WORKING WOMEN ON MISSION:
ENGAGEMENT AND EDIFICATION IN THE CHURCH

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues for the engagement of working women in the mission of the church. As the church was designed to fully deploy the gifts of every member in its mission, business and professional women, as vital leaders and valued servants, must engage that mission by using their skills, abilities, and influence for the edification of the church. In support of the argument, this paper presents biblical models from the Old Testament—Deborah, Ruth, and the Proverbs 31 woman—who attest to the contributions of women outside the domestic sphere who used their skills, abilities, and influence to strengthen and protect the family of God in Israel. Next, the paper looks at three women from the first century workplace—Lydia, Priscilla, and Phoebe—who used their vocational energies to promote the growth of the early church in the Roman Empire. Additionally, the paper reviews three theological imperatives that compel believers to use their gifts in building up the family of God—the Doctrine of Adoption, the Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers, and the Doctrine of Spiritual Gifts. Based on an understanding of the contributions from the biblical models along with the doctrinal imperatives, the paper then examines the modern church to determine if and how business women are contributing to their local congregations. Findings from three U.S. studies attest to growing trends of disaffiliation with religion and declines in Protestantism. Particular attention is given to the increase in the percentage of unaffiliated persons among women with higher educations and higher
incomes—working or professional women. Noting such, the paper includes a case study from the student of a large urban church in the South that examines how and if working women are finding opportunities for engagement. The case study indicates that working women need and desire meaningful engagement; they also have preferences for the use of their time and energies. While the findings are specific in nature to a particular church, they increase awareness and stimulate further inquiry as to how the church can support working women who endeavor to participate in the unfolding plan of God.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies in the U.S. indicate a growing trend of disaffiliation with religion. At the same time, studies also reveal a decline in the number of adults who consider themselves to be Protestants. Further, reports show that the percentage of unaffiliated persons has risen in regard to women with higher educations and higher incomes—working or professional women. Indicators such as these prompt church leaders to examine how and if working women within their congregations are finding opportunities for engagement. As the church was designed to fully deploy the gifts, talents, and experiences of every member in its mission, business and professional women, as vital leaders and valued servants, must engage that mission by using their gifts, talents, and experiences for the edification and growth of the church.

This paper endeavors to encourage both working women and church leaders toward greater commitment and active engagement by first describing how working women from the Bible were used to bolster the family of God. Using biblical texts along with a variety of commentaries and related articles, the paper examines three Old Testament precursors—Deborah, Ruth, and the Proverbs 31 woman—as working women who used their abilities to safeguard and enrich the household of Israel. The chronicles of these women are followed by a variety of historical and social studies, including those from Richard Ascough, Joan Campbell, and Marie Keller, pertaining to their New Testament successors—Lydia, Priscilla,
and Phoebe—as cosmopolitan business women who partnered with the apostle Paul in strengthening the family of God as the early church developed in the Roman Empire.

Next, the work explores three doctrinal imperatives that affirm the spiritual empowerment and giftedness of all members in the body of Christ, including working women. Relying on the systematic theologies of Wayne Grudem and Robert Reymond, the paper reviews the Doctrine of Adoption, the Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers, and the Doctrine of Spiritual Gifts. These doctrines work together to compel business women to engage fully within the family of God as adopted children empowered for service with the skills, abilities, and influence necessary to strengthen the body of Christ and to stir each other to good works.

Lastly, a review of recent case studies offers insight for church leaders as they consider how to advance ministry opportunities for and with working women. This section of the paper calls attention to the growing number of working women disengaging or not fully engaging with organized Protestant religion according to surveys performed for The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life as well as those associated with The National Congregations Study. Because the surveys show that women comprise the greater percentage of total church membership and because many women need to work outside the home, the paper includes the findings of a survey conducted by the student of a large urban church in the South where working women were asked if they were finding opportunities to use any of their skills, abilities, and influence for the mission of the church. The results of all these studies are included to provide meaningful information for future ministries to and with women who work. By offering working women meaningful opportunities and encouraging
working women to engage, the whole body of Christ is supported for growth and greater mission.
CHAPTER TWO
OLD TESTAMENT PRECURSORS

From the very beginning of creation as described in Gen 1:27, the Bible is clear that God created men and women in his own image—a multi-faceted image whereby his creatures were endowed with the highest and best capacities for establishing relationships and maintaining the created order. As the crown of his creation, God blessed the man and the woman and gave them work to do using the resources at their disposal, both internal and external. Along with that responsibility came specific instructions pertaining to living well and working as his people in the world he had created. As it stands, the couple chose to disregard those divine instructions—a choice whereby all of creation was thrown into disorder, harmonious relationships were disrupted, and work became a labor distorted by hardship and frustration. Despite God’s judgment on sinful disobedience, he demonstrated his everlasting mercy in Gen 3:15 with an announcement of the gospel to redeem his creation; God’s initial plan was not thwarted by human failure. As part of the eternal plan, the Bible describes how God has used men and women throughout history in extraordinary ways to further his divine mission to create a people for his name. Though the Bible often illuminates the work and leadership of men in God’s unfolding plan, closer examination reveals significant contributions from women, particularly women with responsibilities outside the home.

Biblical models from the Old Testament attest to the contributions of women outside the domestic sphere who used their skills, abilities, and influence to strengthen and protect
the family of God in Israel. Those women were prepared and used by God, not to display their greatness or to promulgate the supremacy of their gender, but to display the faithfulness and glory of God as he cared for his people and fulfilled his covenant promises. The stories of three specific women—Deborah, Ruth, and the Proverbs 31 woman—offer insight as to how God used the skills, abilities and influence of working women or women from the marketplace to strengthen and safeguard his chosen ones.

Deborah

The story of Deborah as described in Judges 4 and 5 is not a narrative of a woman from the business world per se, but an account of a woman who operated faithfully and successfully in the public sphere to end years of oppression for God’s people under the Canaanite king, Jabin. To better understand her role in the execution of God’s plan (i.e. a plan to establish a people for his name), it is important to think about the world in which Deborah lived and how she used her God-given abilities to strengthen the young Hebrew republic as they settled into the Promised Land. Her relevance and significance is particularly poignant when examined in terms of the socio-historical context and in light of the Biblical text.

From a sociological and historical context, Deborah emerged in the 12th century CE1 after Joshua’s death at a time that has been termed the “Dark Ages”2 of Hebrew history, a period lasting from the death of Joshua until the time King Saul.3 The strong leadership from

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Moses and Joshua that had previously guided the Hebrews was, at this time, disseminated to a loose federation of tribes under the direction of male chieftains that represented the various clans of Israel. These tribes or clans constituted a nation-in-the-making as they were divided geographically according to their various land inheritances within the land of Canaan. It was indeed a period of transition and chaos as groups of wondering shepherds grappled with what it meant to become a more structured society. That time can be characterized as an amalgam of historic patriarchal practices with the influx of new cultural and sociological ideals.

The world in which Deborah found herself was patriarchal in nature, especially in terms of leadership, military activities, and land ownership. To illustrate, Exod 1:1 describes the family of Israel in Egypt based on the names of the sons of Jacob, not the daughters. Further, the book of Numbers shows that as the family of Israel increased as they followed Moses out of Egypt leading Moses to call for a census to be taken on two occasions—one in the wilderness of Mt. Sinai in Num 1:2 and one on the plains of Moab at Jericho in Num 26:2. At each request, a count was made of all the congregation of Israel by clan according to the house of the father whereby each male twenty years or older was counted. As a result, men were identified by their father’s house and later considered eligible for military service. Further, inheritances were traditionally distributed to male children, not to female children, as evidenced by the challenge of the four daughters of Zelophad. In Numbers 27, these four women appealed to Moses as there was no male heir in their family to inherit their father’s land. In practice, women were given dowries while men were given inheritances. As a result, women were often relegated to domestic life as tent-dwellers as depicted by Jael in Judg 4:17-22.
Another factor influencing the society of Deborah’s time was the type of inhabitants found within the land of Canaan. According to the word of the Lord, Moses established the boundaries of the land of Canaan as an inheritance to the people of Israel in Numbers 34. In addition, the Lord gave the names of the men (i.e. Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun) who were responsible for dividing the land among the nine and a half clans west of the Jordan. These men selected one chief (i.e. man) from every tribe to further divide the land as an inheritance for the people of Israel in the land of Canaan. Though the Israelites were able to defeat many kings and take possession of much of the land, the people of Israel were not faithful nor were they able to drive out all of the foreign inhabitants. Therefore, Deborah’s story is set within the Jordan Valley, a stronghold of the Canaanites, where the Israelites lived under the rule of King Jabin. In addition, the Israelites found themselves surrounded by foreigners including the Jebusites in Jerusalem, the Hittites to the south of Canaan, the Ammonites in southeastern Judah, the Hivites in central Samaria and the Perizzites near Mt. Carmel. Unable to take the land of their inheritance, the children of Israel were compelled to live and trade among a blended society. As a result of comingling and intermarriage, the Hebrew children soon abandoned the ideals of their theocracy in favor of the religious practices of the Canaanites, including acts of sexual immorality and cruel human sacrifice; it was a wicked age.

In this blended culture filled with religious apostasy, the value system of the Israelite forefathers eventually went by the wayside. According to the book of Judges, the new generation was doing what was right in their own eyes—practices considered evil in the sight of the Lord. Though it would seem that God had every right to revoke his plan to establish a

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4 Hester, 140.
separate and royal people, what actually occurred is nothing short of astounding. Instead of abandoning his people to their hapless fate, God judged their disobedience through the oppression of foreign powers and that very oppression caused them to beg for God’s deliverance. After twenty years of oppression from the ruthless King Jabin, the Israelites appealed to the God of their fathers for help. God, in turn, heard the cry of his people and raised up an unlikely deliverer.

Like the past repeating itself, the Israelites in Ephraim cried for help and God responded with a leader—he gave them Deborah. Deborah was the only female named among the judges listed in Hebrew history and one of only two judges worthy of emulation. Despite the unexpected gender of this historic leader, the biblical text of Judg 4:4 and Judg 5:7 introduces Deborah matter-of-factly in feminine terms and in light of her public service where she is described authoritatively as a prophetess, a judge, and as a mother in Israel. Each of these roles provides insight as to how God used Deborah, a woman operating in the public domain as his instrument to ensure the welfare of his people.

First, Deborah is introduced as a prophetess, one of only six women with that distinction mentioned in the Bible. Like the prophet Moses, Deborah was “a person with a particular calling to see or hear what God is saying, live it out in their own lives and proclaim it to the people round about.”5 As one endowed with the Spirit, Deborah was an instrument of God called to speak on his behalf and to convey to the Israelites the knowledge of the divine will in all things sacred and civil. As such, she was well-acquainted with the laws and statutes given to Moses by God to ensure the welfare of his people. Further, Deborah was considered a true prophet as described in Deut 18:22 whereby her prophecies were

authenticated by what came to pass (i.e. Deborah imparted the word of the Lord for the promised victory to Barak wherein she indicated that the honor for the death of Sisera would go to a woman; both events unfolded just as Deborah had foretold.)

Along with the God-given role of prophetess, Deborah also had the profound complementary responsibility of being a judge. Pastor Gordon Hugenberger of Park Street Church in Boston states that it was “her job to right the wrongs, personal or between great people groups.”⁶ Further, Adam Clarke elaborates on Deborah’s role in his commentary on Judges stating that the word “judge” is not, “one who determines controversies or denounces the judgment of law in criminal cases, but one who directs and rules a state or a nation with sovereign power, administers justice, makes peace or war, and leads armies of the people over whom he presides.”⁷ He emphasizes that the Old Testament judges were not chosen by the people; rather, they were always chosen by God on extraordinary occasions as indicated in Judg 2:16 and 18. As such, they had no power to make or change laws—they could only execute laws under the direction of God. For the theocracy created at Mt. Sinai, the judges operated like deputies of God; they operated as agents of God’s saving work. They also conducted themselves as military deliverers restoring Israel from oppression and “setting them back ‘in the right’ with God’.”⁸ It is to this end that Deborah speaks with discernment and authority to Barak, the military commander who will lead the Israelites in triumph over Sisera and over the armies of King Jabin at the river of Kishon beneath Mt. Tabor.

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⁷ Clarke, 98.

⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright, Old Testament Ethics for the People of God (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 270.
For added understanding, Tammy Schneider indicates that descriptions of Deborah as judge contain a number of strong verbs that provide insight into the execution of her job in the public domain. In Judg 4:5, scripture records that Deborah used to sit (like Moses in Exod 18:3) under a particular palm tree in the hill country of Ephriam, a place of supreme judgment reserved for “the most serious cases.”⁹ In Judg 4:6, the writer records that Deborah, in her role as judge, had the authority to send and summon Barak, the highest military leader. Further, it was Deborah who explained to Barak that God had a strategy for leading the Israelites in triumph over Jabin despite their lack of weaponry. At her word, Barak assembled an unprecedented coalition of 10,000 Israelite men from six different tribes—Naphatali, Zebulun, Ephraim, Issachar, Manasseh, and Benjamin—for to defy Deborah’s command would have been to defy the command of God. Once the troops were assembled, Deborah arose and went with Barak to the battlefront, a most unlikely place for a woman since women could not serve as a military leader. Further, she was the one to issue the imperative command to Barak in Judg 4:14. She signaled the precise time for attack as the 900 iron chariots of Sisera became immobilized in the mud after an unseasonal rainstorm in the river valley of Kishon. It was at her counsel (i.e. the counsel of God) that the victory was to be granted to Israel.

As a strong and authoritative leader, Deborah’s work in the public sector resulted in forty years of rest and order (see Judg 5:31). She was praised as “a mother in Israel” in Judg 5:7, an honorific title connected to a military context similar to the one used in 2 Sam 20:19. Susan Ackerman reveals three basic characteristics of one who is designated as a “mother in

Israel”: 1) the person must be a good counselor; 2) she must use her skills to protect the heritage of the Israelite deity; and 3) she must be willing to step forth as commander to lead those under her protection.\(^\text{10}\) Clearly, the description in Judg 5:7 glorifies Deborah for doing what she must do and what she is equipped to do; she is to care for the people that God has designated for himself. Her designation as “a mother in Israel” indicates that she provided “an example of a life that caused others to trust in God.”\(^\text{11}\)

The story of Deborah’s work, as one uniquely gifted by God to enrich the life of his people, is not a singular story nor just a piece of ancient history. Her work amid a blended and religiously pluralistic society resonates in the modern world where people are often oppressed and cry for help, especially within the body of Christ. Deborah’s particular calling to participate in the life of God’s people as a leader, counselor, strategist, and decision-maker was only one part of the larger plan and only one instance where God used the workplace skills of one woman for his glory.

Ruth

From the exploits of the exalted leader Deborah in the book of Judges, the focus in the Christian canon soon shifts to a short narrative about a lowly working girl by the name of Ruth and her efforts to provide for her Israelite mother-in-law in tough times. Though the story appears as little more than a dialogue between two women, a more in-depth look reveals there is much to be gleaned from Ruth’s approach to living and working among the

\(^{10}\) Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 42.

people of God. In using her God-given skills, abilities, and influence in the workplace, Ruth not only serves as the instrument through which God will care for the aging Naomi, she becomes the vessel through which God will provide for the greatest need of his people for all time.

