Force itself was a strong affirmation along those lines.

When the women in the Task Force had finished their official work, Executive Director of Encompass Dr. Dave Guiles asked me to head up and recruit a work group to study and articulate a "robust theology of women" for Encompass, within defined theological boundaries. WoRTh is the result.

Our core work group consisted of Becky Schwan, Elizabeth Paul, Dr. Ron and Chery Boehm, and Gary McCaman, with help from Mike Jentes and Malcolm Stevens. We solicited input and written contributions from Encompass staff members\*\* and Grace Brethren pastors. While our study was Bible-based, we read and consulted commentaries, books, articles, blogs, and other resources from a variety of currents that would, for the most part, identify themselves as evangelical.

Over the course of the past 18 months, each member of the core group spent unseen and uncounted hours of study, research, Skypes, discussions with others, and prayer concerning the biblical material and what has been written about it. We also have had the opportunity to examine our own experiences and teaching in the light of what we were learning. I think I can speak for the group when I say our understanding of the Scriptures on this topic has become more richly textured, our convictions more firmly established, and our practices more consistent. We have perhaps also become more respectful of those who see things differently than we do and more willing to graciously listen to another point of view.

As head of this group, I also affirm the strong commitment of each member to be faithful to what we understand to be biblical truth and practice. This journey has been a joy!

Special thanks to my husband, Paul Klawitter, who has informed and influenced this work in so many ways by his example, his scholarship, and his willingness to engage on the subject over the course of many years.

— Louise Klawitter for the WoRTh group

\*Becky Schwan, Ginger Hock, Karen Foster, Jessica Robertson, Angie B., Elizabeth Paul, Linda McCaman, and Louise Klawitter. Wayne Hannah was the Encompass leadership liason. The group studied, affirmed, and advised on a number of subjects, including employment policies in consideration of the particularities of cross-cultural, often pioneer ministries.

\*\*Throughout this anthology, some Encompass staff will be referred to by their pseudonyms for security reasons.

# Purpose

This is an anthology that seeks to represent different parts of the mosaic of Scripture regarding how men and women on mission can work together for the greater glory of God.

Our hope is to encourage reflection, study, and thoughtful, prayerful practice of Scriptural principles among people on mission, whatever their contexts.

Our approach has been to explore and discover the richness of the Scriptural mosaic by looking beyond the several controversial passages in seeking the whole counsel of God. We have not been disappointed! We have discovered that by regarding the many varied stories of women throughout the Bible as individual tiles in a grand and glorious mosaic, an overall picture emerges. This picture gives cause to celebrate the Lord's artistic designing of men and women, made in God's image, as both equal and complementary, gifted by His Spirit to participate in the *missio Dei*, the work of God on this earth.

As church planters and cross-cultural workers, we are "boots-on-the-ground" theologians of a sort, not vocational scholars and academics, but practioners. We do not primarily work within the established North American church but rather in church planting and cross-cultural ministries including church equipping, holistic ministries, and crisis response. We hope to bring some varied perspectives, a slightly different voice to the subject, and to enrich the conversation.

We firmly believe that our understanding and practice of biblical principles regarding women on mission is crucial to fulfilling our calling to make disciples of all nations. What we understand about the role of women is not only reflected in our practices, but is an integral part of our message, especially as we engage cultures with markedly unbiblical, at times shocking, values in this regard.

We also seek to promote unity in the Spirit alongside biblical diversity. In sharpening our focus theologically, we may better evaluate our practices to ensure that we are bearing spiritual fruit.

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last."<sup>1</sup>

— Jesus

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."<sup>2</sup>

— Jesus



1 Jesus, from John 15:16, NIV  
2 Jesus, from John 17:20-21, NIV

# Introduction

"Taking the time to understand the different attempts to harmonize the biblical elements does more for true Christian unity than seeking to impose our interpretation on everyone."

— Alfred Kuen<sup>3</sup>

"For our souls' sake we must learn to understand the Scriptures. We must escape the slavery of words and give loyal adherence to meanings instead. Words should express ideas, not originate them."

— A.W. Tozer<sup>4</sup>

"...we must differentiate between God's revelation, and our understanding of it."

— Paul Hiebert<sup>5</sup>

What the Bible teaches about the role of women is a subject that can be both clearly divisive and yet clouded by the use and misuse of words. We have chosen the form of an anthology using "seeing and hearing" metaphors to organize our material. This is so our readers can see certain issues more clearly and thus engage in further study and conversation.

So why can't we just all agree on one interpretation about women's roles in ministry in general, and teaching and leadership in particular? Much of the answer turns on our understanding of the biblical words that are used as well as the ways we use words to convey biblical ideas as we understand them. Here are some examples:

- **Complementarian vs. egalitarian:** Is this a contest? These are not Bible words, but can we use them in an understandable and perhaps helpful way?
- **Authority, submission, headship:** Do these words convey positive ideas? Or are they being heard as implying abusive use of power or demeaning attitudes?
- **Servant leadership:** Do we truly grasp it as Jesus' example, or do we use it without understanding its implications, as a way to avoid confronting the question of authority?

We would like to take our readers beyond clichés and stereotypes. We share what we have found and invite you to take it further.

We have included exegetical articles and studies, with an article about the difficulties of exegetical certitude in key passages. We have referenced blogs, websites, articles, and books that look in depth at various issues from different perspectives. You will also find some personal journeys, as well as fresh tellings of ancient Bible stories. There are even some speculative wrestlings with the biblical testimony alongside carefully researched position statements and field-tested study guides.

This is by no means a comprehensive work but rather an attempt to bring the biblical testimony to your attention in a way that encourages conversation—as if we were in an art gallery before a giant wall mosaic discussing what we see, but with a difference. The goal is not to just admire the beauty of it, but to carry its message as far as the Artist will send us!

