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CALLED TO INFLUENCE

## Finding Your Place in Ministry

Discover a place that's  
uniquely yours in the  
body of Christ.



## Finding Your Place in Ministry

Discover a place that's uniquely yours in the body of Christ.



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Introduction

## When I Grow Up in Christ

*By Janine Petry*



I don't think any question was asked more of me as a child than, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I'm sure you can relate. And depending upon which year I was posed the question, I'd give a different answer.

There was the time I wanted to be a concert pianist. So I practiced every day for hours—until I decided I didn't want the pressure. Not long after, I wanted to be a sailor. I thought some historic sail ship might need an extra hand. But in the end it seemed too impractical. Then I thought I'd just settle for fame and fortune, and become an inspirational speaker. But I'm still working on getting over that public speaking phobia.



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I am fully aware that none of these "occupations" has anything to do with the other. Thankfully, none of them materialized. Regardless of what I wanted to be, the thing is—I was always thinking about it. I'm confident you probably were too.

But here's something I didn't think about: what I'd like to be when I grew up in Christ. As a child, I'm not sure I spent much time—if any—contemplating my place in ministry. I knew that I'd have a place, but I didn't think of what that place would be. Perhaps as a result, I have spent years trying to discern God's will for me as his servant. And I've come to understand that nothing could be more important than finding my place in his work, and becoming who he wants me to be there.

If you feel "all grown up" in Christ, but you're still uncertain as to what your place is, know that you're not alone. Many women struggle in the same way. But no matter how long you've felt out of place, that doesn't change the fact that God knows the plans that he has for you—"plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). It's not too late to discover your place.

In the following collection of articles, you'll find practical insights to help guide you to your unique purpose and place in ministry. You'll also be inspired by God's work in the lives of other women, pointing





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you to look to him for the answers you seek. Remember that "everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:8).

Blessings,

*Janine Petry*

Contributing Editor, KYRIA downloads,  
Christianity Today International





## How to use “Finding Your Place in Ministry” for a group study

“Finding Your Place in Ministry” can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

1. **Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
2. **Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
3. **Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
4. **Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
5. **When working through the “Reflect” questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It’s important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
6. **End the session in prayer.**



## Hearing God's Call

How can I figure out what God wants me to do with my life?

*By Nancy Ortberg*



There are few things more attractive, more noticeable, than someone who's pursuing an activity she loves and is good at. We've all had the remarkable experience of sitting in a classroom listening to a teacher who engages and awakens the deepest parts of who we are. I have a friend who runs a gardening service, and as I listen to him talk about keeping a family's yard looking nice, the joy and skill he brings to what he does are obvious.

It's an amazing and fulfilling thing to live life in line with God's design and calling on your life. But it can seem difficult and overwhelming to discover it. Here is my suggestion: *Pay attention to who God made you to be.*



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What gives you life? What are you good at? What do you love to do? What consistent patterns are noticeable in you that may be clues to your design and calling? Before he met Christ, the apostle Paul was an activist and a zealot—an articulate *opponent* of the church. When he met Christ, he continued to be an activist and a zealot, but he changed for whom he worked. Acts 9:20 says he at once began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. He didn't change who he was by design, but he did change the Lordship in his life

Noticing what you're not good at is also valuable information. We only have so many "yeses" we can give, so don't spend them on what you don't do well. After having spent years paying attention to who God made me to be, I know I shouldn't say "yes" to volunteering in the church nursery. The kids in the nursery agree with me. But there are people who really love that work, and the church nursery is a remarkable place when they're the ones in it.

We each have a unique design. You may be able to learn by watching someone else, but your calling isn't her calling. Don't get caught in the comparison trap like the apostle Peter. In John 21, right after Jesus says three times to Peter, "Take care of my sheep," Peter looks at John the disciple and says to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" (v. 21). It's as if he's saying, "Yeah, I heard what your calling for me is, but before I decide, I'd like to hear about John, compare the callings, and then decide."

Jesus replies to Peter in words that are pretty direct and a bit harsh: "What is that to you? You must follow me" (v. 22).







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So, while I'm no help in the nursery, I've found things I *am* good at—things that make me feel alive, that others notice I do well. When I'm teaching a group of people or leading a meeting, good things often result, and I get the sense this is what I was made to do. Teaching and leading—these are my spiritual gifts and a large part of my calling.

Finally, remember that God's calling for your life goes way beyond what you *do*. It's who you are, where you belong, who and how you love. In our culture's preoccupation with success and celebrity, it's easy to approach calling in a way that's not much more than those two things covered by a thin veneer of spirituality. Parker Palmer wrote a wonderful book called *Let Your Life Speak* that directs us to discover and live a life wherein our God-given design intersects with what the world needs. I think a life lived operating in the gifts God has given us—and mindful of meeting the needs of others—is a life that beautifully reflects the person of God. The world could use more people like that.

*Nancy Ortberg is a church leadership consultant and popular speaker. Formerly a teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church, she now lives in California with her husband, John. The couple has three children, Laura, Mallory, and John. This article first appeared in the March /April 2005 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





## Finding Your Place in Ministry

### Hearing God's Call

## Reflect

- *In what ways is discovering your place in ministry overwhelming? How can you overcome these difficulties?*
- *How would you answer the author's questions: "What gives you life? What are you good at? What do you love to do? What consistent patterns are noticeable in you that may be clues to your design and calling?"*
- *How does your life go beyond what you do?*



## Go Ahead— Dream



You'll be surprised at  
what God will do!

*By Stacey Padrick*

**W**hen I was a child, I owned a plaque that pictured a kitten on a rock gazing up at a golden butterfly. Its caption read, "Set aside some dreaming time." While I loved the photo, I always thought of a dreamer as someone with her head in the clouds—forgetting the real world around her. So when I entered college, I left dreaming to the philosophy students. It seemed impractical in the real world of limited resources, changing job markets, and fierce competition. I stuck to what could be measured and graphed—often putting myself and God in a box.



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But several years ago, I was diagnosed with systemic lupus, which turned my "real world" upside down. Physically weakened and highly susceptible to viruses, I had to withdraw from activities, and some of my deepest desires no longer seemed possible. As my hopes for the future evaporated, I had to start trusting God with my aspirations. And as I began to trust, to my surprise, I sensed God beckoning me to start dreaming about doing things seemingly unrelated to my education and training, dreams that may seem insignificant in others' eyes. But these dreams—learning to swing dance, writing a book, leading a missions trip to Asia, and more—make my heart sing. I've allowed God to take me from my comfort zone and do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20).

Do you limit yourself to what's possible? Practical? Acceptable? Do you find it difficult to allow yourself to dream? The following ideas will help you begin to listen to your heart's desires.

**Preface your planning with prayer.** Ask God to grant you wisdom and inspiration, to open your eyes to a greater vision of your life and him. I used to hesitate to dream, wondering, *What if I dream something that isn't God's plan for me? Who am I to say what I want?*

Yet, as I'm growing in my relationship with God, I'm learning he wants me to be honest with him. God encourages us to pursue our dreams while we rejoice in him. "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). Pray God would reveal the dreams he's written on your heart.