Like the story of Deborah, the account of Ruth gains relevance when it is understood in terms of the socio-historical context in addition to the biblical text. Increased awareness of the precarious time period heightens sensitivity and enlarges perspective when it comes to appreciating Ruth’s contributions to the people of God, particularly those made through her workplace. Both categories, social and historical, figure prominently in the story of Ruth.

The first verse in the book of Ruth provides a significant clue as to the historical setting of the story. Though an exact date for the narrative is not given, scripture states that the story occurs in the days when the judges ruled, a period before Israel had a king. Coogan cites such a period as the early Iron Age between 1150-1025 BCE. As described in the story of Deborah, this particular time in Israel’s history was colored with military oppressors, repeated changes in government, and syncretistic religious practices. Even so, there is a sense in the book of Ruth that the nomadic tribes that followed Moses and Joshua have now become more settled in a rural agrarian economy, an economy subject to both the destitution of famine and the abundance of harvests.

From a cultural standpoint, the account of Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi provides glimpses into the roles of women in ancient Israeliite society. In particular, women were known by the men to whom they were attached. For instance, Naomi is introduced as the wife of Elimelech (Ruth 1:2) and Ruth is referenced at the city gate as the widow of

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12 Coogan, 536.
Mahlon (Ruth 4:10). Further, the survival of women often depended on their marital status and their ability to have children, particularly male children who could provide security, both physical and financial. Coogan writes, “That society was clearly patriarchal, with women dependent on their male relatives, in this case husbands and sons.” Since Naomi was beyond child-bearing years and since her two daughters-in-law were childless, it is easy to understand why Naomi felt bitter and empty as she faced an uncertain future without her husband and her two sons.

To further illustrate the degree of male governance in ancient Israelite society, the story of Ruth hinges on two legal practices, both of which require action on the part of a male family member—the practices of acting as a kinsmen redeemer and exercising levirate marriage. As stated in Lev 25:47-55, provision for relatives-in-need could be made through the actions of a male relative or kinsman who acted mercifully to purchase or redeem property that had been lost or to restore the status of people experiencing loss (i.e. slaves or widows). In the account of Ruth (Ruth 2:20), Naomi informs Ruth that the owner of the field where she works is actually a close relative and one of their redeemers—Boaz was one of the men eligible to buy back or purchase the land belonging to Naomi’s former husband, Elimelech and his two dead sons, Chilion and Mahlon. In addition to exercising his option as kinsman redeemer, Boaz could and did implement the practice of levirate marriage as described in Deut 25:5-10 as a means of providing for Ruth (and Naomi) and as a way to secure the family name in Israel.

Apart from the patriarchal control of society, its legal system, and Ruth’s designation as a widow, other cultural factors affected her status within the Israelite community.

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13 Ibid., 229.
Specifically, Ruth experienced challenges associated with her barrenness, her nationality, and the type of work she chose. As indicated above, widows without male representation were essentially left without a voice, with no place in society, and with no source of income. As it was, the ramifications as a barren widow only exacerbated the situation for Ruth who had been married for ten years (Ruth 1:4), yet proved unable to provide an heir for the family.

To this already marginalized position, it is important to acknowledge that Ruth was also foreigner, a Moabite, attempting to establish herself among the Israelites in Bethlehem. Though the region of Moab was only forty miles from Bethlehem, there was a history of hostile relations between the Moabites and the Israelites (Judg 3:12-30 and Judg 11:1-33). As an outsider, Ruth must have experienced the difficulties associated with the move to Bethlehem including language barriers, a change in worship practices, homesickness for her family, and depression over the loss of loved ones. In a world where a sense of identity was defined by circumstances, relationships, and public opinion, Ruth was indeed one of the weakest members of Israelite society struggling to survive.

As a woman in a strange land without the security of a male provider, Ruth’s enduring commitment and steadfast love for Naomi prompted her to go to work. There in the fields of Bethlehem, Ruth undertook the manual labor of gathering grain as a gleaner to provide the basic necessity of food for herself and for Naomi. Yet, even in the field, Ruth was ranked at the lowest end of a workplace hierarchy, a hierarchy that included a foreman, the reapers (men), the binders (female servants), and the gleaners. Apart from the foreman, the reapers and the binders were designated as paid workers while the gleaners were considered beggars.¹⁴ So it was that Ruth found herself on the fringes of Israelite society and

on the periphery of a field where she performed the lowest of all work activities by gleaning from the residue of the harvest.\textsuperscript{15} As an unattached woman, Ruth was at risk for victimization in such an environment and “in reality, gleaners were often mistreated and went home hungry.”\textsuperscript{16}

Though the historical and cultural setting for Ruth provided little hope to one relegated to the margins of Israelite society, the biblical text conveys a different story, a story of optimism that illustrates how God used the workplace skills and abilities of one unlikely woman in His amazing plan to establish a people for his name. As chapter one draws to a close, scripture records that Ruth and Naomi returned to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest, a providential time for a young widow in need of work. Undaunted by circumstances and her status as an outsider, Ruth embraced the prospect of a job with the same passion and commitment expressed in Ruth 1:16-18.

Chapter two provides an in-depth description of Ruth’s remarkable work performance over a fifty-day period, a time that included two types of harvests—one for the barley and one for the wheat. Within that chapter, Ruth’s specific workplace abilities were identified and rewarded. Listed in Figure 1 below are the workplace skills exhibited by Ruth that contributed to her own survival, the welfare of her mother-in-law, and the production goals of Boaz as the property owner.

\textsuperscript{15} The law given to Moses as documented in Lev 19:9-10 and 23:22 made provision for those marginalized in society—poor, the widow, the orphan, and the alien. At the time of harvest, landowners were commanded not to reap to the edges of their fields nor to gather the gleanings after the harvest in order to leave some manner of sustenance for those less fortunate.

\textsuperscript{16} Carolyn Custis James, \textit{The Gospel of Ruth} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 98.
As Boaz observed the workplace abilities of Ruth and her willingness to devote herself to the people of God in spite of her extreme circumstances, he began to call her his “daughter” (Ruth 2:8), though she was not even one of his servant girls. In doing so, Boaz recognized the dignity of Ruth as an image-bearer in the family of God—one who knew God,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enterprising</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ruth made the request - “Let me go to the field” -- though she was in the unprotected position of being a foreign widow and foreigner. The risk associated with this request is indicative of her passion to provide for her family by doing all she could do, namely going to work outside the home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ruth not only made a special request of the foreman the first day on the job, she made a bold request that could only be approved by the landowner—a request to approach the job in a different way by gleaning among the reapers rather than the fringes of the field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resourceful</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;Let me go to the field and glean” was an indicator that Ruth was knowledgeable of the Mosaic law, though she was not an Israelite. By understanding the foreign practices of the monotheistic Israelites, Ruth better understood her job prospects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ruth requested permission to go to the workplace from the only elder she had, her mother-in-law Naomi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humble</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ruth fell on her face and bowed to the ground before Boaz, the landowner, indicating that she was aware of her rank in the workplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to Diversity</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>In addition to the adversity recorded in chapter one, Ruth embraced the diversity of the workplace in Bethlehem and participated as a woman and as a lower-ranking worker at the meal with Boaz and the other male reapers. The inclusion at the meal with strangers was a sign of acceptance for the outsider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Ruth worked well with the servant girls through both grain harvests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visionary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ruth expected to do a good job and to find favor with the landowner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to Execute</td>
<td>3, 23</td>
<td>Ruth was intentional in executing her plan as indicated by &quot;so she set out and went and gleaned in the field” (v.3). Ruth followed the instructions of Boaz in doing her job (v.23).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard-Working</td>
<td>7, 17</td>
<td>The foreman stated that Ruth began her work early in the morning with only a minimal rest period (v.7). Her work day included gleaning from early morning till sundown. Afterward, she winnowed what was gathered and walked back to the city (v.17). Further, the amount of grain she gathered was many more times the daily wages of the male harvesters working for Boaz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>10, 13, 17, 23</td>
<td>Ruth received the favor of Boaz as recorded in his provision of water during the work day (v.10). Also, Ruth was aware that she had found favor with Boaz (v.13). Further, the amount of grain she was allowed to keep was more than sufficient for her need (v.17). She was allowed to continue work through not one, but two grain harvests (v.23).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Character</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Boaz was aware of Ruth's solid reputation as a person who cared about what she was doing as evidenced by her commitment to Naomi.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1 Workplace abilities of Ruth as described in Ruth 2**
one who emulated God, and one who represented him before others. In turn, Boaz as a worthy man (Ruth 2:1) provided comfort (Ruth 2:13), protection (Ruth 2:9) and blessing (Ruth 2:12) to Ruth while she labored in the workplace.

Based on the remarkable demonstrations of commitment brought to the forefront in chapter two, Ruth was positioned to approach Boaz with a more personal request in chapter three—one with lasting results. That same level of “holy boldness” exemplified in looking for a job in an unfamiliar place and requesting a better position (i.e. working behind the reapers) no doubt supported Ruth as she stealthily approached Boaz while he slept on the threshing floor and as she awakened him with a proposal of levirate marriage in chapter three. Impressed by her sincerity and discretion, Boaz agreed to the request of the worthy woman (Ruth 3:11) with the promise of redemption and fulfillment on the following day.

Though the initial intent of Ruth’s extraordinary actions was to obtain marital and financial security, chapter four reveals a greater plan at work. As the story escalates to the apex of marriage in chapter four, scripture records that the town elders expressed their blessings on the union of Ruth and Boaz with a request for the Lord to build up the house of Israel (Ruth 4:11-12) and the Lord did. By the end of the story, Ruth and Boaz were rewarded with the little baby boy named Obed, the grandfather to King David and the ancestor of another baby boy called Jesus. The line that Ruth was actually “fighting to save ‘just happens’ to be the royal line of Israel—the ancestors of the Messiah.”

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17 A. Boyd Luter and Barry C. Davis, God behind the Seen: Expositions of the Books of Ruth and Esther (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 51.

18 James, 79.
account of Ruth, it is evident that God moved His kingdom forward through the heart and actions of one destitute working woman from the margins of Israelite society.

**The Proverbs 31 Woman**

No doubt the stories of Deborah and Ruth reflect the attributes of strong and worthy women as they lived and worked among the people of God, but the epitome of worth and success is best expressed in the depiction of the Proverbs 31 woman. There, as the summation to all that has been said about a good woman throughout the book, the last chapter of Proverbs presents a role model as a pattern for everyday life. As such, the proverb illustrates a kind of universal wisdom that can be understood by both men and women within the covenant family of God, even in the present day. Coogan writes, “Those who know how to succeed in life are also wise, as are, ultimately, those who know the ways of the divine.”¹⁹

Once again, an examination of the historical and social context helps to complete the picture for the modern-day reader who endeavors to learn from the significance of the scripture by understanding the world in which the woman lived. Unlike Deborah and Ruth, the woman of Proverbs 31 is unnamed leaving the reader to question her significance by challenging her actual existence. To this concern Hawkins responds, “What she is represented as doing is possible for an actual woman of the first millennium B.C.”²⁰ Hawkins indicates, “In this sense her existence is historically plausible.”²¹ Therefore, as a representative ancestor of the faith, her story had and continues to have relevance.

¹⁹ Coogan, 459.

²⁰ Ibid.

From a historical standpoint, it is impossible to know an exact date for the book of Proverbs as there are no specific events referenced. However, many of the sayings are attributed to King Solomon, the wise ruler for Israel during the Iron Age from 968-928 BCE, though the collection may have been made by scribes under his or other royal auspices. While the days of Solomon—a timeframe of peace, prosperity, and national expansion—may lend themselves to reflection, Hubbard feels that “Solomon’s name probably points more to the start (about 950 B.C.E.) than to the completion of the task.”22 As a collection of sayings coming together over time, Hubbard suggests a pre-exilic date for the bulk of the work allowing for chapters 30 and 31 to be added after the exile. That said, Professor Hubbard maintains that Canaan was a “mercantile hotbed with its access to Egypt, Phoenicia, Syria, Mesopotamia, and the cities of the Hittites in Asia Minor.”23 Though Christine Yoder proposes a post-exilic date for Proverbs, she too affirms a prosperous position for Palestine. With a socio-economic reading of Proverbs 31, she encourages readers to consider Palestine’s place in the larger Persian realm. Supporting her work with various types of epigraphical evidence, she imparts that the Persian government maintained a widespread network of roads that were used by the imperial postal system, by men and women on private and public business, by officials transporting commodities, by workers moving from job to job, and by imperial soldiers stationed at various outposts.24

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23 Hubbard, 483.

Despite extensive commercial opportunities, Coogan asserts that the “social world of the book of Proverbs is essentially patriarchal.”\textsuperscript{25} He also states that “the values of the authors of the book of Proverbs are for the most part conventional and male-dominated.”\textsuperscript{26} Based on these assessments, Proverbs 31 is no exception. After all, the proverb with its wise counsel is addressed to a son. Further, the reading makes it clear that conservative values were in order as women were expected to marry, to have children, and to provide for the well-being of the household. With such cultural aspects in mind, Parsons stresses the need for readers to understand that proverbs were written to provide leaders for a society in which women were not prominent. Further, Lang stipulates:

That the poem of the ‘capable wife’ focuses on her considerable contribution to the household must not blind us to the undeniable fact that the ultimate economic basis of the upper-class Hebrew household is male-dominated agriculture, and not female-dominated domestic production of textiles and other goods for the market.

He goes on to say, “The economic basis of the household as such is not worth very much, however, if there is not a ‘capable wife’ to take care of its domestic side.”\textsuperscript{27} Indeed, the Proverbs 31 woman illustrates just how valuable such a woman can be.

