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Introduction

A Justice League of Our Own

by Marian V. Liautaud

Social justice has become a 21st-century trend in ministry. Of course, it's not a new concept—Christians have been living out the gospel in radical ways throughout all of history. James 1:27 says, "Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you." Earlier Scripture says, "The godly care about the rights of the poor; the wicked don't care at all" (Proverbs 29:7). Young people, especially, seem drawn to righting the world's wrongs, and often it's this demographic that's first in line for putting legs to our beliefs.





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A Justice League of Our Own

Women in the church, too, have a long history of being first responders in the face of injustice. Mary, Jesus' mother, and Mary Magdalene set aside their fear and stood at the foot of the cross while Jesus died, and Mary Magdalene was first to announce his resurrection.

The articles that follow will challenge you to consider the ways you and the women in your church may be uniquely called to bring the Good News to a suffering world. From Carolyn Custis James' perspective on a woman's role as *ezer* to Kelli Trujillo's call to be more daring, you and your women's ministry will be challenged and inspired by today's modern justice league—the women of the church!

How are you and your church reflecting God's heart for justice? It's a question for every woman—and every Christian—to ponder and respond to.

In his service,

Marian V. Liautaud

Managing Editor, KYRIA downloads
Christianity Today International

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Who We Are . . . Really



Carolyn Custis James on
women as “helpers”
*Interview by Amy Simpson and
Ginger Kolbaba*

Carolyn Custis James is passionate about women. This powerhouse leader and speaker is known for her biblical and affirming message for women. Author of numerous books including *Lost Women of the Bible* and *The Gospel of Ruth* (both published by Zondervan), Carolyn has devoted her life to helping women discover their uniqueness, purpose, and significance in the body of Christ.

Her claim to fame as the first woman to register at Dallas Theological Seminary, and in the first class of female graduates, led her to found Synergy, a national network of women in seminary and in vocational ministries. She is also president of Whitby Forum, a ministry dedicated to helping women go deeper in their relationship with God and serve him alongside their Christian brothers.

Kyria spoke with her at the fifth annual Synergy conference about what drives and fulfills her. Her passion was immediately evident as her eyes filled with tears. "As an image bearer of God, you can't know who you are or what your purpose is if you don't know the One you're supposed to be becoming like," she says. "There's a studied passivity that we get into when we believe that God has called only men to leadership. I don't think you can be an image-bearer and not be called to leadership. That may take a lot of different forms, but oh my goodness, what a big deal that is."

KYRIA: It seems as though whenever I hear you refer to women, you use the word ezer. What does that mean and what is its significance?

When God said, "It's not good for the man to be alone," he added, "I will make a *helper*." That word is actually the Hebrew word *ezer*. Historically, we've narrowed the word *ezer* to mean wife and mother, to indicate that a woman's role is to take on supportive duties for the husband. But when God declared that, they were in Eden. The man didn't have a house, laundry, or meals that needed to be prepared. So what is she helping him with?

There are 21 occurrences of the word *ezer* in the Old Testament. It's used twice for the woman. But it's used 3 times for nations Israel turned to for military assistance, and 16 times to describe God as Israel's helper.

That definitely changes the discussion.

Exactly. There's a pattern of military imagery: Israel looking for military aid; God as *ezer*, a shield and defense, better than chariots and horses, standing sentry watch over his people.

But what about the Garden of Eden?

The Garden of Eden was a military zone because there was an enemy planning an attack. And man and woman were created to rule and subdue. Adam was commanded to guard the garden. That's military language.

When God said it wasn't good for the man to be alone, that was a blanket statement and not just about marriage. Genesis 1 and 2 are passages about God's vision for the world, for humanity. God created the woman to come alongside the man in this battle. She watches his back; he watches her back. They're supposed to be in this battle together.

She certainly can't watch his back if she's weak.

Well, she can't come along as a dependent, because then she's not a help; she's more work if he has to think for her and take care of her and protect her.

So how do we apply this passage to us? The question then becomes, "Am I an *ezer* or do I have to get married before I can become an *ezer*?"

And the answer?

No, you don't have to be married. He created all women as *ezers*. So little girls are *ezers*. And elderly women in nursing homes are *ezers*. It's God's calling for us. It starts when we're born. It's not something you can lose, and it's not something that you have to wait for to begin. It's your whole life.

It sounds like this was a process of discovery for you.

It was. I didn't get married for 10 years after college. I was raised to believe you get married and have babies, but that didn't happen. And I wasn't given any alternatives. Nobody came to me and said, "What does God want you to do with your life?"

Too often in the church we feel sorry for women who have careers and aren't doing the domestic family thing. I don't diminish a domestic life at all, but when we crown that as God's primary and ultimate calling for women, we create a dilemma for women who don't marry or who don't have children. We don't allow for the realities or diversities of women's lives.