## Finding Your Place in Ministry

Go Ahead—Dream

A few years after college, a friend recommended me for an overseas graduate scholarship. Though I'd dreamed of an opportunity such as this for years, I hesitated, wondering if I should stay at the missions organization where I was working. The trip would be a lot of work, and I wasn't sure I was prepared for the challenges I'd face.

Despite my reservations, I paid attention to this dream I felt God had given me. I applied, won the scholarship, and studied overseas. There God gave me abundant ministry opportunities to share his love with students from around the world.

**Set aside some time.** Find time to be alone in a quiet place—maybe a scenic spot you enjoy. Often nature can help us "think big" as we see the grandeur of God's creation. Even a quiet corner in a local library or café can provide an atmosphere for reflection. Bring a journal, pencil, and perhaps a book to stimulate your thinking. One book that helped me was *The Path: Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and for Life*, by Laurie Beth Jones (Hyper-ion). Another that may help you is *Follow Your Heart* by Judy Peterson (Cook Communications).

**Let your pencil go!** During a job search, I took out my pencil and began to list my dreams—even the wild and crazy ones: learning Chinese, hang gliding, becoming a missionary journalist. Exhilaration and excitement surged through me when I allowed myself to dream with abandon.

Let your mind and pencil go! Color outside the lines. Ask yourself: *If money, time, or background had no bearing, what would I dream? What activities give me a sense of*





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*being fully alive? What gifts do I enjoy using? What things do I do to bless my friends? What makes me feel as though I were made for this?* All these can be clues to help you detect and shape your dreams.

My friend Tamara, whose parents ran a restaurant for years, has a flair for gourmet cuisine and entertaining. Friends often refer to her as "Martha Stewart" and rave about her food presentations. Encouragement from friends and family, coupled with much prayer on her part, led Tamara to open her own restaurant at the age of 27. Within two years, it was the most popular gourmet restaurant in town.

**Silence the skeptic.** As you pursue your dreams, be aware of skeptical, discouraging thoughts. For example, when I began writing, my inner critic immediately accused, *Me? Write? I can't write! Besides, I don't have anything of value to say.* By identifying your reservations, you'll be better able to discern whether dreams are from God, yourself, or Satan, who will try to deter you from God's plan.

Don't define your limits! Let God decide what you can and can't do. I've argued with God many times about my capabilities. I can attest that arguing only wastes time and obstructs blessings. God *loves* to work through weaknesses and apparent impossibilities. Truly, "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

I wanted to do something adventurous after college, but when God opened a door for me to teach in China, I thought, *No way! I can't teach. I'm too young to teach at a university! I don't know a thing about China nor do I speak a word of Chinese!* Yet, trusting God, I finally stepped







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forward and went. That year was the most fulfilling year of my life.

Dream big about things that won't happen by your own strength and ingenuity, but only by the power and grace of God. We can never out-dream him!

**Stand guard against dream-killers.** Dream-killers lurk around every corner, ready to pounce just when you find the courage to begin pursuing your dreams. They take many forms, such as concern about others' opinions. Perhaps words spoken to you when you were young, such as "You're so shy," have kept you from dreaming about public speaking.

Although my father had always encouraged me in whatever I wanted to do, when I was offered a job as a writer and editor, he remarked, "I don't see you liking that type of work." In truth, he didn't see himself liking that type of work. I took the job and enjoyed it. God used it as an unexpected launching pad for my writing career.

Other dream-killers can be imagined or real limitations (lack of time, ability, or training). For me, the daily challenge of living with an unpredictable illness threatens to disrupt my goals and extinguish my dreams. When my health unexpectedly weakens, I often must cancel plans at the last minute. Thus, I become fearful of making commitments and pursuing dreams. Yet, through this challenge, God teaches me greater daily dependence on him. Rather than relying on my strength and determination, I rely on him, knowing that without him I can do nothing. We all deal with some form of limitations,





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but they can't limit what God can do as we step out in faith.

**Try bite-sized beginnings.** If you find "dreaming big" difficult, start cultivating smaller dreams. My friend wanted to run a marathon before she turned 30, and she did it—but she started by running 2 miles a day.

If you're afraid to pursue a dream, start with the first step, no matter how small. When Moses crossed the Red Sea, he first had to step into the water before it would part.

In the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, the hero teeters on the edge of a chasm separating him from the cave that harbors the sought-after holy grail. The ancient map says he must step forward, though there doesn't appear to be anything to support him from falling to his death. Yet, as he steps into the abyss, he feels something solid under his feet—a camouflaged bridge that had been there all along. Similarly, as we step out in faith, paths we never knew existed will open before us.

**Be on the lookout.** Look for ways God might be offering direction and guidance as you pursue dreams. A local church or community college may offer a class or workshop that provides in-sight or resources related to your dream. Also, talk with others involved in your area of interest. You'll be amazed how God makes connections and honors the risks you take.





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While visiting a friend, I mentioned my interest in retreat ministry. She told me of a couple she knew in Virginia who'd just purchased a bed and breakfast/retreat center. They needed helpers to develop the ministry. Six months later, I was living at the b&b where I could learn hands-on about the ministry.

As we step out in faith to pursue the dreams God's placed on our heart, inevitably we'll experience setbacks and disappointments. As I write this, I'm still saddened by the loss of a long-held dream to lead a missions trip. After planning and preparing for a year, I had to forego the project at the last moment because of a downturn in my health. Yet in my disappointment, I continually claim the apostle Paul's words to the Corinthians, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair" (2 Corinthians 4:8).

God can work powerfully in our weakness or crisis because we're forced to trust him. We shouldn't wait until we "have it all together" to dream. Begin now, even in the midst of brokenness. My friend Tamara, who opened the gourmet restaurant, pursued that dream after her husband left her. As we entrust broken dreams to God, he'll release new dreams—and do more than we could hope or imagine.

So go ahead—dream! Whether your personality's practical or imaginative, your limitations real or self-imposed, your dreams grandiose or simple, set aside some dreaming time. Whether you learn to swing dance





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as I did, or aspire to do something life-changing, such as launching a new ministry, allow God to expand your horizon and use you to fulfill his purpose in your life.

*Stacey Padrick, a freelance writer from the San Francisco bay area, is the author of the book, Living with Mystery: Finding God in the Midst of Unanswered Questions. This article first appeared in the September/October 2001 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Reflect

- *The author asked the following questions: "Do you limit yourself to what's possible? Practical? Acceptable? Do you find it difficult to allow yourself to dream?" How would you answer these questions?*
- *Which of the author's tips to listening to your heart is the easiest for you? Which of the suggestions is the most difficult? How can you overcome those difficulties?*
- *What are some of your personal dreams? What steps can you take to reach those?*





## Adventures in Ministry

Here's how to keep the  
wonder and excitement.