Though set in a cultural environment that esteemed male accomplishments, the biblical text of Proverbs 31 reveals the story of an industrious Israelite woman who enriched her household and her community through her cottage industry. As a model of wisdom of life, it is critical to acknowledge the strength that was displayed through her business activities as described Prov 31:13-19. Her entrepreneurial skills are noted in Figure 2 wherein

\textsuperscript{25} Coogan, 465.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
Waltke observes, “The itemization of her activity proceeds logically from her income based on her skill in weaving and expanded through trading to her accomplishments on that activity.”28 From her hands, the woman grew the income from her surplus textiles to include the proceeds from a new vineyard. Hawkins affirms, “She knew how to operate in the business world, selecting raw materials, investing in property that would yield a profitable return, and selling finished products.”29 Her business acuity and industrious nature ensured the well-being of her Israelite household and enabled her husband to serve the community without financial worries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>13, 19</td>
<td>Verse 13 indicates that she locates the raw materials of wool (for winter garments) and flax (for summer garments). She works with her own hands to produce products used in the home as well as products that can be traded. Spinning skills required for the wool and flax are described v. 19.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trading</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>This trading analogy symbolizes her import and export activities whereby she sends articles or produce to distant countries or tribes in exchange for anything she buys to enrich her household.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>She performs the necessary domestic planning and labor required to allocate staffing resources for a variety of assignments (i.e. flocks, fields, spinning, etc.) while also making provision for staffing needs (i.e. food). Her careful planning and early rising insures the daily productivity of her servants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>As the family grows, more land is needed. She is able to locate a field, estimate its worth, and make a purchase. The purchase price is paid from her own assets (i.e. those created or earned from her cottage industry).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>18a</td>
<td>As a vendor with a reputation for producing quality garments, she makes sound pricing decisions and solid product offerings in accordance with supply and demand in the marketplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard-working</td>
<td>18b</td>
<td>Because her lamp does not go out at night, her work and her household are protected against unforeseen interruptions (i.e. disaster or robbery). Her diligence ensures that her household and her business are not caught unprepared.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 Entrepreneurial abilities of the Proverbs 31 woman


29 Hawkins, 16.
The woman’s extensive business abilities were infused with excellent character, a character that was defined by her reverence for the Lord. It is because of her faith that the woman was able to provide for the needs of her household and her community. Her concern for others prompted her to contribute to the poor and needy as described in verse 20. Further, verse 23 indicates that her activities enabled her husband to participate fully at the city gates (attending to the good of others) without the distractions of domestic affairs and in doing so, he was honored by his wife’s solid reputation. Hubbard writes, “What she has meant to her household is worthy of acclamation in the whole community.”

Indeed, the closing verses to the poem (Prov 31:28-31) afford her public honor and praise as an important contributor to the economy of the family, as a patron to the community, and as a role model for Israel for all time.

Implications of Old Testament Precursors

In the span of history leading to the time of Christ, women emerged as public leaders and role models amid patriarchal structures to strengthen the family of God using their skills, abilities, and influence. From the Israelite judge to the alien widow, the love of God for his people was displayed through their selfless service to others—services that necessitated the use of their vocational skills. Deborah’s skills as a counselor and strategist, along with her ability to know and hear from the Lord, positioned her to claim a vision of peace and prosperity for her people. Similarly, Ruth’s resourcefulness and hard work, in conjunction with her resolve to embrace the God of Israel, secured an unfathomable inheritance for future generations. Not to be forgotten, the entrepreneurial productivity and profitability of the

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30 Hubbard, 486.
Proverbs 31 woman, rooted in a reverence for the Lord, created a positive impact on the family and the whole community. The lives of these women from the Old Testament demonstrate the inclusive and important roles for working women in the covenant plan of God to establish and strengthen his people.
CHAPTER THREE
NEW TESTAMENT SUCCESSORS

As the incarnation of the new covenant between God and his people, Jesus affirmed and elevated women by including them in his teaching and in his miracles. Whereas, the Greco-Roman culture and the religious institutions of the day marginalized women, Jesus affirmed them in public and encouraged their participation in learning, in sharing the good news of the kingdom, and in caring for the needs of others. As a cultural change agent, Jesus often initiated deep and penetrating conversations with women like one with the Samaritan woman regarding her married life,1 the one with Martha after her brother’s death,2 and the one with Mary Magdalene at the resurrection tomb.3 Unlike his Roman and Jewish counterparts, he considered his followers to be credible witnesses, regardless of gender or social status. Further, at a time when the feelings and work of women were often discounted, Jesus introduced a new way of relating to women by deliberately modeling a respect for their abilities and an affirmation of their contributions. For this reason, women who had been previously relegated to the outer courts of the Temple found their rightful place at the Savior’s feet. In close proximity to the master teacher, they were welcomed to learn and discern the particular richness of the Holy Scriptures. After his resurrection, Jesus commissioned them for service as his witnesses (see Luke 24:48 and Acts 13:26) and empowered them with the Holy Spirit (see Luke 24:49, Acts 1 and 2, and Joel 2:28-29).

1 John 4:4-42 (English Standard Version).
2 John 11:17-24 ESV.
3 John 20:1-18 ESV.
So it is that the gospels as written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John record many events where Jesus advocated for women and accepted their gifts of loving service. Each writer describes encounters for a particular audience whereby Jesus ascribes high value to women in the outworking of the plan of God. As it stands, the New Testament authors document women among those included in the royal bloodline, those inaugurating the kingdom of God, those extending compassion and service, and those grasping the reality of the new covenant.

First, Matthew renders an account of Jesus as the promised Messiah to the Jews—the one who rules everyone and everything with royal authority as the Son of God. In typical fashion, Matthew opens his gospel with a genealogy that contains the names of the men in the lineage of Jesus, a genealogy that is meant to authenticate Jesus as the rightful heir to the throne of David. However, in the genealogy, Matthew also includes the names of five women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. Rather than consign these women to places of obscurity, Matthew affords them prominent placements in the birth narrative of the long-expected ruler.

Further, Matthew shares two other accounts where Jesus used his extraordinary power to help two women at a time when other religious leaders would have considered them impure and unapproachable. One encounter occurs after Jesus left the country of the Gadarenes. Matthew writes that Jesus was pressed by the crowds, yet he felt the touch of a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years; when she reached for help and he took the time to heal her because of her faith. Another report describes an encounter between

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4 Matt 1:1-16 ESV.
5 Matt 9:20-22 ESV.
Jesus and two women in the district of Tyre and Sidon. There Matthew renders the story of a Canaanite mother pleading for her daughter to be restored to her right mind after being demon-possessed. While the disciples urged him to send her away, Jesus responded in sensitivity to the woman’s faith and healed her daughter.⁶

Second, Luke makes a point to acknowledge the lordship of Jesus over all the earth in his account of Jesus as the one inaugurating the kingdom of God, a kingdom that includes Jews and Gentiles and men and women. In doing so, Luke provides an account that shows women as active participants in the messianic purposes of Jesus. Being the longest and the most detailed of the gospels, Luke’s material highlights the participation of women in the new kingdom. In particular, Luke is careful to mention twelve women—twelve women that the other gospel writers do not—along with eight women that appear in conjunction with the other gospels.⁷ Further, Luke’s account of Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension acknowledges women as credible witnesses and faithful followers.⁸

Third, Mark illustrates the humanity and suffering of Jesus in his role as a servant of God, an emotional role that his followers must ultimately follow and a role that likely resonated with the women followers. His accounts often stress the failure of the male leadership in grasping significant truths regarding suffering and sacrifice as in the case of the scribes and the offering of the widow,⁹ the disciples and the woman with the alabaster flask of ointment,¹⁰ and the disciples after Jesus’s appearance to Mary Magdalene’s as the risen

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⁶ Matt 15: 21-28 ESV.
⁸ Luke 23 and 24 ESV.
⁹ Mark 12:38-44 ESV.
¹⁰ Mark 14:3-9 ESV.
Lord.\textsuperscript{11} Despite the lapses, Mark is attentive to recording statements of Jesus that are inclusive of both men and women in responding to the task of discipleship.\textsuperscript{12}

Fourth, John endeavors to show women as being perceptive and engaged believers who, at times, surpass men in their understanding of Jesus as the Son of God. For example, John records that it was Mary the mother of Jesus, in recognition of his divinity, who urged him to perform his first miracle at the wedding in Cana.\textsuperscript{13} In addition, it is the Samaritan woman, unlike the Jewish ruler Nicodemus, who understood Jesus to be the promised Messiah and shared the news with the other people in town.\textsuperscript{14} Further, John writes that Mary of Bethany anointed the feet of Jesus with costly perfume in a moment of intense devotion while his disciple, Judas Iscariot, ironically fumed at the waste of money.\textsuperscript{15} Lastly, as the dutiful and caring son, John is careful to note that Jesus made arrangements for the care of his mother while hanging on the cross.\textsuperscript{16}

The incidents above depict radical religious changes for Jews and Gentiles, both men and women. As Christian practices took shape in the Greco-Roman world, women dynamically participated with an unexpected freedom to engage with other believers. In doing so, women were valued and encouraged to join with men to continue the mission of Christ.

\begin{center}
\begin{footnotesize}
\item[11] Mark 16:9-11 ESV.
\item[12] Mark 3:35, Mark 9:41, and Mark 10: 29-30, 41 ESV.
\item[13] John 2:1-12 ESV.
\item[14] John 4:4-42 ESV.
\item[15] John 12:1-8 ESV.
\item[16] John 19:25-27 ESV.
\end{footnotesize}
\end{center}
Luke also provides a chronicle of the early church with *The Acts of the Apostles*, a work that opens with an account of women being present in Jerusalem with the apostles, devoting themselves to prayer, and anticipating the coming of the Holy Spirit.\(^{17}\) Luke records that they were all filled with the Holy Spirit in keeping with the promise of God.\(^{18}\) From that initial experience, Luke documents an unprecedented level of activity by all who were gathered there—activities of teaching, fellowship and worship whereby people (both men and women) were serving God and helping each other in a variety of ways. Accordingly, the Lord added to their number day by day.\(^{19}\)

As people continued to experience the life-changing reality of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives, they did not cease to teach, preach, and minister in Jesus’ name. However, all of this activity was considered an affront to Jewish religious institutions and a great persecution arose against the early church whereby believing men and women were dragged from their homes and thrown into prison.\(^{20}\) Nonetheless, bold believers continued to follow the commands of Jesus by sharing the gospel throughout the Greco-Roman world. In particular, scripture records the conversion of a zealous Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, who is also called Paul.\(^{21}\) Paul, under the new leadership of the Holy Spirit, made three missionary journeys and traveled extensively throughout Judea, Syria, Galatia, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia, and

\(^{17}\) Acts 1 and 2 ESV.

\(^{18}\) Joel 2:28-32 ESV.

\(^{19}\) Acts 2:42-47 ESV.

\(^{20}\) Acts 8:3 and Acts 9:1-3 ESV.

\(^{21}\) Acts 9:3-19 ESV.
Italia talking with men and women about the gospel and encouraging converts to render their lives in service to the living God.

From the journeys of Paul, the Scriptures enumerate thirty-six partners scattered among nine destinations. Of those thirty-six partners, ten were long-term workers and three of those were women. It was during Paul’s second missionary journey that he met three particular women from major trade centers. Those encounters, as presented in various books of the New Testament, illuminate the impact of Christianity in the lives of women. The extraordinary accounts of Lydia, Priscilla, and Phoebe render examples that inspire business women to engage with the mission of the church today. They were among the first, foremost, and most faithful converts to the Christian faith in that they exercised extraordinary boldness and courage in using their skills, abilities, and influence for the church.

To appreciate the strength of these women, it is important to understand them in terms of their historical background and social setting. Then, to grasp the dynamic nature of their discipleship, it is critical to examine each one in terms of the biblical information provided by the New Testament writers. By stepping into their world, their names as mentioned in just a few short verses begin to take on enormous significance. It is through their lives that the church today can find inspiration for edifying the family of God with the high privileges of adopted brothers and sisters under the New Covenant of Jesus Christ.

**Historical Background of the Greco-Roman World**

When Paul began his second missionary journey from Jerusalem traveling through Galatia, Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia, he encountered blended societies and cultures in transition. Expansive cultural and political forces were at work to test social and religious allegiances and to offer new opportunities for individuals. At the same time, there were
historic gender barriers and social obstacles, especially for women that were beginning to yield to the demands of a new age, an age inaugurated by the political and ideological conquests of Alexander the Great.

Just a few centuries before the time of Christ, Alexander the Great (from 334 to 323 BC) created one of the largest empires the world has ever known covering hundreds of miles and stretching from Greece to Egypt. As a military hero, Alexander was instrumental in opening trade routes, planning townships and cities, establishing cultural centers, spreading Greek influence, and promoting the use of the Greek language. Because Alexander hoped to unite the world ideologically through Greek insight, a type of unity developed among different people groups.

After Alexander’s death in Babylon at the age of thirty-two, the empire degenerated into a series of varied alliances for the Greek city-states. For the next 200-300 years, the city-states experienced instability and a lack of protection from the ruling powers of Egypt and Macedonia as well as threats from the armies of the Seleucid dynasty. Ultimately, fragments of the Greek empire under Alexander found themselves seeking help from the Roman Republic. In 146 BC, Greece fell to Roman rule as a result of the Battle of Corinth. Likewise, Pompey the Great brought Palestine into the Roman Empire in 63 BC.

By the time of Jesus’s birth, Caesar Augustus ruled an expansive Roman Empire with boundaries extending to the Atlantic on the west, the Euphrates on the east, the Danube and the Rhine on the north, and the deserts of Africa on the south. Gonzalez notes, “Although each region kept some of its ancient laws and customs, the general policy of the Empire was to encourage as much uniformity as possible without doing unnecessary violence to the uses
of each area.”

As a result, the political unity fostered a time of relative peace and order where the Hellenistic culture of the Mediterranean world was governed by Roman law. The unity also facilitated travel and trade flourished. Gonzalez mentions, “In the first century, well-paved and well-guarded roads ran to the most distant provinces.” Further, there was some degree of unity in communication as it was not uncommon for people to speak two languages—Greek and Latin—though Latin was the official language of the empire. So it was that “political circumstances favored the spread of Christianity” through missionaries, preachers, travelers, slaves, business women, and others.

**Social Context of the Greco-Roman World**

In this fragmented society, male authority dominated the roles of women, both privately and publicly. However, the public roles of women varied from Egypt to Rome to Greece to Palestine, with Egypt being the most permissive and Palestine being the most restrictive. As an example, women in Egypt experienced the greatest degree of freedom in pursuing public education and political power while women in Rome were limited to private schooling, social clubs, and participation in religious festivals. Just as Roman women may have lacked the freedom of women in Egypt, women in Greece were more restrained than their Roman counterparts and women in Palestine were more restricted than all the others.

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23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.


Family Life

From the second century BC to the first century BC, families under the rule of the Roman government continued to be controlled largely by men. At the head of the family was the oldest, living male citizen—the *paterfamilias*. The *paterfamilias* looked after the family’s business affairs and property; the control was so entrenched that the *paterfamilias* decided if a newborn child would live or die.\(^{27}\) As such, the structure of the *paterfamilias* permeated society and in turn, the family fell under state protection.\(^{28}\)

In a world structured by the *paterfamilias*, women were considered inferior to men. Young girls remained under the control of their father until they married—between the ages of twelve and fourteen—when control passed to their husbands. Wives were expected to be faithful to their husbands and were subject to stiff penalties for adultery—interestingly, only the wife could be accused of adultery.\(^{29}\) However, husbands were free to interact with courtesans, prostitutes, and slaves without any consequences. The sexual use of slaves (both male and female) by the master was a liberty of the time as slaves had no legal capacity for marriage in the Roman world.\(^{30}\) For this reason, a Gentile woman could probably expect to experience infidelity in her marriage. Moreover, a husband could divorce his wife for any

\(^{27}\) Beth Severy, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 9-10.

\(^{28}\) Tucker, 55.