Then inevitably, we block out major portions of our lives when we're not married and don't have kids. It's as if we're waiting for God's purpose rather than looking for his purpose right now.

Those 10 years when I was single were rich with purpose; they were part of God's plan for me.

Was there a clear turning point for you?

I took a seminary class in which we studied the Book of Ruth. Although I'd studied and taught that book and loved the story, I could never relate to her. But our professor talked about Ruth as a risk taker, a leader. That caught my attention, because I'd never been taught to be a leader. I'd been taught that as a woman I shouldn't take the initiative, but respond to the initiatives men make.

I wept all the way home from the seminary because I thought, *What have I been doing with my life?* Then I realized if what the Bible is saying about Ruth is true, the implications for women are earthshaking. That was the real turning point.

How do we fail to realize the strength and leadership of Ruth?

Ruth was with this awesome man, Boaz, but *she* was leading, taking the initiative. And God blessed her for it.

But in the church we don't teach women the truth about stories like this. Instead we make it a sweet-girl-gets-guy-and-lives-happily-ever-after story. And it's not that at all.



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So what should we be teaching?

We should be digging down into the meat of those stories and teaching about what these women were actually doing. Too often the message we hear is to trust God more and to be better in our devotional lives. Nobody's calling us out. Nobody's saying, "You have gifts that God has given you. God has strategically placed you where you are and you're on a mission for him, and as his image bearer you represent him, you speak for him. You are his voice, his eyes, his ears, his hands." It makes every woman's life significant.

That makes Ruth's story even more critical.

This story took place in the Middle East. The way women were viewed, it should shock us that the Book of Ruth is in the Bible. I mean, it's a story about—and named after—a Gentile woman in a very manly Jewish book—the Bible. And it's in a culture where women were valued for their connection to men—married with sons. If you didn't have sons, your husband would either divorce you or add an extra wife.

So you have this story of these two women who didn't have any men in their lives. They'd lost their husbands and sons, and Ruth was barren, so she was the lowest common denominator in society. They were trying to survive. Ruth was scavenging. You can't romanticize what she was doing. It was awful.

It looks like Naomi and Ruth were doing insignificant things. Nobody would have noticed these two women and what was going on in their lives. But that's where God's purposes were moving forward, and the battles that they were fighting were for the kingdom. It wasn't just for Naomi's family; it was for the line of Christ.



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You have to take the implications from that and say, "This is saying very big things about people's lives—things they never knew about themselves." So you don't know that you're leading, that you're doing big kingdom things. You're just doing the next thing that God's put in your path. But I don't think we're giving women these rich stories that tell them about their own lives.

That's really empowering.

Women know we're fighting battles. We fight battles with and for ourselves; we fight battles for our children or neighbors or communities. We know we're warriors. And it's good that we're warriors with the men, not against the men. That's very powerful.

These women throughout Scripture—Ruth and Naomi, Deborah, Mary of Nazareth—they're warriors. They're standing up for the kingdom; they're doing the hard things God calls them to do. That gives us a handle on who we are, and that can't be taken away.

How has what you've discovered about women in the Bible and about God's calling for women changed you?

It changes everything. The more I learn about God and his calling on human beings, the more I know my life is purposeful. I love Hebrews 12:1–2 that talks about a race that's been marked out, which we're called to run; that nothing I encounter along the way is going to throw me off. I may make bad decisions, I may zig when I should zag, but my life is purposeful; I'm on mission; God has me where he wants me. I'm going to go through experiences that shape me as a leader, as an *ezer*, that help me do more for the kingdom. But it has given me a framework for looking at my life. It also stretches me in scary ways.

Such as?

There are situations where I need to show more courage, where I need to step out and take a stand, where I need to speak up because kingdom issues are at stake. Not because I need to elbow my way into some position of importance, but because something big is going on in this world and I get to be part of that.

I don't think that comes easily when you've been conditioned to back away and not speak up. So it creates some *ezer* battles within me because every once in a while I get confronted with a situation where the easy path is more appealing. I have to ask myself, *Is this what God wants me to do?* and take that harder route.

That does change everything for women.

It raises the bar. I have responsibility in this world.

That's why we need to be armed for this battle and realize that the battle isn't against people; it's for them. We're all called to be warriors for the kingdom. We're all called to be representatives of God in this world, to speak and act for him.

If what I'm saying is true, that you are God's image bearer and that you're an *ezer* warrior and that God created men and women to be his A team to get the kingdom built, then all these things mean it isn't possible for you to live an insignificant life. You may never have the significance that others recognize, but look at Ruth and Naomi and the huge things that were going on in their little world. You never know. You might be the one.

