

Woman to woman: Answering the call of Titus 2

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(In this article for women and their pastors, Jean Williams talks about discipleship, women's ministry and how to become the sort of woman who has been shaped and moulded by the word of God.)

My friend and I were visiting another friend's church, enduring that uncomfortable time after the service when you stand around, a cup of lukewarm tea in one hand and an Arnott's biscuit in the other, feeling like you have the word 'visitor' tattooed across your forehead and waiting for someone to approach you to make awkward conversation.

But the woman who approached us quickly put us at ease. She was white-haired, bright-eyed and vivacious, and she asked us, "Is this your first time here?" with sincerity and warmth, as if she really wanted to know the answer. We basked in her interest.

As we chatted, it became apparent that here was an older woman who hadn't lost interest in younger women. She told us that she went to the young people's evening service as well as the morning service just so she could spend time with young women and encourage them in their faith.

As my friend and I reflected on the conversation later, we realized the same thought had run through both our minds: "She is the woman I want to become".

The purpose of women's ministry

How can we become this sort of woman? How can we encourage and train other women to become like her? Is it through the church's women's ministry? Is it through running events like retreats and craft days?

Women's ministries often struggle with a lack of clear direction. Even in churches without an organized women's ministry, it can be hard for women to know how to encourage other women. What we need is a clear direction—a simple aim to keep in mind. Here's an excellent place to start:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. (Titus 2:3-5)

These verses give shape and purpose to women's ministry, whether formal or informal. They give us a clear statement of purpose: older women are to teach and train young women how to live as Christian women.

Unless older women take responsibility for teaching young women, it probably won't happen. Paul encourages Titus to teach every group in the church—older men, young men, older women, slaves—every group except for young women! Teaching and training young women in godly womanhood is primarily the responsibility of older women, not the pastor or male elders of a church. It's vital that women and women's ministries don't lose sight of this goal.

Have a look around your church. Are older women teaching and training younger women? Are women being equipped and encouraged to mentor women? Are relationships flourishing between women of different ages? Sadly, these are the very things that aren't happening in many churches.

When women's ministry doesn't happen

It's a common story: again and again, I speak to young women who long for an older woman to mentor them, but who have found no one with the time, energy or inclination to do so. On the rare occasions when older women do mentor young women, biblical womanhood is often missing from the agenda.

Why aren't older women teaching and training young women in godly womanhood? My friends and I brainstormed and came up with some possibilities:

- Women in western society often live isolated lives because of the breakdown of traditional society, which is unlike many places where women still spend much of the day in each other's homes.
- Generations are deliberately separated in society and church, in contrast to a time (say 50 years ago) when women of different ages mingled freely.
- Many churches have age-specific congregations and small groups.
- Many young women don't respect older women and what they have to offer, while many older women are self-absorbed and lack interest in women outside their family circle.
- Different generations have different understandings of ministry: young women may expect formal mentoring and teaching, while older women may not feel equipped for this.
- We have a cultural tendency to resent unsolicited advice and to seek counsel only from experts or close friends.
- It can be hard to find time and energy for women's ministry after working in a job or caring for your family and home all day.
- The majority of married women with children return to work soon after their children go to school—sometimes for financial reasons but also often because of the pressure of feminism, careerism or materialism. This leaves little time for ministry to women.
- Single women now usually have a full-time job, which limits their ability to be involved in women's ministries during the day and limits the time they have to encourage younger women.
- Women's programs often emphasize events rather than teaching, training and mentoring. Where there is teaching, it is often not purposefully applied to women's lives.
- Feminism makes us uncomfortable with teaching on biblical womanhood (especially its practical application) and makes us embarrassed to pass on 'womanly' skills like household management.
- Some churches have lost an entire generation of women to Liberalism.
- There's some opposition in egalitarian circles to women-only ministry. My friend who wanted to train women in mentoring was told that women should be teaching only mixed groups. Furthermore, women often see little value in only teaching women as opposed to having the opportunity to teach *everyone*.

As we encourage women's ministry to women, these are some of the obstacles we may have to overcome.