\(^{29}\) Carolyn Osiek, Carolyn, Margaret Y. MacDonald, and Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 22.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 22-23.
cause or displeasure.\textsuperscript{31} In the event of a divorce, children were expected to remain in the house of the father; they did not stay with their mother.\textsuperscript{32}

Apart from the fidelity issues, young girls were often widowed at a young age (i.e. husbands killed in battle, husbands were significantly older, etc.) and expected to remarry since the average life expectancy for a woman at that time was around middle age.\textsuperscript{33} For both men and women, remarriages were very common. As a result, complicated situations developed within the home when serial marriages occurred; both husbands and wives had the opportunity to exercise influence on new extended families.

By the first century AD, a new type of woman began to materialize in public settings (in some parts of the Empire more than others) largely due the growth and prosperity of the Roman Empire and Augustan reforms.\textsuperscript{34} Wives began to have options—they could choose to remain under the legal and economic authority of their fathers or they could fall under the authority of their husbands.\textsuperscript{35} In addition, women property owners could bring their property into marriage and continue to administer it independently.\textsuperscript{36} Tax records in Egypt show where women paid property taxes for themselves though there was no clear term in the language or in the law to designate female property owners.\textsuperscript{37} Further, a slave master could

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid. 22.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{33} Tucker, 56.
\textsuperscript{34} Richard S. Ascough, \textit{Lydia: Paul’s Cosmopolitan Hostess} (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2009), 42.
\textsuperscript{35} Carolyn Osiek, \textit{A Woman’s Place}, 24.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 155.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 155-157.
\end{quote}
even be a woman and a *paterfamilias* could be a woman, as attested by literature and inscriptions.\(^{38}\) Women could also arrange marriages and administer the affairs of children.\(^{39}\) Widows, in particular, became a powerful influence on children.\(^{40}\)

These findings attest to the influential roles that women had in the domestic sector of society. Within the confines of the home environment, women had authority and autonomy over the household. In some instances, household management extended to overseeing properties, crops, and slaves.\(^{41}\) Depending on the size of the household and the amount of property involved, a person’s home could have been the center of community activity as in the case of Mary, the mother of John Mark.\(^{42}\) In Acts 12:12-17, Peter goes straight to Mary’s house upon his release from prison because he knows it to be the center of Christian fellowship and a home away from home. Likewise, Lydia has her own household that later becomes the center of evangelization, instruction, and ritual celebration for believers in Philippi.\(^{43}\) Further, it appears that Nympha in Colossae\(^{44}\) and Phoebe in Cenchreae\(^{45}\) were women without believing husbands or there were no male authorities within their houses leaving them to offer the use of their homes or other services to the church.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 155.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 25.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 155.

\(^{42}\) Acts 12:12 ESV.

\(^{43}\) Acts 16:40 ESV.

\(^{44}\) Col 4:15 ESV.

\(^{45}\) Rom 16:1 ESV.
Class Structure

First-century Roman society valued prestige and power.\textsuperscript{46} To that end, society was divided into seven legal groups that were largely constructed on the measure of a family’s wealth. Those legal groups had their own hierarchical order within two broad spectra—the elite and the poor; there was no middle class. The hierarchy from the top began with the Senate, the Equites, and the Decuriones. Next came the lower classes consisting of the free-born urban plebs, the peasants, the freedmen, and the slaves. Further, legal status within the groups was accorded only to males, not to females.\textsuperscript{47}

Citizenship was another crucial dividing line in Roman society. Roman citizenship afforded free born individuals political privileges and legal protections. In contrast, non-citizens, like slaves were ineligible to marry, vote or own property.\textsuperscript{48} Moreover, Roman citizens, like Paul, could expect to receive lighter penalties in court, be exempt from beatings, and exercise the right to appeal in the event of a death sentence.\textsuperscript{49}

So where were the women in the class structure? In the Roman social structure, social status took precedence over gender. Osiek and Balch indicate, “Women were almost always socially disadvantaged in some way in comparison to men of equal rank, yet women of


\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 62, 77.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 108.
higher status were socially superior to men of lesser status.”\(^{50}\) They could not vote, but they could own property, engage in business, participate in public life by funding projects or sponsoring religious ceremonies, influence husbands in powerful positions and file for divorce.\(^{51}\) However, their legal rights varied over time.

**Education**

The early part of the 1\(^{st}\) century AD also represents a period of educational development for women. Osiek and Balch note, “The availability and accessibility of education to any class of individuals is reflective of their standing of that class in society.”\(^{52}\) During this period, education was family-controlled; education and genealogy were linked as were wealth and power.\(^{53}\) For this reason, social advancement via education was exceptional, even for males.\(^{54}\)

With regard to women, education was a conundrum. If a wife received an education equal to her husband, then she would be capable of independencies from him. That condition would have been considered a threat to the Roman family system.\(^{55}\) Estep states, “Formal

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\(^{51}\) Ibid., 58-62.


\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) Ibid.

\(^{55}\) Ibid.
education was simply not the normal course for women in Roman society.”\textsuperscript{56} Most women were restricted to domestic life and considered education to be unfeminine and irrelevant.\textsuperscript{57}

Even with the limitations on education, women were not in the minority as most of the population could neither read nor write. In light of this widespread limitation, LiDonnici observes, “For first-century Christ-believers, however, word of mouth was the dominant means by which virtually all information, including the Scriptures, was received.”\textsuperscript{58} Therefore, strong and reliable communication skills were critical for the transfer of information along with interpersonal, relational experiences.

Religion

The Greco-Roman world was primarily a polytheistic one requiring the worship of various gods and the goddesses, particularly the ones that had become important in the history of each city. As it was, no two cities shared exactly the same gods or goddesses and no two cities worshipped them in the same manner.\textsuperscript{59} That being the case, there was no single coherent system for worshipping the deities of the time. Nonetheless, worship and religious activities were necessary in order for the gods to continue to protect the city and ensure the well-being of its inhabitants. For this reason, women were expected to perform public religious duties while men maintained the temples, sponsored games, processions, and sacrifices. Men and women could hold public religious office, but doing so was often very

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} Joan Cecelia Campbell, \textit{Phoebe: Patron and Emissary} (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2009), 5.

\textsuperscript{59} LiDonnici, 82.
expensive as those in the highest ranks were required to buy livestock for sacrifices, hire priests to conduct the ceremonies, provide for events and festivals, sponsor parades, etc.\textsuperscript{60} Consequently, there was a considerable need for persons to have money and influence if they were to provide for the obligatory participation of citizens in religious activities.

Further, gods and goddesses in the Greco-Roman world were largely capricious and most often detached from earthly inhabitants. Lynn Lidonnici writes:

One of the most central religious messages through Greco-Roman worship, for both women and men, was this emphasis on the unbridgeable gap between humanity and divinity, and the foolishness—and danger—of forgetting this distance, unless the deities themselves are extending the invitation.\textsuperscript{61}

In addition, there was an undercurrent running through religious worship that thwarted changes within society—i.e. things were right as they were and would stay that way as long as all of the members of society kept to their places.\textsuperscript{62} What a challenge it must have been for Paul and his coworkers to penetrate this rigid religious culture with a life-changing message from the living God.

Collectivism

On a more intrinsic level, authors such as Marie Keller, Richard Ascough, and Joan Campbell stress the importance of looking at women in antiquity in terms of how they understood themselves. Ascough notes:

There are a variety of ways in which people are aware of the self, ranging from a sense of being unique and independent (individualism) to a sense of sharing most things in common with a kinship group or a subgroup (collectivism).\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 85-86.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 86.
\textsuperscript{63} Ascough, 8
Whereas the modern North American culture tends to be individualistic with an emphasis on personal goals and priorities, the first-century Greco-Roman world was characterized by a spirit of collectivism where the goals and opinions of the group took precedence over personal interests. Because Lydia, Priscilla, and Phoebe were socialized into a culture of collectivism, it is important to understand that they were outwardly and publicly oriented. As cosmopolitan women embedded in the collectivism of Greco-Roman culture, they lived, worked and participated effectively among diverse groups from major urban centers to promote the mission of the church.

**Business Women in the Apostolic Church**

Though the structures of society often restricted the opportunities for women, Paul openly shared the gospel without distinction and counted women among his friends and workers. In fact, his writings reflect that he cherished them as sisters and acknowledged their help in strengthening the family of God. Of all his partners, three women from the marketplace proved to be remarkable leaders among the early Jesus-groups. Like their Old Testament counterparts, Lydia, Priscilla, and Phoebe used their skills, abilities, and influence to promote the growth of the church and its expansion throughout the Roman Empire. While the biblical texts regarding these women are more limited than their Old Testament precursors, the Scriptures succeed in describing their extraordinary character as well as their lasting contributions to the people of God.
Lydia

Ben Witherington argues that Luke chooses representative and notable examples of conversions in each geographical region to account for the advance of Christianity. Likewise, John Stott sees Paul moving from one strategic location to the next. Stott writes, “Indeed Luke deliberately describes how the gospel spread ‘by the gradual establishment of radiating centres or sources of influence at certain salient points throughout a large part of the Empire.’ That being the case, it is significant that Luke introduces Lydia, a business woman, as being the first person to respond to Paul’s Macedonian call from God and possibly the first convert on European soil. Further, Luke’s account in Acts 16 of Paul’s first stop in Macedonia is one exclusively focused on women.

The text found in Acts 16:11-15 and 40 indicates that Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke arrived in the leading city of Philippi, a Roman colony of about 15,000 people just ten miles inland from the Aegean Sea. Philippi was located on the great east-west highway between Rome and Asia known as the “Via Egnatia.” As the city at the intersection of two major trade routes, Philippi contained a cross-section of people engaged in a variety of business activities with prosperous import and export markets. Further, the city served as a Roman colony for veterans who possessed the rights of self-government under Roman laws and were exempt from taxes. As a key cultural center, Philippi was a microcosm of Rome governed by a proconsul who resided in Thessalonica.


66 Ascough, 25.
Like many cities throughout the Roman Empire, Jewish presence in Philippi was negligible. In fact, Paul and his friends were unable to locate a synagogue—an indication that the city had few Jewish men, less than the quorum needed to establish a center for worship. When the Sabbath day arrived, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke made their way outside the city gate to find a place where a group of women gathered for prayer and rituals. While the nature of their religious practices is uncertain, it may be assumed that these women were ones of piety. John Calvin asserts that the women were Jewish as it was illegal to hold public meetings inside the city so Jews would have had to meet outside the city gate. Further, Jewish water rituals could have easily been practiced there beside the river Gangites where the women would have been removed from the scrutiny of Roman authorities. There beside the river, Luke indicates in Acts 16:13 that Paul and Silas sat down as religious teachers and began to read and interpret the Scriptures for the women. Though these people were Gentiles and foreigners, Paul had no reluctance in sharing the gospel with them. Further, as a change agent, “[A] person who communicates a message about an innovative social movement or product and seeks to influence others toward adopting this innovation,” Paul realized that he must influence the leader of the group. In this instance, that leader would have likely been Lydia.

In verses 14 and 15, Luke reveals four important characteristics of Lydia as the first one to adopt the message from Paul. First, Luke is careful to share the name of the woman listening to Paul. Witherington writes that “Roman women were normally called by their

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68 Ascough, 6.
family’s cognomen, not by a personal name or nickname.” Though her name may have been derived from her place of origin—the Greek region of Lydia, Luke affords her a specific level of respect and dignity in disclosing her particular name.

Secondly, Luke provides more information about Lydia in revealing her place of origin as Thyatira, an important center for trade and commerce famous for textiles made with purple and red dye. In addition to business and industry, the city served as a strategic military outpost under the Greek influence of Alexander the Great and later under the authority of the Roman Empire. As such, its inhabitants represented a blend of both cultures, a society very similar to the one in Philippi.

Thirdly, Luke makes a point to disclose Lydia’s profession as a merchant importer—a dealer in purple, a dealer of goods dyed with purple, or a trader of purple. In the Mediterranean world, the color purple was symbolic of wealth and royalty as much of the trade fell under imperial control. As it was, purple dye was expensive as it came drop by drop from a particular type of mollusk—a Tyrian murex—found along the Syrian and Phoenician coasts. Gill and Gempf stipulate, “Involvement with purple reflects the wealth needed to deal with such materials.” As a business woman, possibly of some wealth with an elite clientele, Ethel Herr sees Lydia as an overseas agent of a large textile manufacturer. Likewise, John Stott views her as a Macedonian agent of a Thyatiran manufacturer.

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69 Witherington, 491.

70 Ascough, 17-18.


As an alternative to the opinions expressed above, Pomeroy suggests that Lydia may not have held elite status since freedwomen from the east sold luxury items such as purple dye and perfumes. Reimer takes the matter a step further by stating that Lydia may have been a slave at some point. Rather than selling expensive purple dye derived from mollusks, Reimer indicates that a less expensive form of purple dye called “Turkey Red” could also be obtained from a plant called the “madder root.” Reimer explains that this less-expensive purple dye was in use in western Asian minor and there is no evidence that the dye was under imperial control. If Lydia sold this type of dye, her trade would have been separate from the royal monopoly, and there would be no reason to suppose she was a freedwoman of the imperial household or a woman of elite status.

Further, Reimer states that “Lydia comes from a region known for the production of dyed wool and woolen clothing.” He adds, “No one denies that work with wool was an activity typical of women.” Accordingly, when textiles were produced, it was likely a task for a woman. According to Reimer, work with purple was normally done in workshops where workers were subject to the disgusting smells of dye and wool; it was socially despised and dirty work done by common people. Additionally,

Inscriptural evidence shows that normally, a group of women and men worked together in the production of purple cloth. They traveled together and sold products they had made. In many cases, these were a group of slaves or freed persons and their companions.


76 Ibid.

77 Reimer, 105-109.
Therefore, Lydia and her companions by the river may have been considered *purpurarii*; *purpurarii* were mainly freed persons who settled in other cities to do their work normally in small groups as common people attempting to earn a subsistence income and at the same time to shape their social and religious lives in common.\(^78\) For this reason, Reimer, asserts that Lydia cannot be equated with the great merchants of the period.

Whether Lydia is to be remembered as a wealthy merchant or the leader of an itinerant group of workers, it is important to note that she engaged successfully in the business activities of the Philippian marketplace. As a Greek-speaking worker in the service industry, Lydia secured a living (above the subsistence level) using some of the skills and abilities described in Figure 3. Marshall writes, “[T]he fact that Lydia was engaged in business strongly suggests that she was single or widowed, and the members of her household would have included any servants or dependents whom she had living with her.”\(^79\) Further, Ascough adds, “Her status as a free person, either freeborn or freed slave, is indicated by her control over a household and a house.”\(^80\) As it stands, Luke depicts Lydia acting independently of a male guardian and uses singular references to *her* household and *her* home.\(^81\)

Fourthly, not only was Lydia a business woman, Luke reports that she was also a worshipper of God. She had probably heard about the God of Abraham from Jewish exiles and became a God-fearer. Intellectually, she knew about the one true God, but she did not

\(^{78}\) Ibid.


\(^{80}\) Ascough, 7.