This interview was originally published in the November 2009 issue of KYRIA digital magazine.

Reflect

- *How does the term ezer resonate with your understanding of God's purpose for your life?*
- *In your study of the Bible, which women strike you as ezers, and why? What was God's strategic purpose for their life?*
- *Where do you sense God calling you to battle for his causes? How are you answering his call?*

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The Women at the Cross

There's power when we come
together for Jesus.

by Sharon Hodde Miller

Yesterday I cried at the gym. It was embarrassing, it was awkward, and it was not for any reason that you could possibly guess.

It all started when I flipped on a television so that I could watch something while I worked out. I surfed through the channels and eventually settled on *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. That was my critical error.

As soon as I saw Aslan making his deal with the White Witch, I should have changed the channel. Every time I've watched this movie in the past, I sob from that point in the story until Aslan comes to life again. Consistent with my previous track record, that's exactly what I did in the gym. I don't know why I couldn't hold it together, but I literally stood there crying while doing leg lifts and arm curls.



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I share all of this because, in the midst of my quivering bottom lip and bloodshot eyes, I had a wonderful realization. As I watched the movie unfold, I saw Susan and Lucy accompany Aslan to his death. I noticed that they hid nearby during his execution. I also observed that, after his death, they stayed with his body. They were there when he died, and they were the first to learn of his resurrection. In short, they did exactly the same thing as Mary and Mary Magdalene.

I don't know why I had never noticed this biblical parallel before, but it's a close reflection of the real events. While most of the male disciples were hiding, Mary and Mary Magdalene stayed with Jesus throughout his crucifixion. And as the male disciples continued to lie low in fear, the women courageously journeyed to Jesus' tomb to anoint his body. Like Susan and Lucy, Mary and Mary Magdalene were the first to learn of Christ's resurrection, and they were the first to be sent out with the good news. They were the first evangelists.

As someone with a heart for women's ministry, this is a powerful visual. It is, I believe, a vision of what women's ministry should be. Ultimately, women's ministry is not about social events or even teaching events, though each has a good and welcome function in the church. Ultimately, women's ministry is about women actively pursuing and serving Christ, together. The women of the gospels (among whom Mary and Mary Magdalene were only a part) came together, both physically and spiritually, the nearer they were to Jesus. Together, they followed Jesus through the peaks and the valleys of life, and they surely encouraged one another to persevere after his death.

Because of their devotion to Jesus and their unity with one another, they had the courage to venture out when none of the other disciples did, and they were consequently blessed with



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the task of sharing the Good News of the Resurrection for the very first time. This group of women had an unparalleled intimacy with Christ, resulting in a monumental role in God's kingdom.

I love those women. We may not hear as much about them because they were often behind the scenes, but what a legacy they leave for us! They leave a legacy of diligent allegiance to Christ, bravery in the face of persecution, and a mission to proclaim the gospel. They make me so proud to be a woman in Christ's church, and I hope we will cultivate women's ministries whose vision is to take up their cause. It is a grand one.

*Sharon Hodde Miller blogs frequently on **Gifted for Leadership**, **Her.meneutics**, and her own site, **She Worships**. She is pursuing her Ph.D. in Educational Studies with a focus on evangelical women in higher education.*

*This article was originally published on **Cultivate Her**, a blog site for Christian women in leadership.*

Reflect

- *Like the author, have you had an "a-ha" moment, a realization about what women's ministry with—and to—each other can look like? What is your vision?*
- *How does drawing near to Jesus give us power to go out into the world?*
- *In what ways are you uniquely equipped to bring the power of the Cross to the world?*

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Seeing Yourself in Scripture

Where are you in the story?

by Mimi Haddad

As friends and I met for dinner to enjoy pictures of mutual friends' wedding, their four-year-old joined in the fun. At one stage I asked this child which picture was her favorite, and she quickly pointed to one saying "This one!" When I asked why, she pointed again and said the name of her best friend. Her parents and I strained our eyes to have another look. We'd been focusing on the images of adults and failed to observe a little girl—her best friend—poking her head just slightly around her mother's knee. We all broke into laughter, realizing we had missed something precious to this child. This little girl noticed an individual similar to herself in the photograph while the adults were looking only at the other adults. It was one of those profound moments when you realize how experience shapes observation.



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The same is true when women read Scripture. Women tend to observe other women. It should not surprise us that as women entered universities in the 1800s, they were among the first to note women evangelists (**Mark 7:24–30**, **John 4:5–42**, **John 20:17**, **Philippians 4:2–3**); deacons (**Romans 16:1–2**); teachers (**Acts 18:24–26**, **Colossians 3:16**); leaders of house churches (**Acts 16:13–15**, **40**; **Acts 18:1–3**, **18**, **24–26**; **Romans 16:3**; **1 Corinthians 1:11**; **Colossians 4:15**; **Philippians 1–2**; and **2 John 1:1**); Junia the apostle (**Romans 16:7**), and women like Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis who "worked hard in the Lord" (**Romans 16:12**). To "work hard in the Lord" is how Paul describes his own missionary work.

