

Women's Ministry, is it mandated, beneficial or completely unnecessary?

There is a growing controversy today with churches assessing whether or not to have a women's ministry. Is it mandated in scripture, always beneficial or not necessary at all? These are real questions leaders are asking.

The term "women's ministry" can mean many different things. So first, let's describe it. The word "ministry" is defined as "spiritual service." Therefore, in a church, a Women's Ministry would meet the spiritual, emotional, and social needs of women.

What does Scripture say?

The Bible does not mandate that churches have a women's ministry; the words are not found within scripture. It does however describe principles for ministry yet stops short of giving us methods to accomplish it. This creates freedom to determine our effectiveness based on things like cultural settings, demographics, times and seasons, etc.

It's true, one cannot reasonably argue that scripture mandates we have a women's ministry. However, I do think we can conclude that women ought to be engage in ministering to other women. In Titus 2, older women are told to "train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God" (Titus 2:4-5 NIV). Paul charged Titus to equip the older women in his

church so that they might be ready to teach the younger women. The list of what is to be taught to younger women regards their character and matters of the home. With this in mind, we look for the best way for women to learn God's heart for these things, which is by teaching them what the Bible says and how to apply it to their lives. Furthermore, Ephesians 4:11-13 speaks of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to the church "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature" (NIV). One key way to bring this maturity in faith is to teach women the Bible (cf. Romans 10:17).

There is not one model for how to minister to women, but many possibilities. It is imperative that a church show they care for women, which can be done in a variety of ways. From thriving Bible studies with multiple teachers and an organizational chart topping 100 names, to small prayer groups gathering with just few and everything in between. The key is spiritual health. If the Bible is being taught well, prayerfully the women will grow in their faith.

Benefits

Women express that they are encouraged in their faith from the fellowship they experience in the context of women's ministry, finding strength to go on in life despite the trials, realizing they do not walk this journey alone.

Other benefits include:

- A safe space to share struggles, and prayer requests, uniquely as a woman
- Develop meaningful friendships.
- Accountability.
- Spiritual growth.
- Opportunities to serve and use spiritual gifts.

Women have shared things and gained wisdom in women's groups that they would never be able to experience with men present.

Difficulties

Often women feel anxious when gathering with groups of women. Even seeing the word "fellowship" brings about fear. A simple group introduction or invitation to pray out loud can send someone out the door, never to return. Women come through the doors with fears, anxieties and horrible past experiences. Willing to try again, they come wondering whether they can trust those around them this time.

Another difficulty arises when a women's ministry becomes a church within a church. When a women can attend women's ministry activities alone without ever attending a church service this could be a red flag to the ministry leader that the ministry has created a church of their own. This ascribes authority to the women leaders and can often promote the usurping of authority to the pastors of the church.

For those leading, we must be motivated by love, having a heart for women, and display a good character, not self-serving or

self-promoting. Skills can be taught, a heart to serve has to come from within. It's been said, "everything rises or falls on great leadership," so having the right women in place is essential.

Push back...

What if a Lead Pastor is not interested in having a Women's Ministry? Prayer would be the best place to start in this situation, and possibly a meeting with the pastor to hear his heart on the matter and share yours. It is important that the Women's Ministry follow the Lead Pastor's vision for the church and help serve the needs of the women within it.

What if the women's ministry leaders are gossips, slanders, spiritually immature, or are running a ministry where their power and position is more valuable than understanding and obeying scripture? Sometimes the best thing for a pastor to do is shut down an unhealthy ministry and re-launch it with a healthy vision and leaders to match. Leaders must be mature in doctrine, character, their service to the women, and in submission to their pastors and elders in order to establish healthy ministry.

In conclusion

Although Women's ministry is not mandated in the Bible, it is beneficial if done with mature leadership, healthy guidelines, and founded on teaching the Bible. The benefits reaped are creating a community where spiritual growth flourishes, training takes place, room is given for the use of spiritual gifts, and support and encouragement are provided in a loving environment with our hearts oriented towards God.

Look for the next steps in our post on how to start a Women's Ministry!