<sup>3</sup> Translated from Alfred Kuen, *La femme dans l'Eglise*, p. 137

<sup>4</sup> A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 104-105

<sup>5</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, p. 70

# THE WORTH PROJECT: A SUMMARY

The WoRTh Project is a study project sponsored by Encompass World Partners.<sup>1</sup> As such, it is missional in intent: We desire to see women be free, in the power of the Spirit and with the enthusiastic support of their churches, to use all that God has made them to be to make disciples of all nations. We recognize the inter-relatedness of the local church and its missional expressions. We are therefore attempting to neither instruct the established North American church, nor set policy for Encompass staff. We have not addressed every contingency, nor have we sufficiently explored every related issue, but we have discovered new richness in the biblical testimony. We have uncovered a surprisingly broad consensus on many issues.

## Embracing New Realities

Encompass leadership has faced the challenge of recognizing and responding faithfully to new realities in a rapidly changing world. The everyday work of Encompass staff has become unremittingly “glocal” (think globally, act locally), and complex. We suspect that over the scope of the Charis Alliance<sup>2</sup>, this is true for many Christian workers.

Some of these new realities include the high levels of education for women, their increased economic independence, and the breakdown of societal taboos in many western settings. This is in contrast with the dehumanization of women in other places or parts of society. While many women have been empowered, others are more vulnerable than ever before. What remains constant is the need for women (and men) to hear the Gospel and have a chance to respond positively through people (women and men) who can translate the Gospel into human contexts.

How will the established church, in partnership with missional expressions of the church, embrace these realities? That is the challenge and opportunity before us.

## Working Towards...

The issues addressed and left unaddressed in this volume reflect the breadth of both Scripture and human experience. While we affirm the possibility of understanding and living faithfully to the Scriptures as we understand them, we hold specific interpretations and applications with humility. We recognize the need for ongoing regard for the accurate contextualization of the biblical testimony, which is informed by the larger hermeneutic community<sup>3</sup>.

1 Encompass World Partners is a mission sending agency affiliated with the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches and the International Charis Alliance. It is referred to as Encompass throughout this volume.

2 For more information on the Charis Alliance see [www.charisalliance.org](http://www.charisalliance.org).

3 For an interesting discussion on this concept see [www.anabaptistnetwork.com](http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com).

# The WoRTh Project: A Summary

## A Robust Theology

If our theology is accurate it must be understood, communicated, and lived out in a wide variety of contexts. We must recognize the limitations of a theology that is too narrow to be accessible in a wide variety of human situations. There is also the threat of a theology that is so broad that it can no longer sustain biblically faithful practices over time.

## Of Women on Mission

We intend this work to spur men (who do most of the mobilizing in the church and mission environment) and women (who often are waiting for a chance to do the same or to be mobilized) on to “love and good deeds” through a closer look at some of the issues, a broad overview of others. We do this in an attempt to capture the beauty and the sense of “mosaic.”

## A Theological Framework of Three Perspectives<sup>4</sup>

1. **Biblical theology** – The study of women throughout the Bible leads us to appreciate the total equality of women with men in terms of intrinsic worth, responsibility, and privilege regarding the Creator and His created order. Man and woman together reflect the image of the Godhead. In both Old and New Testaments, God clearly uses women to advance salvation history both in ordinary and extraordinary ways. Jesus demonstrated an attitude of complete acceptance of women as spiritually on a par with men. He called them to discipleship in ways that were at times culturally acceptable and other times were counter-cultural.
2. **Systematic theology** – Our study has led us to the conclusion that the biblical themes of male headship in the nuclear family and of male elders in the local church are principles to be observed in our ministries today, yet in culturally sensitive ways. In some way they are to serve as images that reflect both the Trinity and Christ in relation to His Bride, the Church. It is a question of responsibility of the head and voluntary submission of the other party—never an excuse for demeaning attitudes or subjugation. Headship in this understanding does not mean all women are to submit to all men, nor does it address situations outside of the two arenas of home and local church.
3. **Missional theology** – The inauguration of the Church clearly opened the way for women to be full partners in the expansion of the Gospel. They would be prophets, priests, and workers in the harvest. The “people-who-are-gifts” in Ephesians 4 are women and men, without referring to authority or specific roles. Women today receive the Gospel, live the Gospel, and carry the Gospel. In fact, women are largely responsible for the expansion of the church in many places. We should not be seeking to “restrict” women’s roles unnecessarily, but rather working to “release” women as much as possible—single, married, young, and old—to follow the Spirit-stirrings of their gifts and calling. That is the goal of this project.

<sup>4</sup> Following Paul Hiebert’s work on the importance of the three theologies: systematic, biblical, and missional. *The Gospel in Human Contexts*. (2009). Baker Academic Books.

## So What are We Afraid of? The Parable of the Talents

*continued*

- Are we asking the right questions? Can we trust the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth and yet humbly accept people who disagree with us?
- Can we trust God for our spiritual leaders to seek God's truth?
- Can we trust our Lord to give us wisdom as we seek to please Him in our understanding, and to correct us when we are wrong?
- Are we concerned enough about the Master's intentions to multiply the harvest to consider whether or not we are just trying to play it safe?

To finish on a very personal note: One of the most discouraging things I have encountered as a woman on mission (not often, but even once is too much) is when a male spiritual leader mistakes my zeal to use my spiritual gifts for the Lord as a desire to usurp authority. Most Christian women I have been involved with would never want to be perceived as bossy, power-hungry women, and so they too hide their talents for fear of being misjudged.

From my perspective, I see many women and men who want to multiply the talents they have been given—calling, gifting, context—in a God-honoring way. My concern is that we unnecessarily limit their possibilities out of misplaced fear.

