

Devotionals for Women's Ministry Teams From Women's Ministry Leadership Training 2023



Better Together... Stone Upon Stone

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:4-5)

Each Sunday night after a long day of ministry, I grab a bowl of popcorn, and Chris and I watch *All Creatures Great and Small*. This PBS TV show is set in the dales of Yorkshire, England. I was privileged to travel to this region on behalf of our International Women's Ministry to learn alongside our UK sisters. Its beauty redefined my vocabulary. I will never use the word *idyllic* for anything other than this patch of God's earth. In particular, I was fascinated by the stacked stone walls that define the landscape of the dales. There are over 5,000 miles of these boundaries. Some have stood for over 2500 years. They are fashioned by the land owners stone upon stone without using mortar. These walls are constructed with two or three rows of stones to strengthen the fence. Sometimes stones must be chiseled for the perfect fit so the walls can withstand storms.

Believers are living stones because of our union with Christ, the Living Stone. We are diversely shaped by the Word, prayer, and His people. Trials and temptations are chiseling us. Perhaps we are uncomfortable as we are fitted next to other diverse stones in Christ's Church. Christ is the master architect with a master plan. He loves His Church, so we are being built together. This action is in the passive voice and points to something that is being built upon a foundation that has already been laid. You and I are being placed, and God is doing the construction. We yield to His master blueprint. The great reveal is a spiritual house that offers up praises to God in our words and deeds.

Your team is being pressed and built together as you serve alongside one another. Christ will use tasks, trials, and conflict to refine His house. He will fit you so closely together as you serve that you will no longer be seen as individuals but as a united team. As you serve, He will unite your hearts into a spiritual house oriented towards continually coming to the precious, chosen, and Living Stone. You will come with your needs, desires, and questions for wisdom. What happens when a lone stone, personality-driven team member decides she knows the best building plan? How about when a preference-driven team member chooses to bolt because she did not get her way? What if a team member elevates bricks over stones desiring uniformity rather than unity? This independent focus undermines the integrity of the whole. I invite you to surrender to what Christ is building on your women's ministry team designed by Him to strengthen His spiritual house.

Devotional Discussion Questions:

We have provided these discussion questions for you to continue to grow as a women's ministry team.

- How are you individually being shaped, chiseled, and sanctified as a team member?
- Share one or two ways that you are better together corporately as a team because you are being fitted together life upon life?
- Do you think the members of your church see your women's ministry as individual independent stones who gather for meetings or a unified interdependent house deployed to serve?
- Do you identify any areas of weakness or gaps on your team that could shape your prayers for your women's ministry team?



One Voice Women's Ministry

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 15:5-6

Singing has always been central to my life. Over the years, I have participated in various choirs and ensembles and even sung an occasional solo. But stepping out on the stage as a soloist has not always been my finest moment. One time in particular, in high school, I approached the carpeted stairs to step up on the platform and grab my microphone. I turned around in my new black pumps only to tumble down the stairs in front of my church family. Unfortunately, this was before the song. I picked myself off the floor, walked back up, and eked out my solo. I should have listened to my mom and scuffed up the bottom of my new shoes!

Sprawled on the floor was a two-is-better-than-one moment. "Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)! I share my feeble fall, perhaps to evoke a smile and get your attention to consider another idea. There is something very glorious when a choir director can bring together different people with various musical skills and voices to lead them around the notes and lyrics of a beautiful piece. The audience hears not one voice but many harmoniously blended, singing the same song. The gospel enables us to gather a diverse covenant family to sing—with one voice—music that glorifies our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Every woman's ministry team is singing a song. Sometimes a soloist breaks out during an event with lyrics that spotlight her agenda. At a team meeting, preferences might derail purposes in what sounds like everyone playing their own personal favorites Spotify list at the same time. The women of your church and the world around you are leaning in and listening. What do they hear? Is it the same song but the second verse? Is it a ballad about the glory of the good old days? Are you singing from the same sheet of music? Women's ministry was never intended to be a solo act!

A women's ministry team's purposes should first and foremost be shaped by their theology which fuels their doxology. J.I. Packer highlights melodic overflow, "The older I get, the more I want to sing my faith and get others singing it with me. Theology is for doxology: the first thing

to do with it is to turn it into praise and thus honor the God who is its subject." Women's ministry is an invitation to sing in His choir, singing songs that bring glory to the Master Musician. As we are united in singing with one voice, it is a melodious invitation to the women of our church to sing along with us.

Devotional Discussion Questions:

- Share what lyrics (words or phrases you often use) you think are written on the sheet music of your women's ministry team.
- Do you perceive you are singing the same song? If so, do you hear more solos or choir numbers?
- What do you think the women in your church and those outside your church hear?
- How can you create an invitational culture where you invite other women to sing the truths about who God is and the majesty of His glory along with you?



