

Called to Go: Who is Fulfilling the Call?

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Cedarville University

Called to Go: Who is fulfilling the call?

Research Paper

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Contemporary World Missions

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In the global church, there is much evidence of females stepping up to evangelize and serve. Women are stepping up, and heeding the call of Christ in fulfilling the Great Commission. One must wonder why there is a disproportionate number of women to men in service. In an interview, John Piper mentions that 80-85% of all single missionaries are women.¹ Later in the interview he says, “It is a rare thing, like two out of every ten, for a single man to make missions his life’s vocation, which results in the overall statistics being that one-third of those in evangelical world missions are married men, one-third are married women, and 80% of the last third are single women.”² Women have always served alongside men in vital ways, including traveling with and learning from Jesus and laboring alongside Paul in the Gospel.³ Considering this, this paper will discuss the role of women in the mission field as leaders and argue that men need to be more willing to heed Christ’s call to fulfill the Great Commission.

To portray and better understand the biblical mandate of men being the leaders of the church, scholars coined the term Complementarianism.⁴ This term means that men and women are equal, but have different roles. Men are called to lead, protect, and provide; while women are called to be nurturers, helpers, and helpers-suitable. The secular world thinks that complementarians are for women's oppression; in reality, they want to see men and women working together as they reflect “complementary truths about Jesus.”⁵ In the mission field, men and women have unique roles and giftings. However, there has been a general lack of men

¹ “Why Are Women More Eager Missionaries?” Desiring God, April 18, 2020. <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/why-are-women-more-eager-missionaries>.

² Desiring God

³ Philippians 4:3

⁴ Kassian, Mary. “Complementarianism for Dummies.” *The Gospel Coalition*, 4 Sept. 2012, www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/complementarianism-for-dummies/.

⁵ Kassian; Complementary truths about Jesus- found in Ephesians 5:23

serving in the field. This has caused the women to lead. The opposite of complementarianism is egalitarianism. Egalitarianism is the view that women can do the man's job, such as shepherding the flock, teaching men, and being a pastor. When men have not heeded the call of Christ, women have taken on the roles biblically defined for men.⁶ African Inland Mission says, "The disparity [of the lack of men in the field] is great enough that there is a noticeable gap on many mission fields," and continues, "the men are missing, and a cadre of single women has taken up the work, sometimes doing jobs that a male presence would be better suited to."⁷ Mike Delorenzo of AIM, says "It's difficult, if not impossible, for young women to minister to men in most cross-cultural contexts."⁸ This is why men are needed.

There are several women from early church history, and the Bible who have risen up, having shown superb leadership, often in the face of persecution or trials. The first woman from early church history is Apollonia of Alexandria.⁹ This woman was appointed as a deacon in the church.¹⁰ Apollonia, after having served faithfully in the early church, later had her teeth pulled out and was martyred by burning at the stake.¹¹ Another example of strong female leadership is that of Hildegard of Bingen.¹² Hildegard was said to have "revived the spiritual health of a church that had become morally and spiritually indifferent," and that she "called the people to find salvation by looking to the Bible and to Christ rather than to the priests."¹³

⁶ The example that comes to mind is Deborah (Judges) and Lottie Moon.

⁷ Koh, Lyndsey. "New Statistics on Single Men in Missions." *Mission Network News*, August 16, 2013. <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/new-statistics-on-single-men-in-missions/>. African Inland Mission or AIM.

⁸ Koh

⁹ Haddad, Mimi. "Egalitarian Pioneers: Betty Friedan or Catherine Booth?." *Priscilla papers* 20.4 (2006): 53.

¹⁰ Haddad, 54; Today, a woman serving in this role would be called a Deaconess.

¹¹ Haddad, 54.

¹² Haddad, 55.

¹³ Haddad, 55.

The first woman from the Bible that is being mentioned for her leadership is Deborah.¹⁴ She was a prophetess and a judge, in a time when Israel was in rebellion with God. Together with a man named Barack, Deborah led 10,000 Israelite men to fight against Sisera.¹⁵ The Lord gave Deborah, Barack, and the Israelite army great victory that day through the hand of a woman, named Jael.¹⁶ This is just one of many examples throughout the Old and New Testaments where the Lord used women to accomplish his purposes.