*With Jill Briscoe*

**A**nother meeting. A repeated complaint. Too little sleep. Not enough money. Add them together, and even a noble calling can begin to feel humdrum. How do you keep the wonder and excitement in ministering for God?

LEADERSHIP JOURNAL put that question to Jill Briscoe, a grandmother of nine and someone who shows amazing vitality in ministry. When World Relief needs someone to bring Christian encouragement and teaching to refugees in Croatia or the killing fields of Cambodia, it often sends Jill Briscoe. When ministers and their spouses want biblical teaching and a spiritual boost, they often invite Jill Briscoe.



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"The best thing I can do for my world and for those I love," she writes, "is to be wise, fearing God, laughing at the Devil, working my head off to see God's kingdom come. I live for his work, his honor, his smile, because I love him."

Jill was educated at Homerton College in Cambridge and taught in the British school system. She worked with rough street youth in Liverpool, through Capernwray Missionary Fellowship. She and her husband, Stuart, moved to the U.S. in 1970. Since then, he has served as pastor of Elmbrook Church in Brookfield, Wisconsin; she is lay adviser to the church's women's ministry and a director of "Telling the Truth" media ministry. She has written more than 40 books and is editor of *Just Between Us*, a magazine for ministry wives and women in ministry.

#### ***When did you become a Christian, and when did you enter ministry?***

I started ministering the day I was saved. I was in the hospital, desperately sick. I couldn't move. A girl in my ward, age 17, had died of a kidney disease, and I had a similar problem.

Jenny, a girl in the bed next to me, led me to Christ. She said, "Every nurse who comes to do something for you today—you tell them what's happened to you." That got me talking.

Then I got better within three days. It was miraculous. When I was leaving the hospital and returning to college, Jenny said, "Next week on visitor's day, bring me the first person you've led to Christ."







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I said, "How do I do that?"

She told me how, and I went and led a girl to Christ. I came back with her obediently on visitor's day, and Jenny said coolly to me, "Only one?"

"Well, you only said one."

"That was my mistake," Jenny said. "Now, then . . ."

So I did what she told me, and all these people came to Christ. And then Jenny showed me how to follow up with them. I put them in little groups and began to teach them, instead of doing it one on one.

#### ***When have you most felt you couldn't keep going in ministry?***

In those same evangelism days. There was a period when I did so much street ministry, and then I had three kids, and Stuart was on the road as an evangelist for months on end. I was a single parent, basically, raising three kids and involved in this work. I found myself drained. I felt couldn't keep going in *that* ministry.

But I don't think I have ever come to the point of saying, "I'm quitting," because what is ministry? It's being a disciple, isn't it? It's serving the Lord. I've never been so depressed that I could quit doing that.

#### ***What did you do with the pain you were feeling about your particular ministry?***

I came to a point of decision. I could either drown in a sea of self-pity, or I could ask, "In what redemptive way do you want to use this mess, Lord? What do I need to





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learn? What can I do because Stuart isn't home, that I couldn't do if he were?"

You either look at all those lonely hours, or you look at the potential they offer. I found, for one, that his travel gave me extra time. I didn't have to get an evening meal ready. A friend whose husband traveled all her life helped me; she said, "Get so busy that you fall into bed at night too tired to think. Fill your life with other people's problems. Just get out there and do it."

I did, and I found it took me out of myself. I don't think I could do what I do now if I hadn't been through that.

I'm in a family situation right now that has been the deepest thing I've ever been through, the most damaging and painful. But I try not to waste the pain. I try to let it be an energizer rather than to obsess me and to take me out of thinking about other people. I hate the pain, but that's what happens—you come through into real fruitfulness and usefulness.

#### ***You speak often to people in ministry. What do you notice as you meet with them?***

What I see worldwide—especially on the mission field and in the leaders on the front lines who are working against incredible odds—is they're just tired.

You can be tired "in" the work of the Lord, or you can be tired "of" the work of the Lord; and I think they're tired "of" the work of the Lord. At that point, you're in trouble. That's spiritual depression.





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Elijah once lay flat on his face under a tree, wanting to die. Not because everything was wrong—fire had just fallen on his ministry—but he just collapsed. A lot of people in ministry need the loving touch of the Lord that Elijah experienced when the Lord said, "The journey's too great for you." God didn't rebuke and chastise him. He just touched him in his tiredness and allowed him to retire to a cave for a bit. But God didn't leave Elijah there. That's because failure is never final for anyone.

#### ***How do you deal with being tired "of" the work of the Lord?***

Renewing your commitment to God and your interaction with the Holy Spirit. We're doing the programs, and programs can be effective, but do we care about the people in those programs? Do we maintain the heart?

Two weeks ago I was on a plane coming from Chicago to Milwaukee. I asked for a seat with an empty seat beside it, because I had a writing assignment, and I needed to spread out my Bible and notes, and study. So on this small plane, I ended up the only person with an empty seat next to her.

I got out my Bible, and just as we were about to take off, into the plane came this huge man, 6'4" or 6'5"—very masculine. But he was dressed like a woman—mini-skirt and stockings, high-heeled white shoes and purse, and wig. As this cross-dresser came down the aisle, I realized, *The only open seat is next to me. He's going to be sitting next to me all during this flight.* And I suddenly wanted to put my Bible away.





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I'm amazed I had these reactions. Prejudices I didn't know I had came out. I said to the Lord, *I don't really care about him. I really don't care if he goes to heaven or hell. And that's the truth. Here I'm writing and preaching about these things, and suddenly here is a real live human being, and I don't care a bit about him.*

I repented and said, I'm sorry, Lord. *Forgive me, and give me your heart for this man. You died for him.*

I didn't lead him to Christ, but I didn't put my Bible away, either. I smiled at him and changed my attitude. I began to ask, *What has happened in his life to bring him to this point?* And at the end of the journey, I had a compassion for him I didn't have at the beginning

### ***In ministry, what do you need to face if you're going to stay fresh?***

Finding someone you can talk to, who can hold you accountable not to run dry.

One time I was speaking in Michigan, and during that time I was going through some struggles over my teenage daughter. She was going to a school dance while I was away. I had just come from Britain, where conservative Christians don't even go to school dances, so I was struggling with that cultural issue. I wasn't too keen on the guy she was going with, either. And I wasn't going to be there. I thought, *What sort of mother am I? Here I am, talking about mothering to thousands of women, when I should be home.*





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Before the meeting, I found my way to the prayer room and met a prayer counselor named Margaret. I told her all my fears for my daughter. "This dating thing is foreign to me," I said, "and it scares me out of my wits. It's like putting my daughter in a basket and letting her go among the crocodiles, like Moses' mother did."

The prayer counselor said, "We'll pray about this, and I'll pray for your daughter. By the way, who brought you to the convention prayer room?"

I said, "I'm the speaker."