PURPOSEFUL PILLARS

*Our daughters will be like **pillars** carved to adorn a palace. Psalm 144:12 (NIV)*

*But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a **pillar** of salt. Genesis 19:26 (NIV)*

*...you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a **pillar** and buttress of the truth. 1 Timothy 3:15 (ESV)*

This past summer Chris and I had the opportunity to travel to Italy and admire some of the world's greatest architecture. It was humbling to consider the historical importance and walk into the Coliseum, built in 70 AD. Floor upon floor, you can observe Tuscan-style Doric columns, elaborate Ionic columns, and intricate Corinthian columns. These beauties support and connect to this marvel which has stood strong for millennia. These architectural wonders point us to life-giving and life-taking realities in the Church.

The psalmist calls us daughters, which are pillars carved to adorn a place. You can still see Greek temples where female pillars adorn temples. Here, the word *pillar* is not a free-standing or ornamental pillar but a functional and supportive one. And the word *palace* refers to a home or church. As women in Christ's Church, we live out our helper design by being strategically placed to provide both support and connection. We are carved, shaped, and positioned through life-on-life gospel discipleship. Women's ministry equips us to be helpers who support the work and worship of the Church as we cultivate a gospel-shaped community. We are also connectional life-givers as we extend relational bridges that foster care to our covenant family. These daughters are deployed to provide life-giving protection and comfort in a polluted world.

Pillars are often unseen but are essential. We may chafe at this idea when our pride yearns for recognition. Independence and autonomy lead to instability. This is the life-taking picture of Lot's wife, who became a pillar of salt. In the Genesis narrative, the word *pillar* means stopped, trapped, or transformed, as in a still and upright position. When the LORD extended mercy to Lot's family for a gracious escape as He rained down sulfur on the evils of Sodom and Gomorrah, He had one condition: don't look back! Instead of looking forward to protection and peace, she looked back in self-centered immaturity. She had a small view of God and His omnipotence and was rendered, stopped, and trapped. Jesus uses this picture of a female pillar as a cautionary warning, "Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it" (Luke 17:32-33 NIV).

You and I, as Christ's Church are being built together into the household of God. This beautiful construction picture by Paul shows us the glory of the covenant community. Pillars and

buttresses are architectural beauties. A buttress, or foundation, is essential to the stability of a building. A church is only as good as its truth-established foundation. Pillars lift our eyes upward and provide connectational support. They give a church both strength and attraction. The world is proliferated with lies, but the Church is the place where the truth forms the foundation of everything and is the pillar that upholds it for the world to see. This is why we need to train women to think biblically. Our women's ministries should be Word-based. As we gather to study the Scriptures together, we not only lay them as a firm foundation for life and ministry but also seek to adorn them in our lives. So, as the world leans in and looks, they will believe the truth and live.

Devotional Discussion Questions:

- What are two or three ways I can support those in my church family?
- Describe how a woman was a connector for you as you relate to other women?
- How do these actions cultivate a gospel-shaped, life-giving culture in your church?
- How has sin stalled, stopped, or trapped you for being embodied with God's people?
- How can your women's ministry equip women to think biblically about the Church being the place where the truth forms the foundation of everything and is the pillar that upholds it for the world to see?



WEDDING PREP

Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. Revelation 19:7-8

When my daughter Anna Grace got engaged to Kevin, she was finishing college in Los Angeles. It was fun sharing an exciting time of preparation for the big day. We chatted about her idea of the perfect wedding. I reminded her as a pastor's kid, this was her shot. If she wanted to get married at her church in LA, she could easily scale the guest list, but if she returned home to her home church in Naperville, Illinois, then that might present a challenge. Not only did Anna Grace want to come home to get married, but she also wanted to invite her Naperville covenant family and special covenant family from every church we had served in during her lifetime. She even wanted to include the little kids whom she had taught in children's worship and for them to have a special table with crayons and cupcakes. Endless guest lists and an unknown amount of wedding food, no problem, right? I knew right then that it would take a covenant village to pull this off, so I quickly began recruiting. There was no way I could do this on my own. From the food to the decor, it was all hands on deck. It was glorious to see how the Lord raised a team of willing hands and hearts to bring everything together.

The sanctuary was packed to the brim on June 27th. Anna Grace had an older woman from our congregation come and help her dress and put on her make-up. In the days leading up to this special day, we had time to reflect and be thankful for the spiritual mothers, fathers, and gospel friends who had nurtured her throughout her life. Seated with our family, these special guests were from our ministry days spent at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama, Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, North Carolina, and Treasure Coast Presbyterian in Stuart, Florida. When Anna Grace had arrived at Biola, she sought the wisdom of spiritual parents in a beloved professor and his wife who also participated in the ceremony.

As I stood in the back of the sanctuary, about to grab the arm of my son Haddon, I clutched a tissue my friend had slipped into my hand with this encouragement, "Don't do the ugly cry; remember there are photographers." I looked back over my shoulder and saw Anna Grace holding onto Chris who would not only walk her down the aisle but step up and marry Kevin and Anna Grace. I looked at Haddon and thought about all the gospel-shaped conversations with his big sister in the car and around the kitchen table. But as I rounded the corner, I saw the scope of the whole—a sanctuary filled with hundreds of people who faithfully loved and

showed Anna Grace the shape of godliness. Then I looked forward and saw Kevin waiting for his bride at the front of the church.