Women were also at the forefront of recovering the contributions of women throughout church history. Here are a few examples:

The Early Church

The earliest Western translation of Scripture was the work of a fourth-century male-female translation team—Paula (347–404 A.D.) and Jerome. Jerome, a prominent early church leader, hailed Paula's mastery of Hebrew and her ability to speak it without a Latin accent. In gratitude for her, Jerome dedicated much of his work to her.

Macrina (330–379) was the older sister to Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, and both credit her for their theological education. Insisting that humility and love are the fruit of scholarship, Basil (famous for his defense of the Nicene Creed) and Gregory (known for his theological understanding of the Holy Spirit) both called Macrina "teacher."

Apollonia was a prominent deacon in the Alexandrian church who was brutally martyred in 249 A.D. Like all deacons,



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she cared for the ill, provided a theological education to converts, anointed the sick with oil, and held a position of leadership in the church.

Middle Ages

Throughout the Middle Ages women like Theodora (500–548 A.D.) continued to reform the world. She and her husband Justinian, emperor of the Byzantine Empire, built Constantinople, the most architecturally advanced city in her day, as well as Hagia Sophia, one of the most impressive churches in all of history. Passionate about the plight of women, Theodora limited forced prostitution and built homes for them. She gave women a greater voice in divorce and advanced laws that allowed women to hold property. Theodora also built unity among Christians factions.

Celebrated for her learning, holiness, and unceasing service, Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179 A.D.) was one of the most celebrated women in all of history. She was a physician, composer, and political leader, and her counsel was sought by popes, bishops, and kings. As an abbess over a double monastery, she exercised authority over monks and nuns. Hildegard revived the spiritual health of a church that had become morally and spiritually indifferent.

Catherine of Siena (1347–1380 A.D.) worked tirelessly to oppose corruption and abuse of power. She demanded that bishops and popes lead righteous and humble lives. God called Catherine to public service at the age of twenty-one. She cared for the victims of the plague and confronted the greed, corruption, and spiritual poverty of church leaders. Catherine boldly entered the pope's palace at Avignon where she reminded him of the church's highest mission, that of saving souls.

The Modern Missionary Movement

During the "golden era" of missions in the late 19th century, women outnumbered men two to one on mission fields around the world. Their efforts shifted the density of Christian faith outside of the west to places like Africa, Asia, and South America. One of these women was Charlotte "Lottie" Moon (1840–1912), the best known Southern Baptist missionary. Originally sent to teach children in China, Lottie defied her field director's advice and began evangelistic work in Northern China. She lived among the people, dressed like them, mastered the language, and began churches, a school, and a medical clinic. She taught male converts and prepared several to pastor the churches she started. Lottie shared everything she had and eventually died of starvation when food was scarce.

Amy Carmichael (1868–1951) was also a celebrated missionary. Born in Northern Ireland, she lived and worked more than 50 years in India, rescuing over 2,000 young women and girls from temple prostitution. Amy established a home and school for these children and published numerous books that inspired other missionaries.

Concern for women and children was also a consuming passion of Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922), founder of the Mukti Mission—one of the best examples of Christian faith in action. An advocate of women's intellectual ability, she and other women not only translated Scripture into a prominent Indian dialect, they also printed and distributed this Bible.

If our experiences as women bring insight not only to history but also to Scripture, then women offer something of great value to these fields. Perhaps this is why Christ (who lived in a very patriarchal era) used females as key figures in many of his parables and other teachings. Clearly, Jesus loved and valued



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women, making this visible by including their voices and experiences throughout his work. If we are followers of Jesus, shouldn't we be doing the same?

Dr. Mimi Haddad is president of Christians for Biblical Equality, and has degrees from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary and the University of Durham, England.

This article was originally published on GiftedforLeadership.com.

Reflect

- *What other women would you add to the author's list of women who changed the world?*
- *Today, who do you consider to be leading examples among women in the church for fighting justice causes?*
- *In what ways might God be calling you to rise up and follow him into needy corners of the world where his voice and hands and feet are needed?*

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Your Kingdom Come

The kingdom of heaven isn't just a destination, it's a movement.

by Keri Wyatt Kent

At 6:25 A.M. on a recent Saturday, a few neighbors met in my driveway. We loaded food into a minivan and drove from our suburban neighborhood to nearby Chicago, where we cooked and served breakfast at a homeless women's shelter.