We laughed so hard. Two weeks later Margaret sent me a little, rubber crocodile with its mouth tied up. She said, "That's what prayer does—it ties up the crocodile's mouth." And for years she prayed for my daughter.

But as a leader, you have few people you can do that with in the church. If you get too close to people in your congregation who can't keep their mouths shut, it can cause problems. If people *can* keep a secret, it causes jealousy, because somebody's going to learn that the pastor's wife shared with someone other than with them. You try to have friends outside of your congregation, but you're so busy you don't have friendship-building time.

For me as a woman, the ministry is a privilege, not a punishment. But for an awful lot of women, it's a punishment. They hear the word *privilege* and ask, "What is the ministry doing to my marriage, to my family?" But if you try to cocoon, you end up fighting all the people who want your husband, instead of participating with your husband in the ministry to these people.





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#### ***What temptations can drain your passion for ministry?***

The temptation to feel valueless, to feel, *Who am I?*

I don't think of myself as a leader, even though I know I am. Maybe it's because I've never been to Bible school. On my own, I've covered pretty well everything academically that I would have covered in Bible school, but I've never had that opportunity. Also, I've never been on the staff of a mission or a church. I've always chosen to model a lay person's position.

But then, I believe in the priesthood of believers, and I'm as much a priest as anyone else, in that sense. Still, I don't know why I don't think of myself as a leader. I'm a mother and grandmother of nine, and that brings you down to size. You have enough things to keep you humble—things you don't do well, the mistakes you make, and things you say that you shouldn't. And to the dog, you're just the nice lady who gets his food. Who are you, anyway?

#### ***What are the dangers of this kind of thinking?***

You're tempted to base your value on performance. I know women who count the number of women who come to their Bible studies. That somehow is wrapped up with their self-worth: "If I were more effective, if I were a better Christian or pastor's wife, then I'd have more women coming."

I was at a conference where the speaker said, "Growth means you're spiritually alive. And if you're small, then you're dying." I did not like the emphasis. Jesus had a very small church—just twelve people—and he wasn't a failure.







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#### ***Are there stages or passages in ministry? If so, which are you in?***

I think there are seasons. I'm trying to figure out whether I'm in autumn or winter. Look at my hair—I'm winter!

Stuart and I were in Utrecht, Holland, for a convention of seven thousand kids from all over Europe. We were certainly the oldest speakers. Many kids came to us and said, "Thank you that you've stayed together. Thank you that you're still teaching and still ministering."

I thought, *What's so hard about this? I don't get it.* But for them, growing up in broken families, they wonder whether longevity can happen.

I try to celebrate aging in a ministry context because age gives you a hearing you might not get if you were younger. Paul said to Timothy, "Don't let them despise your youth." There is something about a young person giving out a lot of instruction, unless it's in the Spirit, that older people resist.

So, I've enjoyed that privilege of having a little bit of leeway in saying certain things now. Of course, I have to earn it and live up to it.

#### ***What's an example of something you can say now that you might not have been able to say 30 years ago?***

It's all right to be a woman in ministry. Stuart just taught a six-part series on the Christian view of politics, of technology, of sex, and other complex issues. He asked me to speak on a Christian view of women. I resisted. I did not want to make statements or beat a drum.





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But he persisted, and I'm so glad I did it. I worked hard, and putting down all that scriptural study and preaching was freeing for me. Coming from my background, a conservative heritage, I've had a long journey to go in all of that. It has taken me all this time to be able to say, "It's all right. I can say what I've come to learn and what I really think and believe."

*This article first appeared in the **Summer 1996** issue of LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.*

## Reflect

- *As you think about your own place in ministry, describe a time when felt you couldn't keep going. How did you deal with your pain at that time? How do you deal with painful ministry experiences now?*
- *Have you ever felt "tired of" the work of the Lord? Why? What can you do to stay fresh in the place God has called you in ministry?*
- *Which words or experiences of Jill Briscoe encourage you the most as you seek your place in ministry?*





## Becoming a Purpose-Filled Woman

Saddleback minister Katie Brazelton helps you understand your place in this world.

*By Jane Johnson Struck*

**A**lmost two decades ago, Katie Brazelton found herself divorced and suddenly devoid of the roles she'd used to define her life. This agonizing transition—and the purposelessness that ensued—left her in an emotional free fall, wondering if "the only logical life purpose [she] had left was shopping" for clothes to compensate for a depression-triggered weight loss.





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Slowly and painfully, Katie began to recover a sense of purposeful living after a life-changing encounter with Mother Teresa during a 1988 trip to Calcutta. As a result of her long journey of spiritual growth and discovery, outlined in *Pathway to Purpose* (Zondervan), Katie realized her call to mentor other searching women. Now, Katie helps thousands discover their church ministry and life purpose, and she trains others to do the same. So if you're wondering about your place in this world, here's what Katie has to say to you.

#### ***Why are you so passionate about women living lives of purpose?***

Because for years after my divorce, I didn't. The angst of purposelessness almost tore me apart. But one of the most important components of my healing was learning that "finding purpose" is a universal heart cry. I wasn't alone in yearning for a life that had significance!

#### ***If God has a purpose for us, why do we often feel as though we're simply going through the motions of living?***

That's because when we're in "robot mode," we let busyness, noise, fear, or impure motives drive out that purpose. We guilt ourselves into doing the hard work of becoming holy in the day-to-day grind instead of experiencing the reward of fulfilling the reason God put us on earth!

I know I used to be more concerned with religious to-do lists and endless faith-driven obligations than with unearthing the buried passion God instilled in me.





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There was a time when I'd routinely ask myself, *Am I happy?* I was so unhappy, I couldn't even get the question out before I started sobbing.

We women need to discover our purpose in life for two reasons. First, fulfilling our purpose gives glory to God. Second, it releases us from the captivity of hopelessness and despair.

#### ***How do you define "purpose"?***

For Christians, purpose is *being* and *doing* what God intends us to be and do: doing today what God asks us to do in our family, church, and community; being more like Christ; and then doing the distinct, bold work God designed us to do before we die!

Scripture reveals the "pathway" to follow. It's spelled out in the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-39) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). In *The Purpose-Driven Life*, my friend Rick Warren says these verses tell us we're ultimately made for fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism, and worship.

But to discover our more unique life mission, we should pray specifically for God to reveal it; we should meditate on pertinent Scriptures, such as Psalm 37:4, Amos 4:13, Matthew 14:27, and John 17:1; and we should clear away some of the mental and emotional clouds that block us from his revelation.

#### ***What do you mean?***

The Bible says, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win





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the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

After my divorce, I lived in manic mode; I'm amazed now I actually thought I could find God's purpose in the midst of my frantic life. I numbed my pain with overspending, travel, and work. It didn't occur to me numbing my pain became my purpose.

I had no idea how much my past influenced my everyday life. I needed to put my anger, regret, bitterness, and pain behind me before I could focus on the race God set before me. It took me years to hear God's voice over the noise and confusion in which I lived. As an immature Christian and an introvert, I didn't realize I needed more mature Christians who could help shed light on what God was saying to me about his will for my life.