A Titus 2 curriculum

It's all very well to say that older women should be teaching and training young women, but what are they to teach? Let's look at Titus 2:3-5 in the broader context of the chapter and see what's on the curriculum. There are four main topics older women will discuss with younger women. The first two are also taught by men to men, but the second two are uniquely relevant to women.

1. The gospel of grace

Books and talks on biblical womanhood tend to be strong on practice and weak on principle. Women's teaching often degenerates into a list of dos and don'ts—for example, kiss your husband when he walks in the door, have regular dates with your children and keep your cupboards organized. This is particularly damaging for women

because many of us long for self-transformation and we excel at comparing ourselves with others. We listen to a talk on womanhood and go away with 20 ways we need to change—right now!

But Paul doesn't let us get away with rule-based teaching. Even when he addresses the specifics of godly living, he makes it clear that our behaviour flows from the gospel. It's “sound doctrine” that gives godliness its shape ([Titus 2:1](#)). It's “the grace of God” that “teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness” ([Titus 2:11-12](#) NIV). It's our desire to “adorn” the gospel that motivates good deeds ([Titus 2:10](#); cf. [vv. 5, 8](#)).

Only a woman who knows the gospel will live her life in the loving freedom that comes from grace, rather than attempting to meet her Christian culture's version of perfect womanhood. As we teach women, we need to constantly remind them (and ourselves!) that most of the practical advice we give isn't God-ordained, that God is patient with our slowness to change, and that we're forgiven and transformed through God's grace.

2. The Bible and sound doctrine

It's sometimes argued that women shouldn't teach doctrine, even to women. That's because the list in [Titus 2:4-5](#) focuses on lifestyle, not doctrine, and because men are responsible for the teaching and theological direction of a church ([1 Tim 2:11-15](#), [1 Cor 14:26-39](#)).

But if older women are to teach young women what “accords with sound doctrine” ([Titus 2:1](#)), older women need to understand great truths about God and learn to handle the word of God correctly ([2 Tim 2:15](#)). When I mentor a young woman, I begin with the same topics as my husband when he mentors a young man: salvation, assurance, the authority of the Bible, and so on. As needed, I'll address topics like the Trinity, the role of the Spirit and predestination. The main thing we'll do is simply learn from God's word together.

At the heart of godly womanhood is confident trust in God—an inner strength that comes from a deep knowledge of the Bible and of God's sovereign purposes. Only a woman who ‘hopes in God’ and who ‘doesn't fear what is frightening’ will have the courage for submission, and will display “the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit” ([1 Pet 3:1-7](#)). Women, like men, need roots that go deep into God's word and God's truth.

3. Biblical womanhood

Women also need to hear about God's glorious plan for womanhood. Manhood and womanhood were not an afterthought in God's design for humanity. From the moment of creation, God made us male and female, equal before God, with different roles and responsibilities. The woman was made to be the man's ‘helper’, serving God in light of the created order ([Gen 1-3](#), [1 Tim 2:11-15](#)).

[Titus 2:3-5](#) spells out what this looks like in the life of a young, married woman with children. She is to love her husband and children, stay pure and self-controlled, manage her home and practice kindness, and be submissive to her husband. This isn't an exhaustive list, nor does it mean that a married woman shouldn't do paid work outside the home, as long as this supports, rather than undermines, her commitment to home and family (cf. [Prov 31](#)). But it does show where her primary focus lies.

Yet we must be careful not to use [Titus 2:3-5](#) to encourage women to idolize home and family. As Nicole Starling says,

These particular instructions to women in [Titus 2:3-5](#) are meant to sail on an ocean of general instruction given in the Bible for all of us as Christians: without an awareness of that big ocean of the Bible's teaching about Jesus and the kingdom of God, the Titus 2 boat can end up bobbing

around harmlessly and inoffensively in the backyard swimming pool of suburban materialism, going nowhere.

Much teaching on [Titus 2:3-5](#) subtly encourages household idolatry. Singleness becomes a waiting room for marriage, rather than an opportunity to serve Christ with undivided attention ([1 Cor 7:32-35](#)), and the family home becomes an end in itself, rather than a place to reach out to others.