The second woman from the Bible worth noting, who displayed wise leadership when her husband did not, is Abigail.¹⁷ Her husband Nabal was a wicked man, who was not generous when David asked for provisions. This caused David to set out with the intent of justice. However, a servant informed Abigail of David's intent, and Abigail acted swiftly. Abigail humbly came before David, presenting him with the provisions and respect that he had sought. Abigail acted without Nabal's knowledge; however, a study points out that in Abigail's refusal to confide in her husband, her lack of confidence in him is noticed.¹⁸ The study continues, "In view of Abigail's insight into the Lord's choice of David,¹⁹ her decision to go against her husband's wishes seems to fall under the category of obeying God rather than men."²⁰ Abigail is an example of a woman who feared the Lord, and stood up in leadership when her husband did not. The Lord rewarded her faithfulness, as not long after, she became David's wife.²¹

¹⁴ This story is found in Judges 4-5.

¹⁵ Sisera led Jabin's army; they were people from Canaan.

¹⁶ Jael drove the tent peg into Sisera's temple.

¹⁷ This story is from 1 Samuel 25.

¹⁸ *The Bible*. The Reformation Study Bible, Reformation Trust Publishing, 2016. 1 Samuel 25:19.

¹⁹ 1 Samuel 25:28

²⁰ Acts 5:29

²¹ 1 Samuel 25:39

These women all have something in common. In a time when male leadership was weak or lacking, whether that be in the medieval church among the priests, the Bible times, or more recently, women have stood up in the face of opposition. Mimi Haddad, the President of Christians for Biblical Equality writes, “Examples of women’s moral, rational, and spiritual leadership caused Christians to increasingly question sexist assumptions regarding the presumed inferiority of women and pioneered the way for later generations.”²² The Lord allowed these women to influence the course of history, and to be remembered as heroines of the faith. Today, men and women alike can learn from their example.

A woman named Lottie Moon, spent the majority of her life working as a missionary in China.²³ An article mentions how Moon defied the church’s belief of the natural role of women, because she “eventually taught a Bible class to men, led them in devotions, conducted worship, and performed many baptisms.”²⁴ The same article continues, “Moon was irked to hear people in comfortable pews theorizing about the proper role of women in the church.”²⁵ Over the years, Moon and her story became the object of much contextualization. The Southern Baptist Convention, and Foreign Mission Board²⁶ have shaped her image to fit their standards. Moon was a stark contrast to the SBC’s belief of the biblical role of women. Moon and her missionary legacy carried on long after her death. Moon was known as “mother of North China,” and that “Chinese custom and Baptist tradition kept her from ministering directly to the Chinese men.”²⁷

²² Haddad, 55.

²³ Flowers, Elizabeth H. “The Contested Legacy of Lottie Moon: Southern Baptists, Women, and Partisan Protestantism.” *Fides et Historia*, vol. 43, no. 1, Wint 2011, pp. 15–40.
EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0001865016&site=eds-live

²⁴ Flowers, 36.

²⁵ Flowers, 37.

²⁶ Now called the International Mission Board

²⁷ Flowers, 38.

Although pamphlets made about Moon that were distributed among the SBC acknowledged her ministry as “woman to woman,” they also mention that “sometimes men eavesdropped as she talked.”²⁸ At one point, Lottie Moon was one of three women and one man who were ministering to the Chinese people. She asked, “Why did one million Southern Baptists only have one man and three women witnessing to thirty million souls?” Moon continued, “[A Christian] should ask himself not if it is his duty to go to the heathen, but if he may dare stay at home. The command is so plain: ‘Go.’”²⁹

Christianity in Iran dates back to the Old Testament, as people such as Daniel, Esther, and Mordecai were some of the believers who lived in what was then Persia.³⁰ Iran has had a complicated history of Christianity, as believers face immense persecution.³¹ Voice of the Martyrs shares a story of a young, Middle Eastern girl who had to run from her own Muslim family members that were out to kill her after her conversion.³² A documentary called “Sheep Among Wolves” that was created by a missions agency, Frontier Alliance International, speaks of the growth of the Iranian church.³³ A representative from FAI says, “The Iranian awakening is a rapidly reproducing discipleship movement that owns no property or buildings, has no central

²⁸ Flowers, 38. .