\(^{81}\) Luke 16:15, 40 ESV.
know about Jesus. Kistemaker asserts that as a God-fearer, Lydia had learned the synagogue teaching of the Old Testament, but the Jews had not fully accepted her as a convert.  

Remarkably, it is this woman who exposed herself to potential trouble with the Roman authorities, risked the loss of business, and subjected herself to the bad will of the community by listening to the new teaching of Paul and in doing so, the Lord opened her heart. In response, she submitted herself for public baptism, along with the members of her household, thereby becoming Paul’s first convert on European soil.

As a new convert, Lydia, persuaded Paul and Silas to stay at her home. Stott writes, “[F]or once the heart is opened, the home is opened too.” In doing so, Lydia provided the protection and household base necessary for Paul’s mission to Philippi. Though there is no mention of Lydia leading or teaching in the church, she is recognized as the head of a household with the material resources to provide a home for the embryonic church in Philippi. Not only was her conversion and hospitality an encouragement to Paul at an important juncture in his ministry, her skills, abilities, and influence created and supported a fellowship of believers that was crucial to the existence and growth of Christianity in Philippi. Likewise, the Philippians strongly supported Paul throughout his ministry with their finances, their resources, and their prayers—they never turned their backs on him. In his letter addressed to the saints with the overseers and deacons in Philippi written while he was imprisoned in Rome, it can be discerned that a healthy and loving congregation developed from Lydia’s initial conversion. John Stott writes, “It was from Europe that in due course the


gospel fanned out to the great continents of Africa, Asia, North America, Latin America, and Oceania, and so reached the ends of the earth.” \(^{84}\) Accordingly, Paul was ever thankful for the Philippian partnership in ministry (Phil 1:3).

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*Figure 3 New Testament working women*
Priscilla

From Philippi, Paul made his way to Greece, first to the intellectual center of Athens and then on to the commercial center of Corinth, the capital city of southern Greece. Witherington writes that Roman Corinth in the early 50s AD was on its way to becoming the largest, most prosperous city in Greece. As such, it facilitated trade between Asia and Italy through its two ports—Lechaeum on the Corinthian Gulf to the west and Cenchreae to the east on the Saronic Gulf. As a result, there was trade in all directions. Recognizing the value of its location, Julius Caesar ordered the city to be rebuilt in 44 BC. Therefore, the architecture, language, and law were all reflective of the Roman Empire. Witherington indicates that the city “was a crossroads of humanity with varying social statuses, religious pluralism, varying religious orientations, itinerant business men and women who could help spread the word elsewhere in the Empire.”

Consequently, it was an ideal place for Paul to cultivate and encourage a Christian body of believers.

In Corinth, Paul created a friendship with a married couple from Rome, Aquila and his wife Priscilla—a bond that would span more than ten years and prove vital to the success of his mission. Scripture records that the couple left Rome as a result of a command from Claudius, the Roman emperor from 41 to 54 AD. Kistemaker submits:

The Roman historiographer Suetonius writes that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they were continually rioting at the instigation of Christians. Repeated conflicts between the Jews and the Christians seem to indicate Priscilla and Aquila were Christians when they left Rome.

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85 Witherington, 538.
86 Kistemaker, 649.
Moreover, Keller suggests, “[S]ince banishment seems to have applied only to the leaders and activists, it is safe to assume that both Priscilla and Aquila were particularly active on the Judean Christ-believers side.” As independent leaders for the cause of Christ, the couple readily offered hospitality to Paul by sharing their workshop and their home. Luke records that Paul made a visit to this couple and decided to stay with them for a time because they shared the same profession—they were all tentmakers.

Right from the start, Luke acknowledges in Acts 18:3 that Paul viewed Priscilla as a coworker. There in the shop at Corinth, the three of them (Priscilla, Aquila, and Paul) worked with leather in washing hides and sewing them together to make small portable tents that soldiers and travelers could carry with them. The workplace or the shop of this artisan couple in or near their home provided a convenient setting for ongoing teaching and discussions.

After roughly eighteen months, Luke records that Paul set sail for Ephesus in Syria—a religious center and the third largest city in Roman Asian Minor—and he took Priscilla and Aquila with him. As itinerant artisans or entrepreneurs, their vocational skills and abilities afforded them the ability to travel and provided the infrastructure for the expansion and the support of the Christian movement. Osiek writes:

One of the most fascinating features of the description of Priscilla and Aquila’s activities in Acts and presentation of their contribution by Paul in his letters is that they combined aspects of an itinerant existence with the more settled existence of hosting a house church; their lives may, therefore, offer very important insight into how the Jesus movement managed to establish itself in the Greco-Roman city.

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88 Acts 18:3 ESV.
89 Acts 18:18 ESV.
90 Osiek, *A Woman’s Place*, 33.
In Ephesus, Luke makes a point to share that Priscilla and Aquila had an opportunity to hear the teaching of a leading evangelist named Apollos from Alexandria, the leading center of Hellenistic learning. Apollos was an educated Jew, eloquent in his presentation and knowledgeable concerning Jesus. However, Priscilla and Aquila quickly discerned that his knowledge was lacking so they took him aside and they “explained the way of God more accurately.” Despite a possible lack in education, Kuyper writes that Priscilla took upon herself the duty of exposing Christianity more fully to Apollos—she had another calling beyond her daily duties. He states that she knew the truth and she knew how to present it clearly. Calvin writes, “We also see that at the time women were not so unacquainted with the Word of God as the papists wish to have them, since we see one of the chief teachers of the Church was taught by a woman.” Though women were discouraged from using their intellectual abilities in the Greco-Roman world, Priscilla dared to use hers. Her teaching must have been commendable as Apollos later served as Paul’s successor to the Jesus-groups in Corinth.

Though Paul left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus to teach and nurture the church, they must have returned to Rome sometime after the death of Claudius in 54 AD as Paul sends them greetings in the letter carried by Phoebe. In the letter, Paul refers to both Priscilla and

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91 Acts 18:24 ESV.
92 Ibid.
93 Acts 18:26 ESV.
95 Calvin, 145.
96 Acts 19:19 ESV.
97 Rom 16:3 ESV.
Aquila as being his “coworkers”—his synergos. As coworkers, both of them played vital roles in work and ministry among Jesus-groups in multiple locations. Further, Paul states that the two “risked their necks for his life.”\textsuperscript{98} Adam Clarke elaborates:

> What transaction this refers to we know not: but it appears that these persons had, on some occasion, hazarded their own lives to save that of the apostle; and that fact was known to all the church of God in that quarter, who felt themselves under the highest obligations to these pious persons, for the important service which had been rendered.\textsuperscript{99}

As believers willing to give their lives to assist Paul, Priscilla and Aquila demonstrated that their commitment and dedication to the growth of the church was authentic and unfailing.

Though Priscilla was the feminine partner of Aquila in work and ministry, both Luke and Paul consistently afford Priscilla honor and respect in their writings by using her name, alluding to her profession, and describing her abilities; her name is even listed first in four of the six instances in which it appears.\textsuperscript{100} Margaret McDonald writes:

> As in the case with the other missionary pairings of men and women mentioned in Paul’s letters, there is no indication whatsoever of the female partner having a different or diminished role in relation to the male partner.\textsuperscript{101}

As it stands, Priscilla and Aquila had a missionary and a business franchise of sorts—they had shops in three major cities where instruction could be done privately and where Christian communities could meet in their homes. They were enterprising business people with creative and management skills, hospitable and relational abilities, and extensive and useful influence (see Figure 3). Reimer acknowledges:

\textsuperscript{98} Rom 16:4 ESV.


\textsuperscript{100} In Acts 18:18 and 26, Rom. 16: 3-5, and 2 Tim. 4:19 but not in Acts: 2-3 or 1 Cor. 16:19.

We should take the history of Prisca (Priscilla is the diminutive form of Prisca) into our hands again, to preserve it and in this way draw inspiration from it, especially for the manifold activities of women today.\textsuperscript{102}

As a first-century believer, Priscilla willingly shouldered the mission of the church though her itinerant ministry demanded the hard work of a difficult trade, the financial setbacks of opening and closing one business after another, and the willingness to risk her life for sake of others.

John Chrysostom, one of the early church fathers who lived during the fourth century, elaborated on the work and service of Priscilla and Aquila in his sermon on Rom 16:3-4. In his remarks, he stressed Paul’s great affection for Priscilla and Aquila though they were a humble couple “living by the labor of their hands”\textsuperscript{103} as tentmakers, one of the lowest and most despised professions of Roman society. He reminds the church that Paul lived with this dedicated team for two years and saw first-hand their excellence in the work place as well as their spiritual insight. As fellow-laborers in the Lord, Chrysostom asserts that Paul treasured them as people of worth and virtue. Further, Chrysostom indicates that particular attention should be given to the order of the names in the greeting found in Rom 16:3 whereby Priscilla’s name is mentioned first. With regard to the greeting from Paul, Chrysostom wrote, “He does not do this without a reason, but he seems to me to acknowledge a greater godliness for her than for her husband.”\textsuperscript{104} With his comment, Chrysostom paid homage to Priscilla’s focus and partnership in ministry of the church. By paying tribute to Priscilla and Aquila,

\textsuperscript{102} Reimer, 217.


\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 18.
Chrysostom urged believers to draw inspiration from their godly examples and to use their stories as motivation to enrich the lives of others.

Phoebe

In addition to Lydia in Philippi and Priscilla in Corinth, Paul thoughtfully recognized the public work of another business woman, Phoebe of Cenchreae. As stated previously, the city of Corinth was couched between two sea ports, Cenchreae and Lechaeum. Cenchreae was just seven miles from Corinth and served as the life-line to Athens while Lechaeum was five miles to the west and provided a passageway to Rome, the capital of the empire. The harbor at Cenchreae was located “[O]nly ten kilometers due east of the agora (marketplace) in Corinth and served ships coming from Athens, Ionia, Cyprus, and the rest of the Levant (the middle part of the Fertile Crescent, between the Nile Valley and present-day Iraq).” In Phoebe’s lifetime, Cenchreae was a profitable port connected to Corinth by a major road where “one could make the journey by foot in approximately two hours.” Since Cenchreae was a strategic business center for the Mediterranean world and another attractive location for Paul to share the gospel, Paul may have met Phoebe and stayed at her house while teaching in the area or he may have met her on the way to Ephesus when he stopped in Cenchreae for a time of dedication (Acts 18:18). As it was, Paul used the port in Cenchreae to embark on the return portion of his second missionary journey back to Jerusalem after sending Phoebe in the opposite direction with his letter to the Romans—the assumption is made that Romans 16 was written to be the final portion of Paul’s letter to the Romans, not to

105 Campbell, 36.
106 Ibid.
107 Acts 18:18 ESV.
the Ephesians. John Stott indicates, “It is very likely that Phoebe was entrusted with the responsible task of carrying Paul’s letter to its destination in Rome, although other business was apparently taking her to the city as well, perhaps commerce or ‘quite probably a lawsuit’.” As an independent woman with the resources and status, Phoebe was well-positioned to assist Paul by carrying his letter to the believers in Rome.

Though Phoebe is mentioned in only two verses of the last chapter of Romans, Paul conveys a substantial amount of information about her character and leadership in the Jesus-group within her community. Paul chooses significant words of commendation to solicit the proper level of attention and respect for her as his representative and to secure any help she might need in Rome. In particular, Paul attributes honor and worth to Phoebe as his emissary in describing her as a sister, in calling her by her name, in referring to her as a deacon, and in noting her contributions as a patron.

First, Paul introduces the believers in Rome to Phoebe as “our sister.” In referring to Phoebe as “our” sister, Paul places her directly in the Christian family—she is one of them. By inference, she is loved by God and considered as one of the “saints.” In this recommendation, Paul intentionally aligns Phoebe with himself and with his missionary work. This direct affiliation contrasts sharply with other practices of the Greco-Roman culture where wealthy women often provided resources and support to voluntary associations or trade guilds, yet remained external to the group with the expectation of public praise. In this instance, Paul wants others to know that Phoebe is fully committed to the mission of the

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109 Rom 1:7 ESV.
church as a member of it. He wants people to understand that her contributions are not rooted in a desire for public praise or reciprocity; rather, her works as a Gentile believer are freely given in love.

Next, Paul refers to Phoebe by name in Rom 16:1. In first-century Mediterranean societies, names communicated information about social standing, kinship and geographical origins. In this instance, there are no attached labels where a father, husband or sons are mentioned. Paul simply refers to her as “Phoebe”—a name that means “bright,” “radiant,” or “pure.” The connotations of Phoebe’s name illuminate the godly character in her letter of introduction.

Third, Paul acknowledges the service and leadership of Phoebe as a servant or deacon of the church in Cenchreae. Perry offers this comment:

According to Paul, deacons are exemplary men and women who exercise their varied gifts, carry out works of relief and restoration and execute commissioned tasks to display God’s multifaceted wisdom through the church to the rulers and authorities whose lordship in this age is being nullified.

Though the exact nature of her service is unclear, Paul views her service as key in building up the community of faith in Cenchreae. So it is that Phoebe emerges as a person of substance and leadership.

Since Jesus-groups met in Christian homes, it is conceivable that Phoebe offered her house for meetings and provided the hospitality needed to encourage other believers.

Marshall writes:

It is not unlikely that Phoebe, in addition to holding an office in the church gathering, had provided the facilities in which the believers met and provided

110 Campbell, 10.

accommodation to travelers. In so doing, she provided the security from scrutiny as a wealthy citizen.\textsuperscript{112}

Further, as a homeowner with the ability to manage her own financial resources, Phoebe would have had a greater social status than Paul in the Corinthian community. In turn, she would have used that status and power to help Paul and the church in making connections, connections to ensure the growth of the church internally and externally.

Lastly, Paul refers to Phoebe as a patron to many people, including himself. One important area in the Greco-Roman world where women exercised a degree of financial control and influence was in the practice of patronage. Though practiced more extensively in Rome than in Greece, patronage most often manifested itself as a relationship between two people of distinct social classes (for example, a patron and a freed slave, an artisan, a poet, a writer, etc.) or as relationship between a patron (\textit{patronus} or \textit{prostatis}) and a public group.\textsuperscript{113}

Characteristics of patronage included, but were not limited, to the following:

1. An exchange of resources—economic, political, etc.—between people of unequal status (though patronage could exist between people of equal status)
2. Promises of reciprocity
3. Solidarity and loyalty
4. Unconditional and long-range credit
5. Strong sense of intrapersonal obligation
6. Intricately connected with honor and shame
7. Not fully legal but informal (at times the understanding goes directly against or furnishes a means to circumvent laws)
8. Voluntarily entered into or abandoned\textsuperscript{114}

Women also exercised patronage to unofficial groups as in the case of Junia Theodora in 1\textsuperscript{st} century Corinth—in the 40s or 50s A.D. Archeological evidence discovered in 1957

\textsuperscript{112} Marshall, 183.

