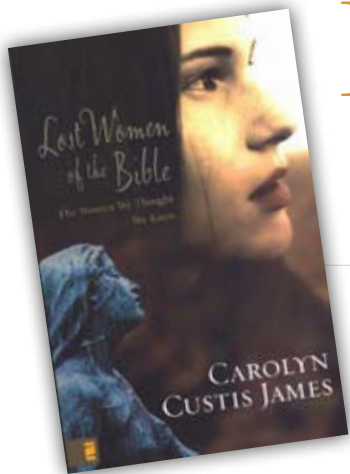


The Mentoring Series

Carolyn Custis James:

What It Means to Be a Woman in Ministry



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The issue may seem intimidating, but it's only as daunting as the command we've already been given.
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Continuing With Love

The issue may seem intimidating,
but it's only as daunting as the
command we've already been given.

by Janine Petry

As leaders in church ministry, we face many challenges on a daily basis. There are meetings to run and attend, plans to be made and carried out, people to manage and care for. Add to the list the fact that we carry out these tasks either working as solo leaders—whether male or female—or alongside one another in clumsy male-female relationships, and we have yet a few more reasons to seek divine guidance as ministry leaders.

For many, the topic of men and women serving together in ministry is a difficult and personal issue. But it's one that leaders must face and discuss as we grow and go forward in fulfilling the Great Commission powerfully in these end times. And while charting through the issue may seem intimidating, it's only as daunting as the command we've already been





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given to: Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:30-31). With this continuing to take precedence in all of our dealings with one another, we can be unified in Christ, work together as his Body, and glorify the Lord until he comes.

If you and your team are looking for encouragement and insights on the topic of men and women in leadership, then this download will help guide you. In it, you'll find the words of respected author, speaker, and leader, Carolyn Custis James who capably challenges and directs on the issue. You'll find thought-provoking questions to help you go further in understanding how this issue applies to you and your ministry. And you'll also find plenty of other resources packed inside to help you go even farther in growing in your understanding on this topic. May God bless your efforts as you serve him.

Blessings,

Janine Petry
Contributing Editor, Gifted For Leadership
Christianity Today International

Introduction



LEADER'S GUIDE

How to use the Mentoring Series from *Gifted for Leadership* in your ministry meetings.

You've purchased an innovative resource that will help train you and those you serve alongside in ministry. Here's how to use the materials in this pack for individual study, or with your board, staff, or ministry leaders:

- Print and photocopy the article(s) you'd like to use (you have permission to photocopy for church or educational use).
- Hand it to your team to read through and complete.
- Lead a discussion based on the team's insights and answers.

The featured author in this Mentoring Series pack is Carolyn Custis James, a respected thinker, author, and leader in ministry. Carolyn Custis James has an MA in biblical studies, and is a vibrant new voice with a biblical and affirming message for women. Her vision

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is eloquently and passionately articulated in her books, **When Life and Beliefs Collide: How Knowing God Makes a Difference** (Zondervan, 2001), **Lost Women of the Bible: Finding Strength and Significance through Their Stories** (Zondervan, 2005), and **The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules** (Zondervan, 2008).

Carolyn travels extensively as a popular speaker for women's conferences, churches, colleges, seminaries, and other Christian organizations. She is the president of WhitbyForum, a ministry dedicated to helping women go deeper in their relationship with God and serve him alongside their Christian brothers. She is a consulting editor for Zondervan's Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament.

This pack is dedicated to the issue of women and men serving together in leadership, and James explores this topic with passion, biblical integrity, and deep, personal insight. We hope you and your group members are challenged and benefited by this resource as you take a step back and evaluate your overall approach to ministry.

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THE HEART OF THE ISSUE

Supporting the Surge

Theology is the study of God and no one (not even women) can get too much of that!

As I glanced over the last Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) alumni newsletter, my eye caught the announcement that the seminary had reached a significant milestone: 1,500 female alumni on their roster. As one of the first women to set foot on the DTS campus as a student, I admit my heart skipped a beat when I saw that number. The fact that DTS was celebrating this was even more satisfying. Rock on DTS!

Here are more encouraging statistics: The latest Association of Theological Seminaries study (2007-08) reported 34% of seminary students are women. Interestingly enough, the same report indicates a significant rise in the numbers of women students between the ages of 40-64—underscoring the happy notion that it's never too late to get started! Furthermore, women now comprise 23% of full-time seminary faculty.