### ***So you're saying we can't be a lone ranger in this discovery process?***

That's right. A woman trying to find her life purpose is like a novice trying to run a marathon. Both need a partner who can prepare them for the challenges and risks that lie ahead. Many women fail to fulfill their significant life purposes because they have no Christian mentor or adviser to help them reach the next mile marker. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"

God designed our purpose in life to happen in community—whether it's in person, online, through a telephone relationship, letter writing, or as an







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intercessory prayer warrior. Giving and receiving love is part of God's design, and nothing substitutes for interpersonal communication.

#### ***But community takes time—and we're all so busy!***

Yes, but God's creative in bringing spiritual friendships into our lives. Christian community can happen anywhere: at a church Bible-study group, babysitting co-op, corporate lunch-time prayer group, gym, ministry setting, sports event, or hobby show.

One fun way I've developed community is to belong to a "Dreamer's Lunch Bunch"; we meet once a month at a salad bar for the sole purpose of holding each other accountable to God's call on our lives.

Being in community means I'm authentic in a group I trust. Because of the dangers of a "lone ranger" lifestyle, I rely on others to walk alongside me.

#### ***Is there a difference between having a purpose and having a passion?***

Our *purpose* is being a woman of God and doing what he asks. Our *passions* are meant to be godly purpose-indicators. They are the things that make our heart sing; they help us identify and complete our purpose. For example, my passions include jigsaw puzzles, travel, and Sherlock Holmes mysteries. God's purpose for me is to help women figure out his call on their lives.





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#### ***How can we become content with God's purpose for us, especially if it seems less visible or exciting than we'd envisioned or hoped?***

The Bible warns us not to despise the day of the small things (from Zechariah 4:10). It says we need to look forward to when our Master says to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21).

The best shortcut I've found to guard against jealousy over someone else's ministry is to invite God to reveal his vision for *your* life and to believe with all your heart he'll do so. If you find yourself envying others, confess it to them or at least to God; pray for them; and support them in their endeavors.

#### ***What's the bottom line on living purposefully?***

In Acts 20:24, the apostle Paul says, "I don't care about my own life. The most important thing is that I complete my mission, the work that the Lord Jesus gave me—to tell people the Good News about God's grace" (NCV). And 1 John 2:17 says, "The world and its desires pass away, but the [wo]man who does the will of God lives forever." God wants us to heed the apostle Paul's counsel: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). God wants us to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

I love the way God takes any willing Christian—no matter how broken or scarred her past—and weaves every thread of her life into his kingdom-building plan! He doesn't shy away from our hurts and failures but specializes in hope, second chances, and resurrections.





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I never imagined my tough experiences would give me the substance I now need to minister to others. I had no idea God was preparing me to offer the same hope to other women he provided me every day. Our ordinary routines and daily roles—no matter what they are—can provide incredible opportunities to help others become more like Christ.

In the end, purposeful living is about hope. If you can hang onto the hope that God does have a plan for your life, as the Bible promises in Jeremiah 29:11, you'll make it through the tough days of the unknown and later, the tough days of fulfilling the bold purposes God assigns you.

*Katie Brazelton, Ph.D., is a licensed minister at Saddleback Church in California, the best-selling author of the Pathway to Purpose™ series for women, and founder of Pathway to Purpose Ministry, which trains Christian women as Life Purpose Coaches™. She can be reached at [support@pathwaytopurposeministry.com](mailto:support@pathwaytopurposeministry.com). This article first appeared in the January/February 2006 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





## Reflect

- *Katie comments, "For Christians, purpose is being and doing what God intends us to be and do: doing today what God asks us to do in our family, church, and community; being more like Christ; and then doing the distinct, bold work God designed us to do before we die!" How could her definition of "purpose" influence your life?*
- *Do you pray to God, asking him to reveal your unique life purpose and place? What mental and emotional clouds might block your revelation from God?*
- *According to Katie, why can't you discover your purpose by yourself? How could entering into community help you to discover your purpose? Where can you find community?*





## Brave New World

Transform your empty nest into a season of exciting opportunity.

*By Vicki Edwards*

In two short years, I'll have two empty bedrooms in my home ... and I'm dreading it! The college catalogs strewn about the house remind me this is my son's last year at home; my daughter, a junior in high school, isn't far behind. Not only am I going to miss their company when they leave the nest, I'll also miss the purpose they bring to my life.

Because I know the empty nest will be a huge adjustment, I decided to seek out mothers who'd "crossed over" into this next season of life. I asked friends to tell me about women they knew who'd found a new ministry *after* their children left home.



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I suspected these moms' new interests would seem dull compared to having kids at home. Then I met Becky Oliver.

Becky, 50, and her husband, Jim, always stayed involved in each other's interests while raising their son and daughter. Then Jim started talking about motorcycles—and Becky thought he was having a midlife crisis. But Jim's interest grew. He encouraged Becky to take a safety course before riding on his motorcycle with him. What Becky learned from the class was, "It's way too much fun not to ride my own motorcycle!" Now they spend at least three weekends a month (April through October) riding side by side with their Christian Motorcycle Association "gang" to rallies, prisons, and children's homes, and Becky has new opportunities to serve and witness.

Let's face it: We won't all become bikers when our children grow up. But instead of moaning that there's "too much quiet" when our kids fly the coop, we can look to God to help us fill—not kill—our time.

### **Determining Your Midlife Ministry**

"Preparation for the empty-nest years is best begun as you're raising your children," says Barbara A. Kee, PhD, a Christian life coach. Here's how to get started:

***Begin with God.*** Start your search with prayer for God's direction. Have your spouse and friends pray for you as well. And don't forget to spend time in praise, acknowledging God's faithfulness in your life.





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***Set your goal(s).*** What will your family's needs be when your children leave? Will extra income be the most urgent need (to help pay for college, etc.)? Have you been waiting to "have the time" for a special project? Do you see this time as a gift from God? If so, could you offer a portion of it back to him by serving others? Dr. Kee advises mothers to keep a list of goals and interests they'd like to pursue as they become less involved with their children's needs.

***Learn from other empty-nesters.*** What can you glean from their passage into this new life phase?

I've learned some great tips from my new empty-nest friends. "You have your children for a short time—your husband for a lifetime," Becky Oliver reminds me. From Becky's experience, I also realize a husband often becomes a ministry partner. That's a big revelation, as my husband's skills and interests seem so different from my own!

***Develop a bird's-eye view.*** My work background is in public relations. I also taught at a junior college for two years before my children were born. As I boiled each job to its core skills, I realized that whether writing or teaching, I'd always worked as a communicator. I love reading and writing. I also enjoy communicating with others about God and his goodness. I can do this while visiting with friends over coffee, teaching a Sunday school class, or writing an article.

I'm learning my life experiences, including parenting, illness, and trials, make me better equipped to help others. Now when I face a dilemma or challenge, I







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think, *What can I learn from this?* and, *This may make a good article some day.* The interests, experiences, and skills I acquire now prepare me for tomorrow.