But [Titus 2:3-5](#) encourages young women not only to ‘work at home’ but also to be “kind”. In [1 Timothy 5:9-10](#), the word ‘kind’ is linked to many good deeds of godly women—not just bringing up children, but also showing hospitality, serving Christians, and caring for the needy. A godly woman's home is not only a secure refuge, but also a base for loving, serving and reaching out to others.

4. Practical skills

I doubt that Paul was thinking of formal teaching or even formal mentoring (a recent concept!) when he encouraged older women to teach young women—although both teaching and mentoring have their place! The items on Paul's list are very practical: loving a husband, managing a home, staying pure ([Titus 2:4-5](#)). Young women need older women to come alongside them, give them help and support, and, in the minutiae of life, offer words of wisdom and a godly example.

So there you have it: four topics that women should be teaching to women. You don't have to be a theological expert or trained in ministry to teach these things to a younger woman, even if you're formally mentoring her. Simply open the Bible, learn from it together and seek help if you get stuck. Share your life and what you've learned about godly womanhood. Pray together. If you have daughters, teach these things to them first, and then to other women, and train other women to pass them onto others so that the teaching of younger women doesn't stop with us ([2 Tim 2:2](#)). Remember that discipling women doesn't generally take place in a formal setting; it happens naturally as we get involved in one another's lives.

Getting practical: everyday ideas for women encouraging women

What's your place in women's discipleship? Do you see yourself as a young woman, an older woman, or a facilitator of discipleship relationships between younger and older women? It's likely you fit all three categories! Whichever group you belong to, here's some practical suggestions.

1. As the older woman

- Talk about yourself. Share your life, thoughts, and struggles. Let younger women “see your progress” ([1 Tim 4:15](#)).
- Ask lots of questions. Listen. Be interested. Be slow to give unsolicited advice.
- Tell women what you've been reading or thinking about. They might not say much, but they are listening.
- Keep on hand some favourite books to lend or give away. Ask follow-up questions. Read a book about womanhood with a younger woman.
- Share how you read the Bible and pray. Talk about how you deal with temptations to worry or gossip.
- Invite women into your home. Let them see how you run things. Teach a young woman how to make and keep a budget. Don't try to make your house look perfect.
- If you're married, welcome a single woman into your family, especially on difficult occasions like New Year's Eve. Let her see your struggles so she doesn't idolize marriage and family life.

- If you're single, model godliness in long-term singleness: show how your trust remains firmly in the Lord and how you serve Him in your circumstances. Model godly relationships with the opposite sex.
- Give practical help to younger women. Look after a single mom's kids. Ask an international student over for dinner. Visit a depressed woman every week. Clean or do a load of washing for others during times of stress.
- Enlist young women's help in helping others. Spend a day together cooking casseroles for people in your church. Visit an old peoples' home. Teach Sunday School together.
- Be generous with praise and encouragement: "It's great seeing you reaching out to women at work" or "Your children are a delight. You're doing just fine; hang in there." But don't flatter for the sake of it.
- Be intentional when you go to church. Sit next to a younger woman and ask how she's going as a Christian. Pray for the women at church.
- Befriend the teenage girls in your church. Go to the young people's service.
- Be involved in women's lives. Call them. Remember their details and ask about them.
- Write a younger woman an encouraging note, telling her how you've seen her grow in godliness.
- Call a young woman each week and ask how you can pray for her.

2. As the facilitator

- Speak respectfully about older women in your church. Model this respect to others.
- Build bridges between younger women and older women in your church. Organize mixed gatherings. Prompt older women to contact younger women. Include women of different ages in prayer partnerships and Bible study groups.
- Organize seminars for women with speakers you can trust. Run a book club for women. If you run a Bible study, occasionally run topical studies on areas of interest to women.
- Remember how isolated many single and childless women feel. Run women's events and Bible studies at times that suit working women. Organize get-togethers for women without obvious friendship groups.
- Train women in Titus 2 ministry and mentoring. If you don't have the skills to train them, find someone who does and ask them to lead a training day at your church.
- Mentor a younger woman and encourage her to mentor someone else.