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This growing trend is one of the biggest success stories of the modern church, and we should be making a lot of noise about it. I know there are still some who question (or flat out oppose) the decision to offer theological education to women and still some seminaries that refuse to admit them. Opinions divide over how far women can go with their theological training and whether or not seminaries are capitulating to the culture (and more specifically to feminist influence) by opening their doors to women. But there is strong biblical warrant for what is happening.

The subject matter alone is reason enough for women to be part of the seminary community at every level. After all, theology is the study of God and no one (not even women) can get too much of that! Hopefully, the presence of women in theological seminaries will correct the misperception that theology is for men only and women should just learn from them.

Let us not forget that Jesus defended Mary's desire to "sit at his feet" and learn along with his male disciples—a description that identifies her as a rabbinical student. As I noted in my book, *When Life and Beliefs Collide*, Mary was the first real NT theologian to grasp the meaning of his atonement and the hope of his resurrection. Even Mary's sister Martha began theologizing as she conversed with Jesus after the death of her brother Lazarus.

Then there are his challenging interactions with the Samaritan and Syrophenician women, as well as his choice of Mary Magdalene and the other women from Galilee to be the first witnesses and proclaimers of the resurrected Jesus. All this in a culture that rarely, if ever, offered formal education to women, where men avoided public conversation with women, and where a woman's testimony was inadmissible in a court of law.

I have hard time believing Jesus isn't rejoicing in the swelling numbers of women pursuing theological studies today.

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It is indeed a good thing that more women are walking the hallowed halls of seminaries. What's more, there is a growing recognition that the seminary community needs women. My latest book, *The Gospel of Ruth*, reinforced this conviction, as I studied the conversations between Ruth and Boaz—discussions over Mosaic Law where Ruth's insights expanded Boaz's understanding and subsequent actions.

Likewise today, the involvement of women in theological seminaries is changing things for the better. Suddenly a new pair of eyes falls upon the biblical text. A new perspective that has for centuries been missing is now enriching the discussion of God and his word. And men—both fellow seminary students and professors—are the better for it.

And isn't this the way things are supposed to be? When God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone," what part of life did He exclude? Even in seminary—maybe especially in seminary—men and women need each other.

*This article first appeared on **GiftedForLeadership.com** on January 27, 2009.*

Thought Provokers

- *What are the primary concerns of those who look negatively upon women pursuing theological training?*
- *Read Acts 2:17-18. In what ways could an increase in the number of women pursuing theological studies reflect this biblical prophecy?*

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GETTING DEEPER

When A Woman Finds Her Voice

Women give up something central to their message by imitating men.

I can't recall an election year that has generated more interest and excitement than the one held in November 2008. One of the "moments" that captured a lot of attention (as well as considerable flack) was when Hillary Clinton, campaigning in New Hampshire, dropped her professionalism and her stump speech to speak simply and transparently from her heart.

Looking back on that moment, the senator in her primary victory speech reflected, "Over the last week I listened to you; in the process, I found my own voice."

Whatever the pundits may be saying about Hillary finding her voice in New Hampshire (and many believe it turned the election in her favor), I am personally fascinated by what happened to her and troubled by the notion that it is actually possible for us, like Hillary, to do a lot of speaking, teaching, writing, communicating, not of politics, but of the gospel without finding and employing our own voices.

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“It’s a man’s world,” we’re told. To succeed as a leader, we must adapt ourselves to the world of men. We must learn to think and speak like a man.

While I don’t want to discount the importance of understanding men and how they think and operate, we aren’t men and are giving up something central to who we are if we lose ourselves by imitating them. We end up distancing our very selves from the message we proclaim. We can routinely prepare and deliver messages without connecting our words to our own hearts and struggles, without tapping into the rich perspectives God has given us as women or drawing out of our personal histories with God.

What does it mean for a woman to find her voice? Some are quick to reduce the discussion to emotions and tears. But that explanation is far too simplistic and doesn’t account for the fact that a lot of men choke up when they speak about something they care deeply about.