Motherhood itself was the best preparation for Linda Brantley's new ministry. She and her husband work with the 300 singles who attend Prestoncrest Church of Christ near Dallas. Linda, 58, feels it's because she's a non-threatening mother figure that young adults feel comfortable opening up to her. She regularly offers hospitality and motherly wisdom.

**Take a leap of faith.** "I never thought of myself as a career person," says Pam Williams, 53. "My family's needs always dictated what I did outside the home, and I was happy with my part-time job as activities director at a local retirement community. But then my pastors asked me to work on staff with the seniors' ministry. It was more of a challenge than I was seeking. But I prayed about it. I felt the church had done so much for my family, and that maybe it was time to give back. So when my youngest son, Jonathan, joined the Navy, I started as director of 65+ at Central Christian Church in Mesa, Arizona."

One of Pam's duties is to coordinate the annual National Senior Adult Convention, which averages 1,000 registrants and features speakers such as Oliver North.

"I've enjoyed every dimension of my life. But I feel like I'm entering one of its most exciting times," says Pam today. "My husband and I are enjoying each other. We're very excited about the years ahead and what we can do now, including mentoring others in ministry!"





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So whether it's through an open door, an urging from the Holy Spirit, or a message from another Christian, stay attuned to the opportunities God places before you.

***Try, try again.*** It may take a false start or two before you find your ministry—but that's one of the advantages of being open to different opportunities. For example, Debra Plog, 45, thought she found her niche as the director of women's ministries for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. But when her husband's job moved them across the country, her new church asked her to serve as a volunteer in their women's ministry. Debra believes what she learned during that life detour prepared her for the position she holds now. She was recently ordained and is serving as associate minister for women at a large church near St. Louis.

"My seasons as a young wife and mother, and as a woman with health problems all have prepared me to help others," Debra relates. "I'm glad God gently led me to this place where I can minister to women."

***Remember to soar.*** Dr. Kee stresses that it's never too late "to spread your wings and develop interests that you've been putting off until the children are grown." Rebecca Anderson, 59, lived out that advice when she went back to school after her children left home. She'll soon complete her Master of Divinity at Phoenix Seminary, and then plans to begin a career in counseling.

### **A Mother's Heart Never Retires**

I know that while a sparkling new mission can provide me with fresh purpose, it won't keep me from experiencing some emotional loss when my children leave home. When





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my daughter started kindergarten, I took a part-time job, thinking that would keep me so busy I wouldn't miss her. I was wrong! Although the job filled my time, I still missed her intensely for weeks. The truth is, any time we choose to love, we make ourselves vulnerable to pain.

While many women see their children leaving home as a sad time, not all suffer a deep emotional valley. Women with a job and/or hobbies they enjoy, as well as social attachments, church involvement, and a healthy marriage, often are well equipped to move gracefully into the next phase of life. According to Dr. Kee, "If you feel your children are ready to face the world, it's easier to let go of them."

I'm still seeking my midlife ministry. While I'm waiting for God to open that door, I'm scheduling time between grocery shopping and orthodontic appointments for writing and editing a newsletter for a missionary friend. Thanks to the example of the godly women with whom I spoke, my anxiety has melted into a peaceful assurance—and at times even an excited anticipation—about what God has in store for me. I've learned God can use us at any stage of life if we're open to his leading ... and that he's preparing us now for what's to come. We can experience joy, excitement, and purpose beyond the parenting years.

*Vicki Edwards is a freelance writer and author of the e-book *Bugs in My Freezer* (DiskUs Publishing). This article first appeared in the March/April 2006 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





## Reflect

- *Take some time to answer the author's questions: What will your family's needs be when your children leave? Have you been waiting to "have the time" for a special project? Do you see this time as a gift from God? If so, how could you offer a portion of it back to him by serving others?*
- *What passions or dreams have you been putting off until your children were grown? How could you begin pursuing those goals?*
- *If your children are still in the home, consider the purpose they bring to your life. How can you look ahead and prepare for the transition ahead?*





## A Woman of Influence

Elisa Morgan's passion for helping others see themselves as more than their roles.

*By Jane Johnson Struck*

**E**lisa Morgan has her audience eating out of her hand. Onstage, the petite dynamo with spiky hair and a warm grin regales the 5,000 women gathered in Nashville for the annual MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) International Convention with a hilarious anecdote about her preschool-aged grandson, Marcus, whom she unabashedly adores.

An engaging communicator, Elisa, 51, is the most recognizable face and voice of an international ministry that began in 1973 with a handful of moms in Colorado.



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The CEO of MOPS since 1989, Elisa has led MOPS, which empowers women to become the best parents they can be, through a period of expansive growth. Today MOPS boasts more than 4,000 groups in 36 countries and offers its membership a wide range of electronic and print resources, including books Elisa has authored or coauthored, such as *What Every Mom Needs* (Zondervan) and *Twinkle* (Revell). Get her talking about the future of MOPS, and her passion for a broader ministry reach to women is contagious. Elisa envisions a MOPS that maintains a lifelong connection with the women leaders who've "graduated" from the preschooler years. To meet this goal, in 2007 MOPS will launch events, online assessment tools and leadership training, as well as a new print publication called FullFill, for Christian women leaders, which debuts this spring. Elisa's hope, she says, is for women to become unapologetic about being "influencers."

Elisa's own influence may lead some to assume her life's been picture-perfect. Yet Elisa, mom to Eva, 22, and Ethan, 20, readily calls herself "Mother Inferior." Married 27 years to husband, Evan, Vice President of Ministries for RBC Ministries, Elisa acknowledges that a difficult childhood prepared her in unlikely ways for such a visible role. God, she'll tell you unequivocally, has shaped her deficits for his unique purposes. Here's what Elisa has to say to TCW about women in leadership, parenting in a less-than-perfect world, and wrestling with that elusive balance in life.

***It sounds like you're entering an exciting phase for MOPS.***

Yes, we've been blown away! God called us to look at our ministry with fresh eyes, and he used the parable of the talents in Matthew 25—with its message of stewarding





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what God's entrusted to us—to do that. He's impressed us with our responsibility to his kingdom for the many women who've been touched through the years by MOPS.

We believe at MOPS that every mom is a leader. And we believe we've been called to help her steward her influence in her world, in her community, and beyond for God's kingdom.

#### ***But that call isn't just true of moms.***

I agree. All women are kingdom participants. We're eternal beings whom Jesus wants to mold in his image. We need to step up to that without apology, without fear, without compromise—and with great obedience to Christ. It starts with reframing how we see ourselves. You may be in a carpool. You're influencing the other children in your car. You may be in a grocery store. You're influencing the checkout person. You may be in corporate America. You're influencing those around you. You don't need to wait to become a woman of influence; you already are one.