Our monthly visit to the shelter is a step on a shared journey of faith. Through serving, we solidify our friendships with one another and remember to be grateful. We dare to believe our small acts of justice matter and advance the kingdom of heaven.

Simple Acts of Love

The women at the homeless shelter each have a story. Some wrestle with mental illness, addictions, or both. They've experienced poverty, abuse, pain. Some are incredibly smart; some are angry and withdrawn; many have faith that far outshines mine.

After cooking and serving breakfast, my friends and I typically visit with the women for a while. On the drive home, we talk about our conversations. Finding common ground with people we don't know isn't always easy. But on this Saturday, my friend Kathy remarked, "You know, you don't have to figure out what to say. You just have to listen. All they want—all everyone wants—is someone to listen to them."

Kathy, who's not a theologian by any stretch, had said something profound. She was, in a way, bringing the kingdom of heaven to a homeless shelter. She brought the hungry food, and she provided the poor with the shelter of her attentive listening. In the process, her obedience led her to truth: black or white, privileged or poor, everyone just wants to be loved. And listening is an act of love.

The Here-and-Now Kingdom

I grew up thinking God's kingdom meant heaven—a place we'd go in the future if we were "in" with Jesus. So bringing the kingdom into the world meant evangelizing—leading seeker Bible studies, arguing with atheists, witnessing to friends, inviting non-believers to church. The goal was getting sinners to pray "the prayer" and be saved. Although such efforts are worthwhile, they seem less like bringing the kingdom into the world and more like pulling people out of it. It was as if we were selling tickets for a future event, or offering a bus transfer for a ride to the preferred eternal destination.



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Jesus often said, "The kingdom of God is near you" or "among you" or "within you" (Luke 10:8–9; 17:20–21). He described this kingdom with word pictures: It's like a seed or a bit of yeast or a hidden treasure—small inanimate things that effect great change in the here and now. He also said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). So this here-and-now kingdom apparently consists of folks who realize they're spiritually bankrupt, needy, hungry. It's a fellowship of people who understand we can't buy our way into the kingdom; we're dependent on God's goodness to welcome us in.

The kingdom of heaven isn't just a place we go when we die; it's a movement we're part of today. It's living in the presence of God forever, starting right now. Eternity, by definition, is all time, including the present moment.

Jesus talked about the future, no doubt. But mostly he lived as if the kingdom of God truly was "at hand." He told us to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). This prayer isn't just hoping for change, but asking God to direct us in facilitating that change and then—often the most neglected part of prayer—actually doing what he commands.

Jesus also said his disciples would be known by their sacrificial love for each other and for God (John 13:35). How do we show that love? Jesus said: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matthew 25:35–36).

People who live in the kingdom of God right now choose to give, to practice hospitality, to be kind to the suffering, sick,



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or poor. We experience the kingdom of heaven on earth when we recognize God's presence here with us and serve him as if he really is our King.

A Starting Place

We can bring God's kingdom to earth by starting where we are. "God has placed us where we are for a reason," write Will and Lisa Samson in their book **Justice in the Burbs**. "Wherever you are, that is where the kingdom of God is at work. . . . So doing missions means doing the work of the kingdom wherever you are sent. And the best place to think about where you have been sent is to see where you are."

Here are three spiritual practices I use in doing my small part to further God's kingdom right now, right where I am:

Praying. Often we think of prayer as a last resort, but it ought to be our first and continuing effort. We should pray fervently against injustice. And pray with our ears open—listening for what God would have us do, and obeying his promptings.

Living simply. This practice entails seeking God's kingdom first (Matthew 6:33) rather than seeking position or more possessions. We must be aware of our privilege, not so we feel guilty, but so we're grateful. We should live within our means and be content, stewarding our resources carefully.

Giving. When we pray and live simply, we can respond to God's commands to give. He promises to bless us when we do. Beyond writing a check, giving also involves the activities mentioned in Matthew 25. We need to give of our time, our love. We can sponsor a child, volunteer, become a regular donor, invite others to participate.



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When we love a difficult coworker or offer help to a stranger, we invite God's presence. When we serve at a homeless shelter, bring a meal to our unemployed neighbor, or choose to be patient with our children, we push back the powers of darkness and live in the reality of God's kingdom. We say with our actions, "Your kingdom come."

*Keri Wyatt Kent is a speaker and author of several books including **Simple Compassion: Devotions to Make a Difference in Your Neighborhood and Your World** (Zondervan).*

*This article was originally published on **Kyria.com**.*

Reflect

- *When have you brought God's kingdom to earth?*
- *What is your church doing to serve the needy and bring Christ's love to the world?*
- *How could your church partner with your community to expand the reach of specific initiatives, such as a local food pantry, homeless shelter, or prison?*

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A Healthy Heart for Outreach

5 vital signs
by Nancy Beach

To reach out to others, your own heart and soul should be healthy. Test your emotional health with these five key indicators.