For me personally, a better example of a woman who found her voice is Ruth, the Moabitess. Ruth saw the world through the eyes of a woman, of a Gentile outsider, of a scavenger in the grain fields of Bethlehem, and above all through the eyes of a follower of Yahweh. Her “own voice” emerges out of her richly complex perspective. She speaks from her heart, from her true self, and in using her own voice becomes a powerful agent for change in Israel.

Her words reach the ears of Boaz, a man who knows how to listen. He listens to this new voice—this female voice, this voice that speaks out of poverty, this foreign voice that dares to reinterpret Jewish law.

Boaz is a landowner who carefully observes the letter of Mosaic gleaning laws. But the gleaning practices of Israel look very different when you’re living on the hungry side of the law. Ruth possessed a perspective Boaz lacked. The letter of the law says, “Let them glean.” And Boaz complied. The spirit of the law (according to Ruth) says, “Feed them.”

Ruth’s perspective opened up new possibilities Boaz hadn’t considered.

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What does it mean for a woman to find her own voice? I'm still pondering that question for myself. But in Ruth's case, it meant a new perspective—a missing perspective—was gained. It meant the conversation between men and women, about God and his word and what it means to follow him in this world, grew richer and deeper. It meant Boaz, through Ruth's leadership, discovered a whole new ever-expanding realm of obedience to God. It meant God's people learned to sacrifice in greater ways for the good of those in need, and that the kingdom of God shone more brightly in the fields of Bethlehem than they would have otherwise.

Seems to me we need to work on finding our voices too.

*This article first appeared on **GiftedForLeadership.com** on February 1, 2008.*

Thought Provokers

- *What does it mean for a woman to “find her own voice”? In what ways do women “imitate” men when it comes to forms of self-expression?*
- *What are the characteristics of the “feminine voice” in contrast to the masculine?*

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BIBLICALLY SPEAKING

Recovering the Blessed Alliance

Whatever happened to the sure-footed alliance of men and women the Bible envisions?

“It’s awkward and uncomfortable—like a three-legged race. I’ll have to learn to walk all over again.”

I nearly fell out of my chair! Frank managed an uneasy smile. We were drinking coffee with a young friend who, in an unguarded moment, was talking with disturbing pessimism about his impending marriage. Neither Frank nor I thought of marriage as a three-legged race. For us it was more like a sprint. Astonishment turned to sadness over this young man’s dimly low expectations of what a male/female relationship might promise.

Happily, not every prospective groom shares this gloomy perspective. However, his attitude points to a reality that not only characterizes a lot of Christian marriages, it spills over into working relationships between women and men in other venues. Even in Christian circles—even on ministry leadership teams—we

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joke uneasily about the “battle of the sexes” because, truth be told, even here relationships between the sexes can be as awkward and cumbersome as a three-legged race—or worse.

Whatever happened to the sure-footed alliance the Bible envisions?

In the days before a conference, I was dumbfounded by the number of successful women in leadership who confided to me the difficulties they were experiencing in working relationships with men they respected on their ministry teams. More often than not, they were enjoying opportunities other women only dream about. And the men with whom they struggled were sometimes the very ones who had opened doors for them.

Still, something was wrong.

One woman discovered to her dismay that she was the only church staff member excluded from a private male-only staff meeting to develop strategies for the ministry, including her department.

Another ministry leader found her female voice didn’t carry the same weight as the men around the table. Her ideas were largely ignored unless a man repeated them.

And here is the real kicker. Difficulties were surfacing in both conservative and progressive contexts. Remarkably, it didn’t seem to matter what the formal stance was on the role of women in ministry. Even the most progressive ministries still found themselves struggling to find the right balance for women and men to work effectively together. The real problem is not primarily about how far a woman can advance in a given organization, but is bound up in something deeper that is impacting everyone.

If, like the pessimistic groom, the best we can hope for is to adjust to the three-legged nature of our relationships, have we set our sights too low? Doesn’t the Gospel take male/female relationships to a completely different level?

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When “God created the heavens and the earth,” he had a world-wide kingdom in mind. His key strategy for building that kingdom centered on his image bearers—male and female. Their shared mission was to represent him and to advance his kingdom over every square inch of this planet. And he called them to build it together.