\textsuperscript{113} Osiek, \textit{A Woman’s Place}, 198.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, 195.
reveals multiple inscriptions to Junia Theodora, a wealthy widow originally from Lycia. As a woman of international status, Junia participated in urban commerce with access to legal and political authorities in Corinth. Inscriptions, like the degree from Patara in Lycia dated 43 AD, indicate that Junia provided hospitality for Lycians passing through the city of Corinth, quite possibly as travelers on business or as spectators at the Isthmian Games. As a woman of elite status, Junia apparently cultivated a friendship with Roman authorities in favor of the Lycians. For this reason, Junia was known as a prostasia, a term very similar to the one Paul uses for Phoebe. Paul refers to Phoebe as a leader using the prostatis—a cognate of prostasia.

For early Christians, patronage manifested itself in several ways including the exchange of hospitality between persons, the hosting of Christian groups, the provision of material resources including food, money, and lodging, and the assistance with social connections. Biblical examples of patronage include the hosting of house churches by women such as Mary, the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12), Nympha (Col 4:15), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15 and 40) and possibly Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2). For Lydia and Phoebe, the assemblies flourished to the point of having overseers (Phil 1:1) and deacons (Rom 16:1 and Phil 1:1).

Patronage and benefaction were important components to the social structure of Greco-Roman society. Margaret McDonald writes:

People of higher social status offered support to those of lower social status—their clients. The clients, in turn, bestowed honor on their patrons and were subject to their authority.  

115 Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth: Text and Archeology (Collegeville, Minn.: Michael Glazier, 2002), 82.

116 Gill, 184 and Osiek, A Woman’s Place, 205-207.

117 Kraemer, 239.
However, with regard to Paul and Phoebe, Whelan views their relationship as one of mutual patronage. “Paul relies on Phoebe’s network of clients and at the same time introduces her to his network as a way to reciprocate her patronage to him.” As such, Paul depends on Phoebe and her influence to expand his mission in Cenchreae and elsewhere (see Figure 3).

For the apostle Paul, Phoebe’s effective delivery of the gospel to the Jesus groups in Rome was essential to establishing unity among groups of believers in the capital city and to providing the support necessary to expand the church into Spain. Campbell views Phoebe as an influential, elite widow who was “[P]robably literate and well-connected socially, therefore eminently qualified to serve as patron and as emissary on behalf of her community, even if that representation involved litigation.” Phoebe, as Paul’s trusted emissary, had the resources and fortitude to travel over eight hundred miles to Rome, to effectively communicate the contents of the letter, and to network in the city. Like Timothy and Titus, Phoebe honorably served as a representative of one church to another as a valued associate of Paul in his missionary endeavors.

Implications of New Testament Successors

As the plan of God continued to unfold with the incarnation of Jesus and the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, working women from the public arena were acknowledged and valued for their partnership in the mission of the church. For Paul, the skills, abilities, and influence of women from the marketplace were crucial to the establishment and spread of Jesus-groups in urban centers and for the areas surrounding

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118 Osiek, A Woman’s Place, 216.
119 Campbell, 95
them. Despite the limitations of patriarchal structures and other social restrictions, working women from the first century were able to come alongside men within the Jesus-groups to love and serve others in a meaningful way as adelphoi\textsuperscript{120}—brothers and sisters—in the family of God, not just the household of Israel. With an intentional focus on strengthening the members of the family, Lydia, Priscilla, and Phoebe devoted their skills, abilities, and influence to the service of others based on the transforming message of the gospel. The legacy of these three sisters of faith radiates with consuming commitment and courageous engagement; it inspires the vision of modern believers who long to participate fully in the unfolding plan of God.

\textsuperscript{120} Campbell, 17.
CHAPTER FOUR
CHURCH DOCTRINES

Having established biblical precedents from both the Old and the New Testaments to substantiate the importance of working women or women in the public sphere finding opportunities to engage with the body of Christ by using their abilities, attention is now given to the theological imperatives that compel all believers, including working women, to use their gifts for the edification of the church. Three specific doctrines—the Doctrine of Adoption, the Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers, and the Doctrine of Spiritual Gifts—speak to the high privileges and loving responsibilities of all believers as partakers of the New Covenant created by Christ Jesus for the family of God in this present age and in the age to come.

The Doctrine of Adoption

In its most basic form, Grudem indicates that “Adoption is an act of God whereby he makes us members of his family.”¹ This specific action of God is distinct from justification and regeneration made possible by faith in Jesus Christ. As such, adoption follows the conversion of a believer as God’s response to the believer’s faith. “By adoption, the redeemed become sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty; they are introduced into and given the privileges of God’s family.”² The scripture in John 1:12-13 affirms the

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preceding statements, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Since adoption comes by faith in Christ as taught in the New Testament, are Old Testament believers like Deborah and Ruth excluded from the family of God? Certainly not. Paul, in Gal 3:24, indicates that the law was the guardian of the covenant family until Christ came. When Christ completed his atoning work on the cross, he opened the way for believers to become participants in a new covenant whereby a fuller realization and a more intimate relationship with God was possible, a relationship in which God would pour his spirit into the hearts of men and women as his adopted sons and daughters.

As members of the New Covenant family, there is no room for divisions or discrimination. The apostle Paul writes in Gal 4:28-29, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” Additionally, Paul reminds believers in Eph 2:19 that they are “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” As members of the same household born of the same Spirit, children of God are brothers and sisters of Christ and of one another (see Rom 8:29). Therefore, women in the household of God share the same status as their male counterparts; they have the same access to the Father and may enjoy all the privileges of the royal family wherein they may find love and support. John Murray writes, “God never has in his family those who are alien to its atmosphere and spirit and station.”

All are reconciled into one body, one family.

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3 Murray, 133.
Professor Douglas Kelley teaches that there is nothing finer, nothing higher than the privilege of adoption. It is by the gracious action of the Father in adoption that believers know immediately and intuitively that the love of God has penetrated their hearts. When God touches their hearts, believers then have the direct perception that they are in a saving and loving relationship with the Father as attested by the Spirit of adoption (Rom 8:15).

Along with receiving the Spirit of adoption, the Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 12 identifies other significant liberties and privileges. Believers, through adoption, have God’s name put on them and may approach Him directly with their concerns just as children would approach a loving Father. In doing so, the Confession affirms that they are pitied and protected; they are never cast off though they may be chastened for their misdeeds. Further, they are sealed as God’s children till Christ returns wherein they may expect to inherit all the things God has promised to his people.4

In response to the privileges of adoption, believers may marvel at the love of God as did the apostle John in 1 John 3:1, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” Reymond stipulates that it is in the light of that love that believers have “the highest privilege available to fallen children of Adam.”5 Along with the privilege of adoption, believers also have the corresponding responsibilities of walking in love (Eph 5:1-2), walking in the light (Eph 5:8-11), responding to the chastening love of the Father (Heb 12:6-8), and cherishing all the brothers and sisters (1 John 4:19-21).6

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6 Ibid.
In the context of love, all believers grow in relationship to the Father and become more like him. Indeed, Paul encourages believers to be “imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph 5:1). Likewise, Peter admonishes believers to be holy as obedient children just as the Father is holy (see 1 Pet 1:14-16). Through the transforming power of the Spirit, the lives and conduct of believers can be elevated and relationships within the family of God can grow to deeper and more intimate levels. As a consequence, relational bonds within the church can be and will be strengthened as the children of God become concerned for the needs of their brothers and sisters.

So it is that God has created people for His name with many members, namely the church. In Rom 12:12-26, the apostle Paul stipulates that all members are united to Christ through the Spirit. Though there is great diversity among the members, Paul stresses the reality that believers are all part of the same body—the body of Christ. Therefore, each member contributes to the functioning of the entire body. Similarly, if one member suffers, the whole body suffers. To that end, every member matters, including women. The unique contributions of women, including business and professional women, are needed for the whole body to function as it should.

The Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers

Each believer is called to a life of discipleship and service—there is no provision for non-ministering members. “To be in the body of Christ is to be part of his working body.”7 Though some members are called to special ministries (i.e. apostles, prophets, evangelists), all members are called to minister. Frank Stagg writes, “Every true Christian ministry is the

continuing ministry of the living Lord. His continuing ministry is the only ultimate ministry; ours is derived from, and dependent upon, his.” The apostle Peter proclaims in 1 Pet 2:9 that believers, as the true Israel of God, have been set apart for ministry as they are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Accordingly, The Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers confirms that each man and each woman within the body of Christ is a priest with direct access to God and each member has a priestly service to render.

Grudem imparts that the role of man as a priest is not just a New Testament idea; it existed even in the Garden of Eden. He suggests that prior to the fall, Adam was free and unrestricted in offering prayers and praise to God. Further, as there was not a need for a sin sacrifice, there was another sacrifice to be offered. He suggests, “[A]dam and Eve’s work would have been offered to God in gratitude and thanksgiving and so would have been a ‘sacrifice’ of another sort.” However noble these functions may have been, Grudem indicates that man lost his priestly role to sin. While there was partial recovery in the establishment of the Aaronic priesthood, the original purity and holiness of the priestly role was never fully realized. Even so, scripture provides indications that the intentions of God were not to be thwarted; God would establish a people for his name whereby men and women would be restored to their original priestly roles. The indications of restoration were present when God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai in Ex 19:5-6 with these words: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured

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8 Ibid, 252.
9 Grudem, 629.
possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Further, the signs of renewal were there when the prophet Isaiah predicted the year of the Lord’s favor in Isa 61:6 as a time when the people of God will be called “the priests of the Lord; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God.” Ultimately, fulfillment came with the perfect life and sacrifice of Christ wherein Peter was led to acknowledge the reality of a new and holy priesthood in 1 Pet 2:5, an inclusive priesthood comprised of both male and female believers as people set apart by God for all time. So it is that Rev 5:10 affirms the enduring nature of the new priesthood in the song to the Lamb sung by the elders and the four living creatures in the throne room of heaven wherein John sees them proclaiming, “You have made them [saints of God] a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

Because Christ has fulfilled the ultimate role of priest by providing the perfect sacrifice for sin and the means for bringing people near to God, men and women must imitate the priestly role of Christ in prayer, sacrifice, and ministry. With regard to prayer, the writer of Hebrews encourages brothers and sisters within the family of God to have confidence and assurance in approaching God since Christ has removed the barriers of impurity and fear (Heb 10:19-23). As sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ, men and women now have unrestricted access to the Father. Further, Heb 12:22-24 indicates that men and women can join with the assembly of all those redeemed in the highest worship of God as consecrated priests; there are no disqualifiers based on gender (Gal 3:26-28).

Secondly, believers may enter into priestly service through the means of spiritual sacrifice. Men and women believers are instructed to offer the sacrifice of praise and to do good works as pleasing sacrifices to God (Heb 13:16). Likewise, the apostle Paul instructs
believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices—body and soul, all that they are—as a means of spiritual worship acceptable to God (Rom 12:1). In doing so, the apostle Peter affirms the church as the true temple of God whereby believers are considered living stones built into a spiritual house (1 Pet 2:5).

Thirdly, as God has constituted a new priesthood, scripture indicates that he has called his people—every man and woman—to engage in ministry. The writer of Hebrews (in Heb 10:19-24) indicates that members who have been purified by the blood of Christ may draw near to God with faith and assurance and they must consider how to encourage one another toward love and good deeds. In this way, every believer, regardless of gender, is a priest in the broad, not specific, sense of the word with a ministry regardless of his or her full time occupation. Further, every believer may serve God by ministering to others within the body of Christ in both spiritual and practical matters; the family of God can be strengthened as members identify opportunities to employ their unique gifts and abilities in helping each other—business and professional women are no exception.

As a final word on the Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers, Grudem emphasizes that believers have an eternal role to fill as priests in service to the Most High God. He states that the role of priest does not end with this life. Rather, believers will eternally worship and offer prayer as they behold the face of God and dwell in his presence. Moreover, believers will continually offer themselves, all that they do and have, as sacrifices to the most worthy King. In this manner, men and women will forever function as the subordinate priests they were originally meant to be.
The Doctrine of Spiritual Gifts

In conjunction with the doctrine stated above, Reymond writes, “The church has the high privilege and solemn duty to minister to, that is, to nurture and edify, the saints of God.”10 As brothers and sisters within the adopted family of God where Christ is present, the writer of Hebrews affirms that the body of Christ has been equipped by the Holy Spirit “with everything good for doing his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight . . . .” (Heb 13:21). Paul expands on this concept in speaking to the believers at Corinth stating that believers have been enriched in every way in Christ Jesus as they are blessed with spiritual gifts (1 Cor 1:5-7). Further, in 1 Cor 12:7, Paul emphasizes that these gifts have been given to all believers with these words, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” From these statements, it is clear that spiritual gifts are the means given by God to equip the church in its ministry to build up the family of God.

Grudem defines a spiritual gift as “any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.”11 He stipulates that spiritual gifts include both those that pertain to natural abilities (1 Cor 4:7) and those that appear to be less related to our natural abilities, i.e. healing and prophecy. Even so, he cautions that not every natural ability is to be construed as a spiritual gift as spiritual gifts must be empowered by the Holy Spirit and used for the edification of the church. Further, he mentions that the Bible does not distinguish between natural and supernatural gifts. Therefore, he advises believers against the

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10 Reymond, 885.
11 Grudem, 1016.
tendency to devalue any gift stating, “If we do this we will fail to see God’s hand in the working of all the gifts and fail to thank him for all of them.”\textsuperscript{12}

Though the New Testament provides a listing of spiritual gifts in six different passages,\textsuperscript{13} Grudem emphasizes that there is no one list that contains all the spiritual gifts since God gives the church a variety of spiritual gifts. He suggests that the New Testament writers were not attempting to construct exhaustive listings of the gifts. Rather, the authors were providing examples or representations of spiritual gifts as they came to mind and each author classified the gifts in different ways. Despite the varied methods of classification, the source and the purpose of the gifts is always clear. God is the giver of the gifts and the gifts are to be used for the communion of the saints “so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:12).

In light of the giving of spiritual gifts, believers are obliged to use them effectively as tools for ministry. Reymond emphasizes, “Indeed, Peter declares (1 Pet 4:10) that every \textit{charisma}, of whatever kind a Christian possesses is a spiritual gift to be used in the service of others.”\textsuperscript{14} The essential nature of this obligation is echoed in the doctrinal standards of the Reformed tradition, namely the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Westminster Confession of Faith. Under Article 28 regarding the obligations of church members, the Belgic Confession of 1561 constrains all people joined with the church to “build up one another, according to the gifts God has given them as members of each other in the same body.”\textsuperscript{15} Similarly, the Heidelberg Catechism approved by The Synod of Dort in

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 1027.
\textsuperscript{13} See 1 Cor 12:8-10, 1 Cor 12:28-30, Rom 12:6-8, 1 Cor 7:7, Eph 4:11, and 1 Pet 4:11.
\textsuperscript{14} Reymond, 887.
\textsuperscript{15} Schaff, 418.
1618-1619 clarifies the communion of the saints in Question 55 as a community of believers whereby “each member should consider it a duty to use these gifts (i.e. the gifts of Christ) readily and cheerfully for the service and enrichment of the other members.” Finally, from the Westminster Confession of Faith Article 26 (ii) adopted in 1649, believers “are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification, as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities.” Based on these confessions, each member is obligated to sustain and enrich the communal fellowship of the church by the use of their spiritual gifts and abilities.