²⁹ Platt, David. “Lottie Moon: The Long Shadow of a Tiny Missionary Giant.” International Mission Board. International Mission Board, July 23, 2018. <https://www.imb.org/2018/07/23/lottie-moon-story/>.

³⁰Hopkins, Philip O. “Iran’s Ethnic Christians: The Assyrians and the Armenians.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 61, no. 1, Mar. 2018, pp. 137–152. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asn&AN=129224897&site=ehost-live.

³¹ Hopkins, 151. Armenian, Haik Hovespian was an outspoken pastor of the Anglican church in Iran, and was martyred by the corrupt Iranian government for his beliefs.

³² *Hearts of Fire*, Barlettsville, OK: The Voice of the Martyrs, 2003.

³³ Thomas, Dalton and Richardson, Joel. “Sheep Among Wolves”. August 2019. Documentary, 1:53:18. August 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9SAPOLKF59U&t=4826s>.

leadership, and is predominantly led by women.” The rapid growth is seen because of the Irnaian evangelism strategy: DMM.³⁴ The documentary notes that many of the women leading the movement come from homes where their husbands are still practicing Muslims. The women have an understanding of the risk of persecution they face because they know that “as soon as they walk out of the doors of their houses, they may never come home again.”³⁵ Missions in Iran look differently, because the believers do not convert to disciple, but disciple to convert.³⁶ The women are looking at the Gospel in light of eternity, as they realize that their bodies are not their own, but that they have been bought with a price.³⁷ The Lord is displaying his awesome glory in the midst of immense human suffering. Throughout history, when the Christian church is heavily persecuted, great growth appears.³⁸ This is being seen in Iran today.

After looking at these women who have contributed greatly to the cause of Christ, their efforts in evangelism, the global church, and the mission field are so evident. Yet, this brings to attention the disheartening fact that many of the global underground churches often have grown through the leadership of female evangelists. This causes the believer to wonder why women are heeding the call of Christ to fulfill the Great Commission more frequently than men are. Author of *Operation World*, Patrick Johnstone, says “There are generally more women than men in every type of church, in every part of the world.”³⁹ The article goes on to say, “Men’s absence [in the church] is especially noteworthy, given that men were a strong force in the early church.”

³⁴ DMM: Disciple Making Movement

³⁵ Thomas and Richardson, *Sheep Among Wolves*

³⁶ Thomas and Richardson, *Sheep Among Wolves*; this mission strategy stated above is in regards to church planting.

³⁷ Thomas and Richardson, *Sheep Among Wolves*; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

³⁸ Verses on persecution and growth are found all throughout the Bible, but specifically in 1 Corinthians 4:12, 1 Peter 5:9, and Romans 5:3-5.

³⁹ Pivec, Holly. "The Feminization of the Church." *Biola Magazine* (2006).

⁴⁰ Reading this quote reveals the sad truth that, “Our whole society has tended to deprive men of their biblical and creational strengths and empower women.”⁴¹ Theology professor at Biola University, Dr. Erik Thoennes says, “It’s very seldom you have a man in church whose wife is staying home [from church].”⁴² Men leading in their homes, prepares them to lead in the local church, which qualifies them to lead in the global church.

In Luke 10:2, Jesus says, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. As believers are aware of the statistics, the church’s role is to pray to the Lord of the harvest, beseeching him to turn the hearts of the male workers, so that they obey their calling to go. Thus, the men would be joining women in more proportionate numbers in fulfilling the Great Commission. What a joy it would be for the global church to celebrate male and females serving alongside one another for the cause of Christ.

⁴⁰ Pivec, 2.

⁴¹ Pivec, 3. Patrick Johnstone said this quote.

⁴² Pivec, 5.

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