He couldn’t have been clearer about the makeup of this team than when he made the unqualified statement, “It is not good for the man to be alone,” and created a woman as the resolution to that problem. Put more starkly, God’s strategy is not primarily for men to work with men, or women to work with women, but for a blessed alliance in which his sons and daughters band together as warriors for his purposes.

God put his stamp of approval on this strategic partnership when he blessed them and commissioned them together with their global mandate (Genesis 1:28).

Sin broke up the Blessed Alliance. Jesus brings it back. He calls his followers—male and female—to be one body where every member is vital to the health and strength of the whole.

It’s time to embrace God’s creation vision for men and women to serve him together. We don’t need to settle for any awkward, hobbling three-legged race. Our sights are set higher than maintaining a delicate balance by determining who does what and when and where. We want to recover this Blessed Alliance in our ministry relationships—where men and women are sprinting forward together to fulfill God’s calling on their lives.

*This article first appeared on **GiftedForLeadership.com** on September 16, 2008.*

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Thought Provokers

- *Read Genesis 1:27-28. How does this inform your understanding of “the blessed alliance” James refers to?*
- *What is James’ referring to when she poses: Doesn’t the Gospel take male/female relationships to a completely different level? Do you agree that “God’s strategy is not primarily for men to work with men, or women to work with women, but for a blessed alliance in which his sons and daughters band together as warriors for his purposes”? Why or why not?*

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LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

Born to Follow?

The most important lesson in leadership is not being told you were born to lead, but learning you were born to follow.

At a very early age I came to understand that as a female, I was born to follow. “Men lead. Women follow.” That’s what I was taught. It didn’t matter that I was the pastor’s daughter, even though PK’s are often leader-types. My three brothers each took a turn as president of the youth group at church. Not me. I knew my place. Girls aren’t supposed to lead. Even being in the first class of women at Dallas Theological Seminary didn’t dislodge me from the conviction that as a woman I was born to follow—follow my husband (if one showed up) and follow male leadership in the church.

Oh, sure, I knew about Deborah, Esther, and Priscilla. But their stories were always accompanied by the explanation that these women were “exceptions.” Christian women weren’t supposed to get any big ideas from studying their lives. Usually one or more qualifiers followed: They weren’t actually doing as much as it seems; they were stepping into a male leadership vacuum and actually were a punishment on the men; this was a unique

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moment in time and not intended to establish any pattern. So these strong female leaders were carefully set aside as role models for women today.

What surprises me, as I think back over my life, is the fact that having the follower mentality drummed into me was actually a great way to prepare me for the day I would discover God created women to be leaders too. The first and most important lesson in leadership is not being told you were born to lead (or participating in competitive sports), but learning you were born to follow.

God's creation call for his image bearers—male and female—to rule and subdue the earth couldn't be a clearer mandate for leadership. But the only way to become the leaders God desires is first and foremost to become his followers. Jesus' first words to the men he chose as leaders was, "Follow me."

The person who finally taught me to think of myself as a leader was a woman whose first recorded act in the Bible was to establish herself irrevocably as a follower. When instructed by her mother-in-law Naomi to return to Moab and to her gods, Ruth the Moabitess dug in her heels and proved immovable. This is when Ruth binds herself to follow Yahweh.

If any woman was ever qualified to take a back seat in life, Ruth was that woman. She was a foreigner, a recent convert, a newcomer in Israel, widowed (meaning she had no voice, no legal rights, no place in society) and barren (as a woman she had nothing to contribute). All reasons to excuse herself from any thoughts of leadership. But Ruth didn't let an unpromising resume stop her. Instead of maintaining the deferential, passive, clinging image we have wrongly ascribed to her, she is gutsy, bold, and astonishingly assertive, and all because underneath her sights were set—not on securing a top spot for herself—but on doing whatever it took to live as a true follower of God in this world.

As a result, she emerges as a powerful influence in the lives of Naomi, Boaz, and the rest of the Bethlehem community. Her actions bless everyone in her path and ultimately change the world for, unbeknown to her, she is rescuing the royal line of Christ.

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Ruth's example establishes a pattern that goes against common assumptions about what female leadership will do to men. When the first calling and greatest passion of a female leader is to follow Jesus, the men in her life won't suffer the fears we hear recited all the time: that they will be displaced, emasculated, or feminized. To the contrary, they become better men.