In light of these standards, it is important to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit blesses the use of spiritual gifts especially in personal ministry to individuals within the church. Varied gifts, in turn, are used by the Holy Spirit in tangible, practical ways to manifest the presence of God in the church (and the world) and to empower people for greater service. Grudem submits, “And when the Holy Spirit works in various ways that can be perceived by believers and unbelievers, this encourages people’s faith that God is near and that he is working to fulfill his purposes in the church and to bring blessing to his people.” Additionally, Grudem stresses that the Holy Spirit brings unity to the body of Christ through the use of different spiritual gifts as members are forced to depend on each other. Such

16 Ibid., 325.
17 Ibid., 659.
18 Grudem, 641.
interdependence and unity “will itself be a foretaste of the unity that believers will experience in heaven.” 19

Implications for Working Women in the Church

The three doctrines described above provide a corporate portrait of the church as a living organization of servants with the divine mission of leading members to spiritual maturity. As one part of an extensive community unified by one Spirit, women are called to incorporate these specific doctrines into their own identities. In short, they must consider how they see themselves and the significance of their work in a God-centered world.

First, the Doctrine of Adoption affirms the high value of each member within the family of God regardless of gender, position, ethnicity, marital status, etc.,—the status of a woman within the family of God is not subordinate to the status of a man. Different roles do not indicate different value. Also, as daughters of the Most High King, women may know that they have the heart and attention of the Father in every aspect of their lives through the witness of the Holy Spirit. Further, each woman can be assured that she has a distinctive and irreplaceable function within the whole body of believers.

Second, the Doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers confirms that women within the congregation are called to priestly functions in the broad sense of the word, as are all believers, set apart to render prayer, sacrifice and service to God. On its most basic level, this doctrine calls women to intercede and engage with the needs of other members in the church community. On a higher level and in response to the great love of the Father, this doctrine obligates women, including business and professional women, to offer their lives, including

19 Ibid, 1019.
their vocations, as living sacrifices to God. As a result and as a pleasing presentation to the Lord, women are called to share their gifts and abilities with the larger church community, including those abilities that have been used or cultivated in their respective vocations.

Thirdly, the Doctrine of Spiritual Gifts affirms that women are endowed and empowered with gifts and abilities to strengthen the family of God. These gifts may take many forms, yet all are necessary. As demonstrated in the lives of the Old Testament Precursors and the New Testament Successors, God can and does use the abilities demonstrated in the workplace or public arena to strengthen and transform his people.

Just as business and professional women are accountable for incorporating these important doctrines into their lives, church leaders are also obligated to spur working women to good works by evaluating leadership and ministry opportunities within the church. Grudem writes, “If God has placed people with particular gifts in a church and these gifts are not encouraged or allowed, then people will feel frustrated and unfulfilled in their Christian ministries. . . .” Therefore, to be effective as the body of Christ, leaders of the church need to ask if they are providing opportunities for a variety of gifts to be used. Further, church leaders need to evaluate how those gifts are identified, cultivated and strengthened for the good of the whole body.

\[20\] Grudem, 1028.

\[21\] This paper is arguing for women to use their gifts in the roles made available through their respective churches; it does not discuss which roles should be made available to women. From a doctrinal position, every believer has a spiritual gift(s) to be used for the good of the church. When gifts are not used, the church is impoverished.
CHAPTER FIVE
STUDIES OF THE CURRENT CHURCH

Based on the contributions of the Biblical role models and a solid understanding of Christian doctrine, the church today is compelled to examine if and how business women are engaging and contributing to their local congregations. With that said, the methodology for making an objective assessment can be elusive as information is not readily available, nor is it updated or maintained in a consistent manner across congregations or denominations.

Moreover, one survey reports:

The U.S. Census Bureau has been prevented by law or administrative rules since the late 1950s from collecting even basic information on religious affiliation from the public in its decennial census or other demographic surveys, thus excluding religion from America’s largest and most authoritative survey instrument.¹

These factors, along with the growing number of Americans who deem themselves unaffiliated with organized religion, have contributed to the absence of statistics. That said, there has been a considerable amount of research conducted in recent decades using surveys to measure religious activities, rather than head-counts. Though these surveys have their shortcomings in terms of depth and sample size, they do provide some degree of insight concerning national trends for religious practices. Accordingly, they are helpful in providing indicators to prompt local church leaders toward greater analysis, reflection, and planning.

Trends from National Surveys

In an effort to highlight trends associated with religious practices, this paper will report general findings from three studies conducted by leading national researchers. The information gathered from these studies is general in nature. Nonetheless, the studies do provide a look at broad-based trends that prompt church leaders to further inquiry.

National Congregations Studies

Since 1998 Mark Chaves from Duke University has been directing a series of surveys to examine what people do together in congregations. Chaves writes, “What communities of faith do together tells us something important about the state of American religion, whatever the specific beliefs and practices of individuals in those communities.”\(^2\) To that end, his studies have gathered and analyzed information from a cross-section of American congregations at distinct points in time—1998, 2006/07, and 2012. Because information has been tracked over a period of fifteen years in three different studies, it is possible to know demographics and trends for a representative sampling of congregations in the U.S.

Year after year, these studies confirm that women account for the majority (60%) of the adult population within congregations.\(^3\) Even so, only 20% of adults (male and female) within the congregations serve in a leadership role.\(^4\) Further, these studies show that congregational leaders continue to be overwhelmingly male. While religious ideals may


\(^4\) Ibid.
prescribe leadership requirements within congregations, the 2012 study confirms ongoing disparities for women laypersons with regard to serving on boards, holding volunteer positions, and teaching adult classes.

Three other trends from the National Congregation Study are worthy of mention in light of encouraging business and professional women to engage with the church community. First, the 2012 findings confirm that worship styles are growing more informal with increased use of technology, a finding “reflecting a broader trend in American culture toward informality.” Second, the size of the average congregation has declined since 1998 as the church going population has become more concentrated in larger congregations with greater resources and more opportunities; members are leaving smaller congregations in favor of larger ones resulting in an overall decline in the average congregation size. Thirdly, the 2012 reports indicates declines in denominational affiliation and weakening financial ties between congregations and their denominations.

Religious Landscape Survey

The February 2008 report from the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life explores details of religious affiliation in the American public. Though the study confirms that religion continues to play an important role in America religious landscape, there are signals of softening in religious commitment in two key demographic groups—the unaffiliated and the Protestants. First, 16.1% of Americans say they are not affiliated with any particular religion and the number grows to 25% for young Americans between the ages of 18-29. The report

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6 U.S. Religious Landscape, 5.
indicates, “They thus comprise the fourth largest ‘religious’ tradition in the United States, nearly approximating the number of members of mainline Protestant churches.” Next, the survey confirms a decline in the Protestant population to 51%, down from the mid-60% range experienced between 1970 and 1990. Additionally, findings show that 62% of Americans age 70 and older are Protestant while only 43% of Americans ages 18-29 claim a Protestant affiliation. The study indicates, “If these generational patterns persist, recent declines in the number of Protestants and growth in the size of the unaffiliated population may continue.” As rendered, these statistics provide important information about the future direction of the religious landscape.

“Nones” on the Rise

In 2012, the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life issued another study to explore the views of the large and growing number of Americans who consider themselves to be religiously unaffiliated or “nones.” This study confirms that the number of adults who said they have no religion, no particular religion, or no religious preference increased from just over 15% in 2007 to just under 20% in 2012. The increase in 2012 represents an unaffiliated population of roughly 46 million people, but 68% of those indicated a belief in God and

7 U.S. Religious Landscape, 11
8 U.S. Religious Landscape, 7.
10 Ibid.
21% indicated that they prayed every day. Of the 46 million, 74% were raised with some religious affiliation.\textsuperscript{11}

Like the 2008 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey mentioned above, this study attributes much of the growth of the religiously unaffiliated to generational replacement, the supplanting of older generations by newer ones. The study confirms that younger adults between the ages of 18-30 (the Millennials) are less likely to be affiliated than their older counterparts.\textsuperscript{12} In conjunction, there were slight increases in the unaffiliated group from two other generations—Generation Xers (those born between the years of 1965-1980) and Baby Boomers (those born between the years of 1946-1964). These increases signal a decline in religious commitment.

Apart from identifying the particular age groups contributing to the growing number of unaffiliated adults, the study provides other important demographics for the unaffiliated group. From 2007 to 2012, the study marks a significant rise in percentages for women, for the unmarried, for those with some college education, and for those making $30,000 or higher.\textsuperscript{13} Further, increases in the unaffiliated population were noted in all major regions of the country: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 16.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 16.

Implications of Surveys

Though these three studies reflect broad-based trends, they are worthy of consideration because they generate awareness concerning the overall composition of the church body and they provide indications regarding the engagement levels of people who constitute those religious communities. Based on the National Congregations Studies, women comprise the majority of all congregations in America, yet the indicators show that few share in leadership opportunities. This observation is not meant to imply an egalitarian theological approach that insists that men and women should always hold the same leadership roles. Rather, within a complementarian framework, this finding merely implies that there may be some leadership roles that would be biblically open to women, yet women are not involved as much as they could be. This disparity is particularly troubling as The Religious Landscape Survey reflects an overall softening in religious commitment, a softening that comes along with a decline in Protestant affiliation. Further, this softening in religious commitment is poignant next to the increase in the number of unaffiliated adults described in the Rise of the Nones. Among those choosing to disengage are: women, adults with a college-education, adults who are unmarried, and adults making more than $30,000 annually.\textsuperscript{14} The increases in these particular categories signal possible connection and engagement difficulties for working women in church. Further, they require a closer look by local church leaders to determine if working women are experiencing assimilation issues within the congregation.

\textbf{2014 Case Study Large Urban Church in the South}

Because data from the national surveys failed to provide specific information with regard to working women in religious congregations, the student conducted a survey of

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
Protestant women from a large urban church in the South during April and May of 2014. The survey, as a case study, was supported by the pastoral staff along with the Director of Women’s Ministries. As a matter of note, reception from the membership, both men and women, was positive.

With regard to the use of a case study, it should be noted that there was both value and drawbacks in conducting this type of research. To begin, the study provided value in allowing the student to ask specific questions, particularly those about the use of vocational skills for the edification of the church, from a large group of women with a variety of skills and abilities. In turn, the survey and its assessment triggered new conversations and generated more areas of inquiry (i.e. How can the church become acquainted with working women and their particular skills sets? What can be done to increase personal confidence and vision for members wishing to engage on a deeper level? How can leaders identify working women who do not contributing but are willing?) However, the case study approach also had its drawbacks as it was limited to a specific church in a specific region. Though the findings were helpful to this specific church, generalizations for other congregations may not be realistic or practical. Nonetheless, the case study did begin to paint a picture of a critical segment of the congregation and it helped to define other areas for future investigations.

To participate in the case study, female members within the congregation were asked to complete an anonymous survey to help the Women’s Ministries department evaluate the engagement of women within the congregation. The survey included questions about the member’s involvement in the edification of the church as well as basic demographic inquiries. Items on the survey were worded as direct questions with multiple choice answers
and included the following topics: participation levels, participation methods, and participation preferences.

A total of 309 responses were received from 1,700 female members, ages 18 years and older—an 18% response rate. Responses included women with and without work experience. The low response rate is illustrative of the lack of information nationwide concerning working women within religious communities.

As information was analyzed, some survey responses were incomplete or invalid. For this reason, the demographic results were compiled using 242 complete responses. All other information was compiled from the total 309 responses.

Methodology

With the intent to create a user-friendly survey that could be easily analyzed, questions were kept to a minimum number with limited response options. The survey form was developed with input from the thesis advisor, the pastoral staff, the Director of Women’s Ministries, and a national survey firm. A preliminary draft was sent to a select group of women leaders within the church who were asked to respond to the questions and make suggestions for possible changes, additions, or deletions.

After finalizing the questionnaire and obtaining permission from the senior pastoral staff of the church, the form was crafted for online distribution using a subscription service called FormSite.com. The FormSite web service provided the tools necessary for data validation, error handling, and data analysis. In addition, the service gave the church the ability to process, store, and email information related to the survey.
Members were informed about the survey from April 30 to May 12, 2014 in four different ways:

1. Direct email from Formsite.com with a link to the survey
2. Church website with a link to the survey
3. Bulletins and newsletters
4. Various class announcements

In all communication channels, women were asked to complete the questionnaire electronically by midnight on May 12, 2014. Though only a minimal number were returned, paper surveys were made available and collected at the church reception desk. Information from the paper surveys was entered into Formsite.com to facilitate automated analysis.

The final survey form (see Appendix 1) asked women about their past and current level of engagement with the church. In addition, the survey attempted to identify women with vocational skills and abilities. Questionnaire topics included:

- Worship attendance
- Church membership
- Sense of belonging
- Group activities
- Use of professional/vocational skills
- Use of other skills and abilities
- Preferences for church engagement

Key Findings

For this particular congregation, 63% of the members were adult women and 60% were over the age of 18. As indicated by the national trends, women did compromise the majority membership in the church in both categories. Beyond those statistics, the results of the survey revealed that 89% of those women had professional/vocational skills and abilities.
Further, 65% of the respondents were actively using those skills on a full or part-time basis (see Figure 4). If these percentages were to be applied broadly across the female membership 18 years and older, then 1500 women or over 50% of the total membership would be women with workplace skills and abilities—a significant resource of edification for a large urban church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocational Commitment by Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No vocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working, have vocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 4 Vocational commitment of survey respondents](chart)

In addition to the sizeable number of vocational women in the congregation, the results indicated women had many years of education and vocational experience. For this church, 96% held a degree beyond high school (see Figure 5). In conjunction, 60% indicated they had more than ten (10) years of work experience (see Figure 6). Further, the work experience included a variety of industries with concentrations in education and healthcare (see Figure 7).
Figure 5 Education level of survey respondents

Figure 6 Vocational years of experience for survey respondents
As part of the survey, women were questioned regarding the use of any skills and abilities in the edification of the church. The top three areas for respondents were childcare, projects for the poor, and hospitality. However, the results indicated that women were willing to use their abilities in a wide range of areas (see Figure 8), areas beyond childcare, projects for the poor, and hospitality.
To drill down into the use of skills and abilities, 60% indicated that they were finding opportunities to use their vocational skills and abilities for the edification of the church while 40% were not. Of the 40% who were not using their vocational skills and abilities for the edification of the church, half indicated they would be willing. For the half willing to use their vocational skills, respondents were located primarily in the 19-34 age group (largely the Millennials) and the 35-55 (Gen Xers and some Baby Boomers) age group.
With regard to the use of any skill and ability, 74% indicated that they were finding opportunities. Of the 26% not finding opportunities to use their abilities, 11% indicated they would be willing. Again, those respondents were located primarily in the 19-34 age group and the 35-55 age group.