You feel deep emotion. A healthy heart feels emotions deeply. It can be touched by joy, pain, anger, gratitude, and love. If not, something is wrong. For example, this past Easter we prepared an original musical. There were 11 performances, and believers in our congregation invited scores of their seeking friends. The musical exceeded our expectations, but the process was hard on many of us. It had many incredible moments, but I had trouble feeling them. My heart was numb, which is not healthy.

How is your capacity to feel deep emotion these days?

High Medium Low



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You're mindful of moments. The leading cause of regret is failure to seize the day. So many of us miss out on the wonder and potential of simple, everyday moments. This is especially true in relationships. When our hearts are working right, we look into one another's eyes. We don't find ourselves in such a destructive hurry that we are unable to be fully present. We cultivate the ability to truly listen to people we minister to.

Right now, can you be "all there" for others, or are you skimming? Do you enjoy the wonder and potential of simple, everyday moments?

High Medium Low

You enjoy spontaneity. A healthy heart has the capacity to laugh, to welcome the unexpected, the out-of-the-ordinary. A really healthy heart initiates spontaneous fun moments, spreading joy to others. Jesus described the kingdom life as one of joy and abundance, not as a burden that weighs us down. We are in bad shape when we cannot laugh from the gut, play like a child, and simply let go.

So how's the joy factor for you these days?

High Medium Low



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A Healthy Heart for Outreach

You're open to the lost and hurting. Over time, our hearts, which once burned with passion for the seekers and the poor and the suffering, can become hardened and impenetrable. St. John of the Cross says that "at the evening of our day we shall be judged by our loving." A healthy heart can weep for those who do not yet know God's love. A healthy heart can be empathetic and gracious to those who are suffering.

How loving is your heart these days?

High Medium Low

You hear God's promptings. There is one thing I hope I never get over as long as I live: the truth that the awesome Creator of the universe is choosing to speak to me—not just once in a blue moon, but most of the time! Sometimes he needs to convict me about a sin I've committed and to guide me to confess. Sometimes he wants to give me an idea. Sometimes he just wants me to remember I am treasured. I shudder to think how many messages I have missed by not listening.

How mindful is your heart these days of the presence of God—are you quick to listen? How is your hearing?

High Medium Low

Nancy Beach is a teaching pastor at Willow Creek and the executive vice president for the Arts at the Willow Creek Association.

*This assessment was originally published in **BuildingChurchLeaders.com** downloadable resource **Becoming Outward Focused.***

Reflect

- *Which of your answers surprised you? Why?*
- *What adjustments can you make to become more open to the lost and hurting?*
- *What are some ways we can help each other find joy in our outreach to people?*

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The Dangerous Book for Women

When you're tired of playing life safe

By Kelli Trujillo

From the moment my husband brought home *The Dangerous Book for Boys*, he and our son have been doing some serious bonding. The premise of *The Dangerous Book for Boys* is to resurrect some of the classic boy activities of yesteryear—things our grandfathers did as boys that boys today just don't do (like make their own bows and arrows or catch frogs in the creek). Since getting the book, my husband and son have mapped out the battle of Waterloo with green Army men, played an old-fashioned game of marbles, learned to tie sailor's knots, performed magic tricks, and folded the best paper airplanes in the world.



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The Dangerous Book for Women

I think my son sensed my jealousy as I've watched this flurry of daily activity. With a serious look on his face, he said, "Don't feel bad, Mom. Maybe they can make a book for you. Maybe they can make *The Dangerous Book for Women*."

That got me thinking. What in the world would I include in a "dangerous book for girls" (and grown-up girls like me!)?

I didn't have to brainstorm too long—I soon found out that a companion book for girls has just hit the shelves. So I dropped by my local Barnes and Noble this afternoon to page through the brand-spanking-new **The Daring Book for Girls** where I read about all sorts of activities to try (like rehearsing cartwheels, creating a lemon-powered clock, putting together a toolbox, and making friendship bracelets) and information to learn (like mathematics tricks, letter-writing etiquette, and Latin roots). And among the inspiring short biographies I found features on notable women like Marie Curie, Joan of Arc, Amelia Earhart, and Charlotte Badger (a dangerous swashbuckling pirate!).

Sipping my coffee and perusing the book (probably intended for readers at least 20 years my junior), I felt completely inspired—and like a complete dud!