There is no male leadership vacuum in the Book of Ruth. Boaz is a true leader when he makes his entrance in the story—a man to be admired for all the right reasons. When he exits the story (after repeatedly following Ruth's lead), he has attained new and higher levels of godliness and is honored as the great-grandfather of King David and the worthy ancestor of Jesus.

Deborah's heart belongs to Yahweh, and so she calls and accompanies a reluctant Barak into battle. Barak makes the Bible's Hall of Fame (Hebrews 11:32) for great men and women of faith. Esther overcomes her fears to answer God's call on her life. She confronts her husband (a man with the power to take her life if it suits his mood) and overthrows Haman, the second most powerful man in the world, and his genocidal plots against her people. Her ascendance to power makes King Xerxes a wiser ruler and exalts her noble cousin Mordecai to a position of great stature and world power.

In Priscilla's unbending commitment to the teachings of Jesus and Paul, she partners with her husband in setting Apollos straight in his teaching. Together they strengthen Apollos to proclaim the gospel to countless people.

I no longer believe leadership belongs exclusively to men. God calls all of his daughters to lead. But the leadership we offer to others will only be as good as our ability to follow—to follow the one who created us to lead. So go ahead. I don't mind if you tell me I was born to follow.

*This article first appeared on **GiftedForLeadership.com** on December 4, 2007.*

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Thought Provokers

- *In what ways does leadership belong to men and women?*
- *How is it true that “the leadership we offer to others will only be as good as our ability to follow”?*

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PRACTICAL CONNECTION

Savoring Synergy

If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.

—*African Proverb*

Several years ago, when I was facing major surgery, I learned just how alone a person can feel and also what it means to have someone come alongside you.

At the time, I was an employee of the hospital where I was now an anxious patient. When I awoke the morning of my surgery, both my husband and my boss (an amazing woman who was also to me both a mentor and a friend) were there for me. As I was wheeled up to the surgical suite, I had an IV on one side and my friend on the other. Her hand was gently resting on my shoulder pumping courage into me.

There's more than a little truth in the African proverb that we need one another to go the distance in the battles God puts in our path.





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In 2004, after dozens of conversations with women in vocational ministry and a sizable dose of personal experience, a group of us in Orlando agreed that the ministry can be a lonely place and we wanted to do something about it.

Today, many women in vocational ministry are still in the pioneering phase. Often we're the only or the first woman on a ministry team. (Now there's a recipe for aloneness!) We met women—like a seminary dean of women—who don't know any other women in their field and are winging it, instead of benefiting from the experience (and avoiding the mistakes) of someone further down the road. Then, of course, there is the next generation of women, preparing to launch into ministry, who wonder what doors will open to them and how to connect with seasoned women who have blazed the trail for them.

In 2005, we launched Synergy to bring these women together. Synergy Conferences provide a stimulating forum where we can network, refuel and go deeper spiritually, and equip and inform one another for greater ministry effectiveness. Believe me, this is not your typical women's conference!

In 2006, we embraced our identity as God's image bearers, ezer-warriors for his purposes, and partners in a Blessed Alliance with our Christian brothers to advance the Kingdom of Jesus Christ throughout the earth. These callings underscore the Bible's strong, affirming message for women. It also reaffirms our belief that our brothers need us to join them in fulfilling God's calling on His church, and we are deeply committed to building strong relationships with them.

In 2007, we were thrilled when Gifted for Leadership approached us with their desire to come on board and co-sponsor Synergy Conferences with us. We couldn't agree more with what Amy Simpson said, "God has brought us together."

When I woke up this morning, I wasn't facing surgery. But I admit I still felt anxious. Ahead are ministry challenges that I will face alone. My to-do list only seems to grow longer, no matter how

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many items I check off. There are difficulties, stresses, and unwelcome battles that are in my path—battles I know I must fight for loved ones, for my ministry, and in my personal struggles with God.

This morning before my feet touched the floor, I was heartened by reminding myself, “I’m an ezer-warrior. God has called me to be strong and face these battles for him.” I felt a sudden surge of encouragement just remembering the friends I’ve made through Synergy—other women who are facing battles too and who are only a quick phone call or email away.