Respondents also had an opportunity to identify obstacles for contributing any of their skills and abilities. In responding to this question, women could choose multiple answers. Interestingly, the top responses were not external impediments. Rather, the top three obstacles were internally-driven as: 1) a lack of time, energy, and resources; 2) a lack of confidence on the part of the respondent; and 3) a lack of vision on the part of the respondent.

In conjunction, women were asked about their sense of belonging within the church. Of the respondents, 88% indicated they had a strong sense of belonging with 41% indicating that the sense of belonging was growing. The response to this question compared favorably to the healthy rate of worship attendance (93% attended worship more than two times per month) and to the years of history with the church (72% had more than 10 years of history at the church). For the 12% who did not share a sense of belonging to the church, it is important to note that the composition was spread evenly across three different age groups; no wide disparities were noted.

In addition to these indicators, survey results revealed other markers reflecting lapses in engagement. Despite the healthy worship attendance, only 30% were involved with a Sunday School class or congregational unit and only 18% participated in a small group or Bible study. Further, few (7%) served on committees while even fewer (3%) acted as worship leaders (i.e. choir, musicians, ushers, lay readers.)
To facilitate and encourage engagement, women were also asked about their preferences. These findings revealed that women were willing to engage and that they valued personal interactions. To that end, the following preferences emerged:

1. Most women indicated they found opportunities to engage through a friend, church leader, or word of mouth.
2. Most women preferred short-term projects or commitments (i.e. once a month, once a quarter, one month each year). This finding revealed that the more the church can do to create discrete, time-limited projects, the more women can engage.
3. Most women preferred to be contacted electronically or online, through Sunday School or congregational unit, or through a request from a church leader or the Director of Women’s Ministries.
4. Most women preferred to affiliate with small, informal groups comprised of both single and married women.
5. Most women indicated flexibility concerning particular days of the week to engage or serve.
6. For women wanting to engage during the week, most preferred the 5 PM–9 PM time period.
7. For women wanting to engage on Saturday, most preferred the 8 AM–Noon time period.
8. For women wanting to engage on Sunday, there was substantial flexibility.

Apart from the multiple choice questions in the survey, women were given an opportunity to share comments. Based on those comments, women were appreciative that the church took steps to acknowledge them as working women within the congregation. Though some made it clear that they were not looking for one more thing to do, there were others that readily shared their skillset and indicated that they were open to using those as a new way of serving.

Options for Vocational Stewardship

Rather than quietly watch the declines as described by the national trends continue, church leaders and working women need to practically consider how to stir each other to
good works. As it stands, the results from the large urban church survey indicate women lack vision and confidence in using their skills, abilities, and influence a holistic manner. To establish connections and engagement within the family of God, the church must learn to appreciate and encourage vocational stewardship. To facilitate growth in this area, members must have opportunities to get to know each other and their respective vocations. Options for generating awareness and cultivating a stronger sense of community include: establishing vocational small groups, conducting classes to help members identify and use their vocational power, offering public and private prayers for specific occupational groups, developing projects to employ vocational abilities, and celebrating vocational contributions.
The purpose of this paper was to present an argument for the engagement of working women in the edification of the church, a mandate in keeping with the covenant promises of God to create a people for his name. First, the lives of Deborah, Ruth, and the Proverbs 31 woman were examined to show how working women from the Old Testament were used to bless the household of Israel. Their examples were then followed by role models from the New Testament, namely Lydia, Priscilla, and Phoebe, who used their business skills, abilities, and influence to strengthen the early church in major urban centers. Then, three doctrinal imperatives were discussed—the Doctrine of Adoption, the Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers, and the Doctrine of Spiritual Gifts—to induce the participation of the children in the family of God in promoting the mission of the church. These imperatives were then followed by a look at modern trends in the U.S. that showed signs of decline in the level of engagement from working women. In an effort to generate awareness for both church leaders and working women, the student then surveyed a large urban church in the South and offered an assessment of the findings, findings which revealed a need and a desire for meaningful engagement from working women.

In looking at the level of engagement from the biblical models and the inclusive nature of the Christian doctrines, one other aspect of the Christian engagement bears mention. The contributions of the Old Testament Precursors and the New Testament Successors occurred in an environment where men and women mutually supported each
other based on the common goal of building up the family of God. Figure 9 illustrates how women worked alongside their male counterparts to effectively serve and edify other believers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working Woman</th>
<th>Male Counterpart</th>
<th>Edification</th>
<th>Honor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deborah</td>
<td>Barak</td>
<td>Stop the Canaanite oppression of the Israelites</td>
<td>Song of Victory in Judg 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Boaz</td>
<td>Secure the lineage of the throne of David</td>
<td>Worthy Woman in Ruth 3:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proverbs 31 woman</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>Ensure the welfare of the family and the community</td>
<td>Worth far more than rubies in Prov 31:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Establish a Jesus-group in Philippi</td>
<td>Paul’s joy and crown in Phil 4:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla</td>
<td>Aquila, Paul</td>
<td>Establish Jesus-groups in Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome</td>
<td>Synergos - coworkers that Paul thanked publicly in Rom 16:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Serve the Jesus-group in Cenchreae, bolster the Jesus-groups in Rome, and lay the groundwork for spread of the gospel to Spain</td>
<td>Letter of Recommendation in Rom 16:1-2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9 Mutual support and the edification of believers

Further, though patriarchal structures and societal limitations existed, these women did not relinquish their skills, abilities, and influence in serving one another, nor were their skills relegated to the marketplace. Rather, their gifts were offered wholeheartedly and used effectively by the household of faith with the framework of the time. In doing so, these sisters of the faith were acknowledged and valued for their service (see Figure 9). As such, these biblical examples illustrate how God worked and continues to work through the interdependence of his people and his divine will. Therefore, in light of the biblical models and doctrinal imperatives, the church, if it is to grow toward maturity, must ensure that
professional women have opportunities to engage in the edification of the body of Christ by using their marketplace skills, abilities, and influence.
APPENDIX 1

SURVEY

Tina Walker is a member of XXXXXXXXXX Church working to complete a Master of Religion degree through Reformed Theological Seminary.

This 5-minute survey has been designed as part of her thesis work to analyze issues affecting women’s ministries and to encourage growth and development within the body of Christ.

Please know that information will only be reported in the aggregate – not on an individual basis. No identifying information will be published or made available to church leadership.

Thank you for your thoughtful participation.

Important!

- Surveys will be distributed in paper form and electronically.
- Please only take the survey 1 time.
- If you can, please complete the electronic version of the survey as results are easier to tabulate.
- Collection boxes will be available at the Information Desk for paper survey submissions.
- Please complete the survey by May 12, 2014.

You and Your Church:

1. How often do you attend worship services?
   - Hardly ever
   - Once a month
   - Two or three times a month
   - Usually every week
   - More than once a week

2. How long have you been attending worship services or activities with XXXXXXXXXX Church?
   - Less than 1 year
   - 1 – 2 years
   - 3 – 5 years
   - 6 – 10 years
3. Are you a member of XXXXXXXXXXX Church?
   o Yes
   o No

4. Do you have a strong sense of belonging to the congregation?
   o Yes and my sense of belonging is growing
   o Yes
   o Not yet
   o No

5. Please indicate the group activities where you participate: (Mark all that apply)
   o Sunday School or Congregational Community
   o Prayer, Discussion, Bible study, Small Group
   o Fellowships or Recreational Activities (i.e. dinners, games, outings, cottage meetings, etc.)
   o Short-term Service Projects (i.e. neighborhood cleanup events, short mission trips, etc.)
   o Long-term Service Projects (i.e. regular support to church partners around the city, etc.)
   o Diaconate
   o Worship Leader (Choir, Musician, Lay Reader, Usher, etc.)
   o Boards or Committees
   o Other ____________________________ (please specify)
   o I am not regularly involved in group activities or projects with or for the church at this time

6. Are you finding opportunities within the congregation to use or contribute your professional/vocational skills, abilities, or influence for the building up and equipping of the church body?
   o Yes, to a great extent
   o Yes, to some extent
   o Yes, to a small extent
   o No, but I would be willing
   o No, it is difficult to connect and contribute
   o No
   o Unsure
7. Are you finding opportunities within the congregation to use or contribute other skills, abilities, or influence for the building up and equipping of the church body?

- Yes, to a great extent
- Yes, to some extent
- Yes, to a small extent
- No, but I would be willing
- No, it is difficult to connect and contribute
- No
- Unsure

8. Please indicate the areas where you have used any of your skills, abilities, or influence for the building up and equipping of the church: (Mark all that apply)

- Projects that serve the poor and marginalized
- Administration or coordination (i.e. special events, conferences, etc.)
- Childcare or Youth activities
- Computer or technical skills
- Construction & Maintenance
- Counseling (reconciliation, support groups, etc.)
- Creative or design work (i.e. art, photography, graphics, set design, flowers, etc.)
- English As a Second Language
- Financial Analysis, Budget Forecasting, Accounting
- Hospitality Endeavors (i.e. food preparation, food service, hosting visitors, etc.)
- Legal or advocacy services Panels, forums, public speaking, teaching
- Marketing or sales
- Medical or dental services
- Recreational Activities
- Vocational small groups, job training, career counseling, testing, etc.
- Writing (church curriculum, grants, booklets, pamphlets, newsletters)
- Other ____________________________ (please specify)
- Not applicable
9. **Please indicate the areas where you have not used but would be willing to use any of your skills, abilities, or influence for the building up and equipping of the church:** (Mark all that apply)

- Projects that serve the poor and marginalized
- Administration or coordination (i.e. special events, conferences, etc.)
- Childcare or Youth activities
- Computer or technical skills
- Construction & Maintenance
- Counseling (reconciliation, support groups, etc.)
- Creative or design work (i.e. art, photography, graphics, set design, flowers, etc.)
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- Legal or advocacy services Panels, forums, public speaking, teaching
- Marketing or sales
- Medical or dental services
- Recreational Activities
- Vocational small groups, job training, career counseling, testing, etc.
- Writing (church curriculum, grants, booklets, pamphlets, newsletters)
- Other ____________________________ (please specify)

10. **What obstacles (if any) have you encountered in using any of your skills, abilities, or influence for the building up and equipping of the church body?**
    (Mark all that apply)

- Church governance or ordinances
- Difficulty in penetrating established groups
- Gender bias
- Lack of vision from church leaders as to how to use my abilities, skills, or influence
- Lack of vision on my part as to how to use my abilities, skills, or influence
- Lack of confidence on my part as to how to use my abilities, skills, or influence
- Lack of time, energy or resources
- Lack of information on the needs of others
- Never been asked to participate or contribute my abilities, skills, or influence
- Other ____________________________ (please specify)
11. If you do use your skills, abilities, or influence for the building up of the church body, how did you find those opportunities? (Mark all that apply)

- Word of mouth
- Invitation from a church leader
- Invitation from a friend
- New member orientation
- Bulletins, newsletters, TV, radio, etc.
- Facebook, Twitter, or other social media
- Took the initiative to create or find opportunities
- Other _________________________________ (please specify)
12. For you to use or continue to contribute your skills, abilities, or influence for the building up of the church body, please indicate the frequency that you would prefer to serve or contribute:

- Once a week
- Once a month
- Once a Quarter
- Monthly – every week for a month
- Quarterly – every week for a quarter
- Yearly—every week for a year
- Special situation or need
- All of the Above

13. How would you prefer to be contacted when it comes to serving?

- Personal request from a church leader or pastor
- Personal request from Director of Women’s Ministries
- Social Media ____________________________ (please specify)
- Electronic Media or Online Registration ____________________ (please specify)
- Invitation by mail
- During Sunday School with congregational unit
- Affiliation with small group or committee
- Other ________________________________ (please specify)

14. How do you like to serve? (Mark all that apply)

- Alone
- With a small group
- With children
- Without children
- With men present in a group
- Without men present in a group
- In a casual or informal situation
- In a formal meeting or service
- With single women
- With married women
- With both single and married women
15. **How do you like to connect with the church?** (Mark all that apply)

- Bible studies or devotional study books
- Group fellowships or dinners
- Recreational or social activities
- Special projects
- Worship activities
- Retreats, special speakers, workshops
- Other ______________________________ (please specify)
- All of the above

16. **Which day of the week is the best time for you to serve?** (Mark all that apply)

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday
- Sunday
- No preference
- No comment

17. **Which time of the day is best for you to serve through the week?**

- Before work
- 8 AM – Noon
- Noon – 4 PM
- 5 PM – 7 PM
- 7 PM – 9 PM
- No preference
- No comment

18. **Which time of the day is best for you to serve on Saturday?**

- 8 AM – Noon
- Noon – 4 PM
- 5 PM – 7 PM
- 7 PM – 9 PM
- No preference
- No comment
19. Which time of the day is best for you to serve on Sunday?
   - 8:00 AM – 9:30 AM
   - 9:30 AM – 11:00 AM
   - 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM
   - 12:30 PM – 6:00 PM
   - 6:00 PM – 7:00 PM
   - 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM
   - No preference
   - No comment

About You:

1. What is your age?
   - Less than 18
   - 19 – 34
   - 35 – 55
   - 56 – 65
   - Over 65

2. What is your present marital status?
   - Never married
   - Married
   - Divorced
   - Widowed

3. How many children do you have?
   - 0
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4 or more

4. What are the ages of your children? (Mark all that apply)
   - 1 - 5 years
   - 6 - 12 years
   - 13 - 18 years
   - 18 - 22 years
   - 23 years or older
   - Not applicable
5. What is the highest educational level you have completed?
   - High School or GED
   - Trade Certificate
   - Associate Degree
   - Bachelor’s Degree
   - Masters, Doctorate or other graduate degree

6. Are you currently involved with professional / vocational work?
   - Yes, full-time
   - Yes, part-time
   - No, but I have previous vocational work experience (of ____ years) and I am not at retirement age
   - No, I am retired
   - No, I am disabled
   - No
   - Other _______________________________ (please specify)

7. How many years of work experience outside the home do you have?
   - 0 - 1
   - 2 - 5
   - 6 - 10
   - 11 - 20
   - 21 - 30
   - More than 30
8. Which of the following industries best describes your professional / vocational work experience? (Mark all that apply)

- Architecture and Engineering Occupations
- Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations
- Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations
- Business and Financial Operations Occupations
- Community and Social Service Occupations
- Computer and Mathematical Occupations
- Construction and Extraction Occupations
- Education, Training, and Library Occupations
- Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations
- Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations
- Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations
- Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations
- Healthcare Support Occupations
- Homemaker with or without children
- Legal Occupations
- Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations
- Management Occupations
- Military Specific Occupations
- Office and Administrative Support Occupations
- Personal Care and Service Occupations
- Production Occupations
- Protective Service Occupations
- Sales and Related Occupations
- Transportation and Material Moving Occupations
- Other ________________________________ (please specify)

9. Please provide the following information if you would like to be contacted by a member of the staff concerning opportunities to use your skills, abilities, and influence within the body of Christ and the ministries of XXXXXXXXXX Church.

Name: _________________________________

Phone: _________________________________

Email: _________________________________

10. Additional Comments:

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

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Journal Articles


Online Surveys