Too often leadership can be a loaded word. Many women are uncomfortable being leaders; many men are uncomfortable with women being leaders. There are so many preconceived notions about what leadership means in our world or in the Bible. But it's really about making a difference, influencing, imparting, contributing, guiding, twinkling.

#### ***What do you mean by “twinkling”?***

The concept for twinkling comes from Philippians 2:15. The apostle Paul talks about believers shining like stars in the universe. You can be in a completely dark room, turn on a flashlight, and suddenly you're not in darkness anymore.







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Even a tiny speck of twinkling light changes the very nature of darkness.

What's so freeing is that it's not our light. When we come into relationship with Jesus, his light comes into us. We can't fight it; God's light will shine out of us—even through the cracks in our humanity—to provide a source of hope and light for those around us.

***It sounds as though your childhood may have caused some "cracks."***

I like to say my mother's illness—her alcoholism—shaped my resilience. When we're raised in families of need, we develop overcompensating abilities. I'm not your typical "nice girl"; I can be in your face and assertive. But I turn on the charm if I need to because I learned, growing up, how to be on my toes. If my mom walked into a room unpredictably not sober, I had to cover for her.

My parents divorced when I was five, and I don't think my mother ever recovered from it. I vividly remember most mornings beginning with the sound of my mom's alarm clock going off down the hall. It was my job to get her up to go to work. So I'd pull back my covers, go into the kitchen, grab a couple chocolate chip cookies, plunk some ice cubes in a glass and pour Coca-Cola into it, and take them down the hall to my mom's bedroom. I'd put them on her nightstand, turn off her alarm, and begin the process of trying to wake her up.

It was a confusing time for me. I look back at it now with much less frustration and criticism. I realize my mother's illness wasn't any different than the illnesses of my sin.





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I just don't deal with it the way she did. But it was all so exaggerated in a child's eyes.

#### ***How did you come to Christ?***

I became a Christian through the teen outreach ministry of Young Life at age 16. But I was coming to Christ a long time before then. From the beginning I was drawn to Jesus. I wanted him. I knew he loved me, and I loved him.

Not long after I became a Christian, my mom talked to me about my earthly father, who had left us when I was young. I was in belligerent teenager mode, saying, "I don't have a father." That night I dreamed I'd fallen off a cliff in slow motion. When I looked below me, I saw flesh-colored, jutting rocks and thought, I'm going to die! But when I hit them, I realized I wasn't falling into rocks but hands—God's hands. I heard him say in my dream, "I'm your heavenly Father. I will never leave you or forsake you."

#### ***How do moms deal with guilt when their kids make poor choices?***

There's an old adage that says: "God wasn't everywhere, so he invented mothers." What an incredible burden to live under! We have to be someplace God isn't?

Some guilt may be legitimate. We all make mistakes. But I think we get mixed up in what we're responsible for. We're not responsible for how our child turns out. Instead, God invites us to influence our child. Of course that means we need to be as godly and yielded to him as possible. But we're responsible for how we influence our child, not for how he turns out, and that's freeing.





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### ***What hope would you pass on to someone struggling with a prodigal?***

I remember being incredibly judgmental over a third grader who watched some TV show I didn't let my kids watch. I had no idea how arrogant I was toward others: *Well, if they just would do like I do it, their kid would be fine.* That was until I realized I'd done all those things, and my kids still made painful choices. I hung my head in shame.

The time Eva wasn't with us was torturous emotionally. Yet I knew we had to let her go, like the prodigal son was let go by his father. And in the years where Ethan has struggled—and sometimes still does—Evan and I wrestle with how much help we should offer. I don't have those answers.

I guess what I want to scream is, We're all the same! When you look at another person, you don't know what's going on beneath the surface. So let's be compassionate toward each other and, as much as we can, share our needs with others.

### ***Why is it important for older women to reach out to moms of preschoolers?***

It's a mentoring opportunity. You have something to offer, even if you're only a few months further down the road in parenting. But I think the younger generations have so much to teach us. There's such mutuality in mentoring.

I want our world to remember the importance of those early mothering years. The purpose of those developmental tasks, those close bonds we forge with our children, is to be able to launch individuals—ourselves included—who can make a wider investment in God's kingdom.





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### ***Can we experience a balanced life while we're so busy influencing others?***

Balance is a great theme for magazines, but I'm not quite sure it's possible. {Sighs and smiles.} There's no formula for it.

For me balance is all about the ebb and flow of this life with God. We dupe ourselves into thinking, If I'm really obedient, life will fall in little categories, just the right half a cup of this and half a cup of that. Not! You get an ocean full of this and a drop of that.

I had a season where I had a son who was here, there, and everywhere, and a pregnant daughter who ended up a single mom—all as I'm leading an international nonprofit. I have a husband who travels for his job. Well, what does obedience to Christ look like? Quitting everything? Quitting something? Doing everything? Doing nothing? My best friend got cancer, a key staff member resigned, my daughter couldn't drive for a season of time, and I needed to help her get around. I couldn't go, "Well, I don't want to do that," or "I quit." None of those options worked.

### ***Maybe "balance" is a myth?***

It's important to think about, but maybe it's not attainable. What matters most, I believe, is today. Today it matters that I spend time with my friend who has cancer. Or today it matters that I drive my daughter. Or today it matters that I step in because my staff needs a leader. Maybe tomorrow I will deal with house and home.

Today is where I am. And Jesus is always with me. I don't have to be ethereal about it; I just know it. And the way I love him is to be loved by him.





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I read in Luke 7 of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus's feet. Everybody at Simon's house was so offended that she put oil on him and dried his feet with her hair. But Jesus asked, who loves me more? The person who's been forgiven, or the person who's been forgiven a lot?

How many times I've held off owning my sin because I somehow felt it distanced me from God's love! I'm discovering, however, the reality that the more sinful I realize I am, the more I'm able to receive God's forgiveness—and his love.

For information on how to start a MOPS group in your church, visit [www.MOPS.org](http://www.MOPS.org).

*This article first appeared in the January/February 2007 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Reflect

- *Consider your daily routine. In what ways are you a woman of influence?*
- *Since it is important to reach out to those younger than ourselves, who might you be able to reach out to as a mentor or friend?*
- *What does obedience to Christ look like in your life? In what specific ways does God have you carrying out his will in your everyday life?*





## Does the Bible Say I Can't Teach Men?

Answers to a tough ministry question.

*By Jill Briscoe*

I grew up in England with a queen on the throne, and was educated at an all-girls' school and women's college in Cambridge by gifted females (and led to Christ by a female medical professional). So, after becoming a Christian, imagine my dismay when I first joined a church where women weren't allowed to do any of the things in which I knew they excelled!



## Finding Your Place in Ministry

### Does the Bible Say I Can't Teach Men?

As a budding Bible teacher, I eventually was asked by male church leaders to speak to young women *and* men in an outreach our congregation hosted. But others challenged my participation. I became hurt and confused. It wasn't that those who challenged me thought I shouldn't be exercising my gifts—it was that they believed "God thought" I shouldn't! This went against the very root of my identity and calling.