*This article first appeared on **GiftedForLeadership.com** on January 27, 2009.*

Thought Provokers

- *How do men need women to join them “in fulfilling God’s calling on His church”? How are you and your fellow ministry leaders encouraging the building of strong relationships between these groups?*
- *What are the risks of doing ministry alone? How can partnering with other women bring encouragement for facing the battles ahead?*

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Additional Resources

More places for more information.

A Spirit Fit to Lead, a downloadable resource from **GiftedforLeadership.com**, will help you explore ways to keep your spirit uplifted so you will be able to lead others. When our souls aren't being nourished, it can be easy to bring unnecessary challenges into leadership situations-whether at church, work, or even at home. Maybe we aren't as patient as we could be. Maybe we seek conflict instead of peace. Maybe we ignore the promptings of the Holy Spirit when we should be focused on them.

Facing Fears as a Leader, a downloadable resource from **GiftedforLeadership.com**. This downloadable packet offers practical advice and biblically sound insights from authors to help you go farther in living the fearless life you desire.

Facing Fears as a Leader, a downloadable resource from **GiftedforLeadership.com**. This packet offers practical advice and biblically sound insights from authors to help you go farther in living the fearless life you desire.

Leading Men, a downloadable resource from **GiftedforLeadership.com**. This packet will help you lead the men and women on your team.





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Leading with Confidence, a downloadable resource from **GiftedforLeadership.com**. God often calls us to do things that at the very least stretch our gifts or at the most force us to step out on faith in unknown territory, depending on God alone to equip us with what's needed for the tasks.

Listening to the Holy Spirit, a downloadable resource from **GiftedforLeadership.com**. This downloadable packet from Gifted for Leadership helps you see what it means to lead in the power of the Holy Spirit and invites you to see if you are using the gifts the Spirit gives us.

Loving Hard-to-Love People, a downloadable resource from **GiftedforLeadership.com**. This packet gives you wisdom for loving difficult people in your congregation, small group, ministry team, or workplace

Ministry for Today's Women, a downloadable resource from **GiftedforLeadership.com**. Running women's ministries is a tough job, for so many reasons. Not the least of which is that churches today still fail to recognize that women are not all the same, do not all have the same needs, and can't be ministered to in a cookie-cutter approach. Because we believe in the importance of ministry to women and the good work of women's ministry leaders, Gifted for Leadership created this booklet. We've designed it to offer you some honest opinions on the way things look today, some ideas of what women would like to see, and some encouragement and wisdom to make it happen.

Serving Alongside Your Spouse This downloadable packet from **GiftedforLeadership.com** is designed to help you as you explore—or further discover—what it means to serve alongside your spouse in ministry.

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The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules, by Carolyn Custis James (Zondervan, 2008). Drilling deep into the familiar story of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, Carolyn Custis James uncovers radical levels of love and sacrifice—as well as gutsy risk-taking and rule-breaking. Discover God’s calling for your life and learn how to become a courageous daughter of his kingdom. This is a Biblical study in celebration of Ruth, a notable woman of the Old Testament who carries a message of hope and renewal for women today. James is quick to point out that God is the hero of her story and our story as well. The Gospel of Ruth is a must read for both men and women alike with a fresh look at a commonly known narrative.

When Life and Beliefs Collide: How Knowing God Makes a Difference, by Carolyn Custis James (Zondervan, 2003). Sooner or later, life’s difficulties bring every Christian woman to God’s doorstep with questions too personal to ignore. We’re tired of spiritual pie in the sky. We want authentic, God-as-he-really-is faith—the kind that holds us together when our world is falling apart and equips us to offer strength and hope to others. *When Life and Beliefs Collide* raises a long-overdue call for us to think seriously about what we believe about God. With passion, brilliance, and eloquence, Carolyn Custis James weaves stories of contemporary women with episodes from the life of Mary of Bethany to illustrate the practical benefits of knowing God deeply. Examining the misperceptions and abuses that discourage women from pursuing a deeper understanding of God, this insightful book demonstrates how practical and down to earth knowing God can be.

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Do You Feel **Alone** as a Woman Leader?

IF you're a capable, called, and gifted Christian woman in leadership, join the conversation at **GiftedForLeadership.com**. This blog, along with downloadable resources, will help you safely converse with other women about the issues you face. You'll walk away feeling encouraged, supported, challenged, and definitely not alone!



www.GiftedForLeadership.com

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