I am sure you can guess what happened. I did the ugly cry, and believe me, we have a picture to prove it! I cried because it is a rare and rich privilege to witness the scope of the whole covenant moment on this side of heaven. God sovereignly places us in specific covenant families during strategic seasons to profoundly shape us. As our friend Chandra Oliver said at LT, "God never gets the address wrong." God used these people to prepare Anna Grace from the time she was born to meet her bridegroom Kevin. It took more than her biological parents; it required a discipleship team to do this sacred work. The joy of gospel-shaped discipleship is participating with the Holy Spirit's work to prepare the Bride to meet the Bridegroom. When a women's ministry sets the table to feast on God's Word, it is a foretaste of the bounty of the wedding feast. When they adorn the gospel in serving shoulder to shoulder, as the women of my church did preparing for Anna Grace's wedding, it is a glimpse of the radiance of the Bride as she prepares for her wedding day. When we intentionally invest in teen-aged young women and little girls in our churches, we make a gospel deposit that will one day be revealed in their glorious preparation for the Bridegroom. No one woman can lead this holy wedding prep effort. Women's ministry is not primarily about tasks or events. It invites all women to this sacred holy calling to join the Spirit's work to prepare the Bride for the Bridegroom in everything we say and do.

Devotional Discussion Questions:

- How has God used others to prepare you for the Bridegroom?
- How has serving along other women prepared you to meet the Bridegroom?
- When you consider the good work you do in women's ministry, is it more focused on tasks or events or the sacred holy work of participating with the Holy Spirit to prepare the Bride for the Bridegroom?
- Are you trying to do this work alone in self-sufficiency, or have you experienced the joy of covenant teamwork?
- As you consider the future of women's ministry, how can you realign and reorient your service towards this eternal holy work?



Chocolate Cake Mistake

As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

1 Corinthians 12:20-22

It is hard to go to someone's house empty-handed, right? A few years ago, I was tasked with bringing a family favorite, the black beast, to the gathering. A beloved friend and cook, Miss Pam, introduced us to this intense chocolate dessert years ago. Remember last week when I told you about Anna Grace's wedding? The beast was her wedding cake! It is as dense and over the top as you might like to imagine. On the way into the gathering, I tripped on a crack in the sidewalk. I think back upon that incident in slow motion. At some point in the fall, I made a choice. I lifted my hand to save the cake and sacrificed my shoulder on the concrete. I was a mess, but the beast survived. As dinner progressed and dessert was served, I realized I could not move my shoulder. When others observed my need, I brushed it off with an "I am fine." I did not come out and rudely say, "I have no need of you," but that is what my stiff-shouldered self-sufficiency communicated.

The next day I knew I had to go to the doctor because it turns out you need a shoulder to fasten a bra and put on a shirt. Humbled by my lack of mobility, I made an appointment to figure out how to regain the use of my shoulder. I never fully appreciated my shoulder for the praise it is due until I had no use of it.

Paul reminds us that you and I are part of Christ's Body. He is the perfect Head who directs each of its members for useful purposes. The Body of Christ, like all bodies, is comprised of many parts. There are limbs, organs, and other parts that, when isolated, are useless, but when connected together, make the body function. Ears hear essential truths in the Church. Eyes see the needs of those in their small group. Shoulders are necessary to extend an arm in service. We live in a radically individualistic, independent culture. Everything shouts, *I have no need of you!* We may not utter these words with our lips, but when we seek to go it alone, that is what we are communicating to others. How about you? Do you believe that you actually need others? When was the last time you asked for help? Are you a gracious receiver and faithful giver? In what ways have you praised others for the ways that God uses them to strengthen the Body?

Women's ministry is a perpetual show-and-tell discipleship classroom. Our teams get to put this gospel reality on display. A diversity of gifts working together is powerful when there is a unity of purpose and mission. We have the privilege to show and tell that we are better together. Community collaboration is God's perfect design from the beginning. "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18 NIV). As each team member grows in understanding her gifts and graces and then deploys them in kingdom service, the entire Church is strengthened. The beast tasted good that night, but there is nothing sweeter than being vitally connected to Christ as our Head and to each other in the Body.

Devotional Discussion Questions:

- Do you believe that you actually need others?
- Share an example of how you have communicated intentionally or unintentionally that you have no need of others?
- When was the last time you asked for help?
- Are you a gracious receiver and faithful giver?
- In what ways have you praised others for the ways that God uses them to strengthen the Body? Share an example of a specific person who is essential to body-life in your Church.
- Discuss 3 or 4 ways your team can appreciate the diverse gifts of each other and then work with unity of purpose and mission.