3. As the younger woman

- Remember that you can learn from older women even when they're not theologically informed or trained in formal ministry. Respect older women and what they've learned and have to offer. Listen.
- Attach yourself to older women you respect, and ask questions. Seek out women who are standing firm in their faith, who have persevered through suffering, who have a heart for evangelism, who have raised their children well, who respect their husbands, or who trust God through long-term singleness or childlessness. Write down questions to ask them.
- Ask an older woman to mentor you, to read a book with you, or, if it's less intimidating, to pray with you. Older women may not realize what they have to offer, or may not want to push themselves forward. It may be up to you to take the initiative.
- Find an older woman who excels in a particular kind of ministry—hospital visitation, door-to-door evangelism, cooking for large gatherings—and ask if you can go along to learn from her.
- Call an older woman and ask for advice and prayer the next time you struggle to pray, manage your time well or love those you live with.
- When there are no older women available, seek mentoring from a distance. Read biographies of Christian women who stood firm. Read books and listen to talks by Christian women.

Becoming an older women

When I think about growing older (something I'm increasingly aware of!), these words by John Piper remind me of who I want to become:

One of the challenges I repeatedly hold out to the people of our church—especially the women—is that they make it one of their aims to age into a sage. I love the vision of older women full of seasoned spiritual fruit that comes only with long life and much affliction and deep meditation on the Word of God. So many younger women yearn for older women, who are deeply wise, to share the wisdom God has taught them over the years.

When I was a young woman, I longed for the encouragement of an older woman. As I grow older, I hope to become the kind of woman I longed for. I hope to fill this gap in the lives of young women around me.

This isn't just my dream. Every Christian woman has a responsibility to help women who are younger in age or in the faith to grow in godly womanhood. If you're a Christian woman and this doesn't lie close to your heart and shape your priorities, you need to ask yourself why. We don't all have the same gifts—we will respond to God's call in Titus 2 in different ways—but our Lord Jesus Christ has committed younger women to our care.

The desire of my heart is to see a new generation of Titus 2 women in our churches—older women who devote themselves to teaching and training young women. Wouldn't it be wonderful if you and I committed to asking God to raise up women like this? In the meantime, let's be the answer to our own prayers.

For further reading and resources related to this article, visit [The Longing](#).

Endnotes

¹ Who are the 'older women'? It's clear from [1 Timothy 5:1-16](#) that Paul probably had in mind women beyond child-bearing age. The reason the advice in [Titus 2:3-5](#) for younger women focuses so strongly on married women with children is that the vast majority of young women in the first century would have been married, and Paul intended for this to be so ([1 Tim 5:11-15](#)). But [Titus 2:3-5](#) is relevant to all women: we're all 'older' women in relation to women younger in age and the faith, and we all have a responsibility to teach and encourage them.

² Nicole Starling, 'Transformed by Titus 2', 1 September 2008, <http://equipbooks.blogspot.com/2008/09/chapter-1-transformed-by-titus-2.html>.

³ Carolyn Mahaney's *Feminine Appeal* (Crossway, Wheaton, 2004), the best book I've read on [Titus 2:3-5](#), occasionally has this tendency.

⁴ 'Agathos', the Greek word for 'kind' in Titus 2:5, is almost always translated 'good' in the ESV and NIV, and is used frequently in Titus for the 'good deeds' characteristic of Christians responding to God's grace (see [Titus 1:8, 16, 2:5, 3:1](#)).

⁵ For an excellent, clear and easy-to-read book on discipleship, read Sophie de Witt's *One-to-one: A discipleship handbook* (Authentic Lifestyle, Carlisle, 2003).

⁶ These suggestions are based on a list created by Jenny Moody, with input from Carmelina Read, Alison Payne and Karen Beilharz. I've also drawn on Susan Hunt's *Spiritual Mothering* (Crossway, Wheaton, 1992), an excellent source of practical ideas for women's ministry to women.

⁷ John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God*, Crossway, Wheaton, 2004, pp. 109-110.