After all, my life often seems rather humdrum. A typical day for me is anything but daring; and the same is probably true for most of you. We who've outgrown the fun and freedom of girlhood now live as women in our safe routine, be it at the office or at home, working, parenting, doing household chores, maybe catching a few favorite TV shows, and doing something "special" occasionally like going out to eat—or something absolutely thrilling like that. We live suspended in a paradox, longing for daring and adventure, but leading lives that are usually tame, safe, and monotonous.

I've realized that my life needs a lot more zest and daring—more Robin-Williams-esque "seize-the-day" moments. And I



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need it not just in my everyday life, but also in my spiritual life. The Bible, after all, is the ultimate book of dares! God calls us to live out daring love—love that is passionate, 100 percent forgiving, and chock-full of grace. God calls us to show daring kindness—embracing and serving the outcast, the stranger, and the enemy. Jesus calls us to pray with boldness and daring: **Mountain, move it!**

And the most notable women in the Bible could populate their own book of daring for girls. Just think of it: Rahab and Esther both risking their lives to save others; Hagar, the tenacious and resilient single-mom who dared to name God; Mary, who dared to carry, give birth to, and mother God himself; the woman in **Mark 5** who grabbed hold of Jesus' garment, daring with her action to receive God's healing power.

Yet how is it that our response to the most daring and dangerous calling of all—"Follow me!"—has become so bland and routine? Be it in matters of faith or hobbies or friendships or tasks, we can choose to embody *carpe-diem* moments.

So I've taken a few cues for *The Daring Book for Girls*. For one, I'm going to work a bit on my rusty old cartwheel. And I'm also ready to brush up on my knowledge on female pirates.

But even more important, I've gotten a wake-up call about the state of my faith. I'm ready and excited to take action the next time God whispers "I dare you?"

*Kelli B. Trujillo is the managing editor for Kyria resources and the author of **Faith-Filled Moments: Helping Kids See God in Everyday Life** and **The Busy Mom's Guide to Spiritual Survival**.*

*This article was originally published on **Kyria.com**.*

Reflect

- *If you were to rate your life on a Dud to Daring scale (1 being a 'dud'; 5, daring), where would you place yourself?*
- *Are you satisfied with this rating? Why, or why not?*
- *What inspiration do you draw from women in the Bible like Rahab, Esther, and Hagar? What traits did they possess that you would like to cultivate*
- *How do you sense God "daring" you to try something new? What will your response be?*

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The Justice Generation

Tackling the world's toughest problems can lead to life-shaping discipleship.

by *Bethany Hoang*

Sabari, his pregnant wife Ammani, and their two-year-old daughter Chissa are the property of another person. They live and work in a rice mill in South Asia, facing brutal beatings, starvation, and grueling labor every day.

There are missionaries and thriving churches in their region. There are also ministries that provide food, shelter, and medical care nearby. There are Christian schools where children can receive education and have an opportunity to hear the gospel. But slaves like Sabari and Ammani do not have access to these opportunities and never will under their slave masters' violent captivity.



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The Justice Generation

The last 60 years of evangelical mission has focused primarily on spiritual salvation with a growing emphasis on mercy ministries—efforts to provide basic needs like food, clean water, shelter, and medicine. But the past 10 years has also seen a surge of involvement in ministries that seek to bring justice to those suffering oppression—people like Sabari and Ammani, who cannot benefit either spiritually or physically from the church's mission until they are free.

The rising concern for justice is seen most dramatically among the younger generation in the church. Christians in college, high school, and even middle and elementary school are putting extraordinary emphasis on justice as part of their Christian witness, and established churches and ministries are taking notice. Even ministries that have been deeply committed to evangelism through the spoken proclamation of the gospel have begun including issues of global justice. Ministries like Campus Crusade for Christ (Cru), Youth With a Mission (YWAM), InterVarsity, the Passion movement, and scores of church youth ministries are now leading the way in mobilizing students to not only proclaim the gospel but also to work for justice in the world.

Will this passion for justice continue, or will it fade like so many other trends? And will this generation be discipled so that their zeal for justice isn't a fad, but flows above all from their zeal for God himself?

From trend to training

Communications technology, travel opportunities, and the forces of globalization have meant that young people in the church today have had more exposure to the reality of suffering and injustice in our world than any previous generation. But as my colleague Wayne Barnard, International



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Justice Mission's director of student ministries, has said, "The needed solutions to address [students'] passion for justice require a long-term commitment, which is challenging for a generation who cut their teeth on convenience. We've not taught them to delay gratification, so why would we expect that their passion for any issue would last beyond the first taste of disillusionment?"

Will this generation be disciplined so that their zeal for justice isn't a fad, but flows above all from their zeal for God himself?

The opportunity is ripe for church leaders to guide this generation beyond fits of emotion-driven passion and the inevitable disillusionment that comes as the hard obstacles to bringing justice are encountered.