The positions Christians take on this issue are based on how they interpret the apostle Paul's writings. Paul told Titus that older women should informally train younger women in practical holiness and everyday Christian living (Titus 2:3-4). These older women were equipped and encouraged to teach.

But what about women teaching *men*? Paul wrote to Timothy: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (1 Timothy 2:11-12). The apostle was encouraging the teaching of women, even though traditionally they weren't given that opportunity. But he restricted them from authoritatively sharing their learning with men.

Some people say this prohibition means women must never, ever teach men in the church. They believe Paul felt that because Eve was deceived, women are gullible and therefore mustn't teach men.

Others think Paul was addressing specific circumstances in Ephesus, because in other Scriptures, Paul actually recognizes several women who were teaching and







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evangelizing alongside him (Romans 16:1-3; Philippians 4:2-3). During this time period in Ephesus, women were uneducated and secluded, and Paul was warning that they could be misled by the false teachers trying to lure new Christians away from the church Paul wanted to establish. Those circumstances don't necessarily exist today, because many women, when trained, have gifts that can bring blessing to both men and women.

Years ago, when I discovered I had gifts half the Christian church didn't think I should have, it was my husband, Stuart, who encouraged me the most to use them. Once on a radio show, an interviewer said to him, "You take the position you do on a woman's role in the church because of the wife you've got!" My husband replied, "Has it ever occurred to you I have the wife I've got because of the position I take?"

Women should seek to use their gifts in ways that are acceptable to their community of believers. Ask God for guidance, and read as much as you can. A few great books to start with are *Men and Women in the Church*; *Women in Ministry: Four Views*; *Women, Authority & the Bible* (all InterVarsity Press); and *Split Image: Male and Female After God's Likeness* (Eerdmans).

Personally, I believe I first have to answer to God for his gifts and calling on my life. I don't want to get to heaven and hear him say, "Half-done, thou half-faithful servant." Prayerfully I exercise my gifts to the blessing of believers when I'm invited to do so and seek to utilize my strengths without being a stumbling block to others.





## Finding Your Place in Ministry

### Does the Bible Say I Can't Teach Men?

I don't believe women should bury their gifts or let anyone else bury them. There's a lost world (of men and women) waiting to hear what God's gifted women have to say to them. The eternal destiny of these souls may depend on it.

*Jill Briscoe is executive editor of Just Between Us, a magazine for ministry wives and women in leadership, and serves as Minister-at-Large at Elmbrook Church in Milwaukee. This article first appeared in the November/December 2003 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Reflect

- *What gifts do you have that those around you don't accept? Who can you talk to in order to help gain wisdom about how to use your gifts?*
- *Jill writes, "Women should seek to use their gifts in ways that are acceptable to their community of believers. Ask God for guidance, and read as much as you can." How can you use your gifts in your community?*
- *How have you buried your gifts? How have you let others bury your gifts? Why?*



## Additional Resources



**Experiencing God's Power in Your Ministry: Success and Survival for Every Woman Who Serves God** by Mary Southerland (Harvest House Publishers, 2006; \$9.99) Straightforward and supportive, Mary Southerland lines out key biblical habits that will bring practical and energizing benefits into your life. She urges women to let God *unleash his power* in tough circumstances, have the courage to *openly embrace transition*, stand firm in the storms, and aim for greatness because God is a great God. In each chapter is a study section and an interview or story from a woman in ministry.



## Finding Your Place in Ministry

### Additional Resources

**What You Do Best in the Body of Christ** by Bruce Bugbee (Zondervan, 2004; \$9.99) Have you found fulfillment in life? Can you say your ministry is fruitful? God has created you to be both fulfilled and fruitful in a meaningful place of service. You can discover your God-given design and the role he created for you in and through the local church. In *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ*, Bruce Bugbee helps you identify your God-given spiritual gifts, personal style, and ministry passion. And he shows how they point to your unique role and purpose in the body of Christ when they are expressed together. Drawing from biblical principles, this book provides proven tools and a conversational approach that will help you fulfill God's will for your life. You'll find plenty of helpful charts and self-assessments---plus insights into the fallacies and pitfalls that can hinder your effectiveness. Start learning today what God wants you to do, and experience more enthusiasm, greater joy, and real significance in your life and ministry.

**Leadership for Women in the Church** by Susan Hunt and Peggy Hutcheson (Zondervan, 1991; \$8.99) Women have a variety of roles to serve in the body of Christ, and this book offers a compelling message, not only encouraging them to use their leadership skills in church ministries but how to develop those skills.





## Finding Your Place in Ministry

### Additional Resources

**Spiritual Gifts for Women: Helping Women Find Joy in Ministry** by Ruth and Elmer Towns (Thomas Nelson, 2001; \$11.99) Do you sit in church every week and wonder how you can minister? Discover your special talents! Each of nine "task gifts" is presented with contemporary examples and inductive Bible study questions in this interactive workbook. Dangers or weaknesses of each gift are also identified. Includes a "Spiritual Gifts Questionnaire." Suitable for individual or group use.

**Ordinary Ministry, Extraordinary Challenge: Women and the Roles of Ministry** by Norma Cook Everist (Abingdon Press, 2000; \$12.99) In *Ordinary Calling Extraordinary Challenge*, Norma Cook Everist brings together several women clergy to demonstrate what parish ministry is like in women's experience. Drawing on years of parish experience, they examine such a wide range of topics as the ministry of preaching, the ministry of stewardship, the ministry of justice, the ministry of outreach, and many more. Written for women and men, this volume will provide support, encouragement, and guidance for performing the many tasks and assuming the many roles of parish minister.

**Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts: The Women of Faith Series** by Phyllis Bennett (Zondervan, 1998; \$4.99) This is one of *Women of Faith's* six-week interactive Bible studies on experiencing God, designed to link women together in bonds of friendship, joy, faith, and prayer. This guide will give you the tools you need to explore a fundamental aspect of your walk with God





## Finding Your Place in Ministry

### Additional Resources

with other women who want to grow, too. It will also give you permission to be yourself, to share honestly, to care for one another's wounds, and laugh together when you take yourselves too seriously. Each of the six lessons in this guide is divided into six sections. Most you'll discuss as a group; others you'll cover on your own during the week between meetings. Each session includes six sections: A Moment for Quiet Reflection; Knowing God's Heart; Friendship Boosters; Just for Fun; Praying Together and Making It Real in Your Own Life.

**Becoming a Woman of Influence: Making a Lasting Impact on Others Through Mentoring** by Carol Kent (Nav Press, 2006; \$10.99) Jesus' twelve disciples changed the world forever. Would you like to have a similar impact? Learn seven simple, life-changing principles Jesus used to influence others - like asking questions, telling stories, and offering unconditional love to others. Through practical examples, see how your struggles and triumphs can inspire others. This book also includes a nine-week Bible study for personal reflection or group reflection.



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