

Womanhood Case Studies

A. Case Study: *Marriage*

Caroline has been married for more than 25 years with high school and college-aged kids. Her husband lost his job in the financial sector two years ago and is still unemployed. This once very affluent family is struggling financially. Caroline is resentful and makes this very much known to her husband (with passive, but biting/coarse comments). Caroline's lack of respect is evident, as is her husband's emotional retreat. Her relationship with her husband is strained and they frequently argue.

In addition, Caroline is very resistant to any thought of working outside the home for income. The chronic struggle of the emotional pain of unemployment, the hold of traditional gender roles with regard to work, view of money, etc. all come into play, along with their decades old marriage and their struggle with sin. Caroline confides to the women in her Bible study group about the situation. "My husband is lazy. Sometimes I wonder why God is punishing our family."

1. How does a biblical understanding of womanhood affect the way a women's ministry reaches out to women whose marriages are in crisis?
2. How could the women in her church help her Caroline think biblically in this stage of their marriage?

B. Case Study: *Teens*

An elder's wife has a teen daughter who feels isolated from the other girls in youth group and no longer wants to attend youth group. One Sunday this teen girl came wearing a modest outfit she had worn two weeks in a row. Some of the other girls in youth group texted demeaning comments about the fact that she wore the same outfit two Sundays in a row to other girls and guys in youth group (hundreds of kids).

Another student forwarded the girl the text. The girl feels as if people don't like her and is so mortified she does not want to go back to youth group.

The youth staff and youth pastor have taught to the issue of encouraging others in the youth group but it does have cliques and "mean girls".

1. How can women with an understanding of biblical womanhood be an encouragement to this girl and others like her in youth group?
2. If this elders' wife was your friend, how would you point her to Scripture? Come alongside her?

C. Case Study: *Younger Single Women*

You have the opportunity to lead a small group bible study of young, single, professional women in your church. You know these women well as you have not only taught them in your small group, but also served alongside them in different ministry endeavors through your local church. Last night during bible study, the women began sharing a mutual concern that they desire godly men to pursue them. They are ready for marriage, but have no prospects in sight. They want to maintain a joyful spirit, but find that they are growing discontent.

1. What are some of the present-day challenges that face our young single Christian women?
2. Do you see yourself reaching out to these women in your church? How could you be of encouragement personally? Are you being intentional as her sister in Christ to offer life-giving attention to the younger single women in your congregation? If yes, share with the group how and in what ways?
3. How can you bring others alongside them to encourage them?
4. Do your women's ministries offer avenues for the young single professional women in your church? If so, share with the group what your women's ministry offers that demonstrates an understanding of biblical womanhood. If not, brainstorm together what a local church could offer this group of women in your church.

D. Case Study: *Older Single Women*

Older single women are in many ways the modern-day equivalent of widows in biblical times. These women have beautiful, faithful, and painful stories. Many of them have a deep love for Jesus and their heart knowledge of Him is evident. Older single women tend to be very sacrificial, serving the church in quiet, non-showy ways that often are easily overlooked by their brothers and sisters. Many in this life stage are longing for family and look to the church as an opportunity for a taste of it. Yet, it is hard for them to break into the lives of married couples with or without children because of the protective barriers we put on our “family time”.

Such boundaries are both good and important but don't we as a church also have a calling to care for these sisters—to see, listen and speak with intentionality? To seek them out? To serve them? To open our doors and welcome them into our homes and families in meaningful ways? These women are not only looking for other women to care for them, but it is important for them to have men in their lives that speak truth, dignity, respect, and wisdom.

1. How can our women's ministry and church demonstrate a biblical view of womanhood and appropriately better care for older single women?
2. Do you see yourself reaching out to these women in your church? How could you be of encouragement personally? Are you being intentional as her sister in Christ to offer life-giving attention to the older single women in your congregation? If yes, share with the group how and in what ways?

E. Case Study: *Single Mothers*

Two women in a church both had marriages end in divorce after years of counseling, church discipline, etc. Both cases were biblically sound reasons for divorce. During this tragic and difficult time, both women found the church, the Session, and their church community to be a critical support. They have countless stories underscoring how well they felt cared for by the Church.

However, now that they are divorced, adjusting to life as single moms, and recreating “normal” in the absence of a husband and marriage, the church has been a difficult place for them. This same place of respite, life, hope and care now feels hard. These single moms say this is not due to anyone’s lack of love or understanding; but rather, the realities of being a single mom and woman alone in the same church where they once were married, and had their children baptized, are difficult. Church feels alien and uncomfortable.

The transition from marriage to a life as a single parent (for ANY reason) feels terribly lonely, even when the church is providing extra care for any physical needs. It’s almost as if now that the “dust has settled” they don’t know how to engage with the body.

1. How should we help women make this transition and find their places in the Church after the crisis surrounding a major life change is over?
2. Are there any modifications we could make to our existing ministries that might make this transition easier?

F. Case Study: *Fertility Issues*

A couple who desired to have children spent several years trying, but with no success. They eventually decided to try in vitro fertilization and had a son as a result. Not long after, they did the procedure again, and ended up having triplets. The oldest child and the triplets are close in age (triplets are 4 now), and needless to say, this is a very busy mom. She went from no children to four little ones in a short period of time. She has been hit or miss at church because someone is always sick, or it’s just too difficult to get everyone ready, etc. She is the subject of critical comments from other moms in the church who say that she is unorganized, always in chaos, not making church a priority, etc.

The Pastor’s wife has talked to a few of these women, working to encourage them to serve, empathize, and love this mom, rather than being critical of her. It became evident that the criticism is coming from a deeper place. A few of the women made negative comments about this couple’s decision to have their children through in vitro fertilization. They blame this couple’s being so busy on the fact that the couple made an unethical decision in the way they conceived.

- How might a theological understanding of covenant, church, and womanhood help us respond biblically to all involved in this situation?

G. Case Study: Bible Study Group Issues

Mary is single (never been married) and in her late 50s. She is not a member of your church or any church, but is a professing Christian. She has attended the Women's Bible Study at your church for one year. Some of the women have complained or left the study because Mary monopolizes conversations and leaves little time for others to speak. Even when the small group leader addresses another woman, Mary finds a way to give her input. Mary is lonely has few relationships outside of her family, who live far away.

1. How do you address this biblically with Mary?
2. How do you address this biblically with the other women in the small group?
3. What are some reactions you should be careful to avoid?

H. Case Study: Supporting Church Discipline

A leadership couple who have been long-time members are having marital issues. The husband asks if a leadership woman would come alongside his wife (who is also in leadership) to help her be a better wife. After a couple years of discipling and many years of marriage counseling, it is clear that there is a great deal of emotional abuse in the marriage. The session is involved and the husband denies the emotional abuse. There is some confusion and division over how to handle this very difficult situation. You hear that some leadership women are complaining that they believe the session is mishandling the situation.

1. What life-taking reactions must be avoided in this situation?
2. How might the women be helpers in this?
3. Are there ways the women could breathe life into this situation?

Women's Ministry Resource

I. Additional Case Studies:

How does Scripture speak to us in addressing women with these issues?

1. A mother with a teenage daughter who was caught twice “sexting” two boys in youth group? The mother, who is a committed Christian, is so grieved by this situation.
2. A single woman asks: “Is it OK for me to seek out a potential date/marriage on eHarmony or other dating websites? Is that biblical?”
3. A single woman who contracted an STD due to past sin, now wonders when to tell her current Christian boyfriend about her situation. How far into a relationship should she go before letting him know? She is terrified of rejection and already feels “unlovable” in many ways.