While some ministries may use justice projects as a convenient lure to reach a socially aware generation, there are some who are doing the hard work of spiritually forming these young adults for the long haul. Cathedral of Joy in Richland, Washington, is one example. They intentionally guide their students into a lifestyle of justice ministry through laying deep biblical foundations and intentional spiritual formation.

High school seniors at Cathedral of Joy enter an intensive study and action experience. Each Sunday they attend meetings led by fellow students to work through a book on the intersection of faith and justice, and the youth pastor teaches on subjects such as the role of prayer in justice ministry. The seniors are guided to take sermon notes, engage in weekly devotions, contribute to service projects in their local community, and write reflection papers on what they are learning about themselves, God, and the world.

Throughout the year they also lead events for their church community such as "The Justice Fast" and "The Weekend to End Slavery." Thus the students help the entire church understand



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biblical justice and create ways to take action. Their year culminates with a trip to Washington, D.C., to meet with IJM staff, provide volunteer help, and attend IJM's Global Prayer Gathering.

By incorporating justice into the spiritual formation program for their students, Cathedral of Joy is making justice more than a fad. By combining Bible study, spiritual disciplines, and practical experiences, they ground students' interest in justice more firmly. This means these students are more likely to bear fruit for decades as they lead the church's mission effort beyond their high school years.

Tim Keller teaches that "justification by faith leads to justice, and justice leads to people coming to faith." As we disciple this generation to embrace both justification and justice rooted in Scripture and the character of God, it will result in the advancement of the gospel.

Slaves like Ammani and Sabari need justice in the form of freedom before they can access the remarkable resources that exist all around them—resources that include the gospel ministry of the church in their region. Ammani and Sabari, and the 27 million other slaves in the world today, are why we must be intentional about making justice a part of discipleship training for this generation.

Bethany Hoang is director of the IJM Institute for International Justice Mission in Washington, D.C.

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Reflect

- *How has tackling the world's injustices helped mold you into a more mature disciple?*
- *What types of justice ministry is your church involved in? Are young people drawn to serving in these areas?*
- *In what ways have you specifically targeted young people to serve in these areas?*
- *How have you addressed the need to keep justice issues from being merely a fad within your church? What are you doing to ensure that your church sticks with specific causes for the long haul?*

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Jesus in the World of Worthless Daughters

Do your assumptions about leadership
reflect the values of your generation?

by Jimmy Long

“**T**hank you, Mother, for raising a worthless daughter.”
These words, part of a lament of a bride going to meet her husband for the first time, summed up the experience of women in China in the 1800s, according to **Snow Flower and the Secret Fan**. In this book Lisa See brings to light the reality of life for a female in that society: No value, no rights, raised for a husband's family, enduring the years of foot-binding torture and subsequent crippling, totally dependent on the desires of her parents/brothers/husband/mother-in-law. She had no purpose—except to bear a son—and no hope.



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Jesus in the World of Worthless Daughters

These words, sadly, have been echoed across countless generations and cultures. In many places a woman has a place in life only if she becomes the mother of a son. In some African nations female genital cutting is still practiced, creating unimagined agony for preteen girls and sentencing them to a lifetime of pain. In Southeast Asia and many other places children are sold—often by their poverty-stricken parents—as sex slaves.

In **Half the Sky**, Pulitzer Prize winning authors Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn horrify us with statistics like this:

"Thirty-nine thousand baby girls die annually in China because parents don't give them the same medical care and attention that boys receive."

"In India, a 'bride burning'—to punish a woman for an inadequate dowry or to eliminate her so a man can remarry—takes place approximately once every two hours."

They go on to talk of kerosene dousing and acid burning, of two million girls disappearing every year because of gender discrimination. One journal stated, "Women are not dying because of untreatable diseases. They are dying because societies have yet to make the decision that their lives are worth saving." This is not new. It didn't begin 200 years ago in China. It has gone on for centuries: Mothers raise "worthless daughters." When I hear, see, and think about such things, I can barely contain my emotions. Horror, anger, frustration, indignation. How can this be? How can it continue? We must do something!

Someone has done something. One person has made a difference. His name is Jesus. Wherever the message of Jesus has been received, the status of woman has been raised. In



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the film *Magdalena*, a telling of the story of Jesus by Mary Magdalene, I was overwhelmed by the tenderness with which Jesus addressed women—in a culture where a man would not even acknowledge a woman.

Yet even in those lands where Jesus has gone, where things are not as bad as they once were, many women still believe they are worthless, or at least worth less. Even today, women struggle to grasp their value—to understand that God has a given them a high calling.

Jesus calls women many things, but never worthless. He calls each one: Desired. Treasured. His joy. A reflection of him. An *ezer*—strong warrior helper. For a purpose. To be his partner in building his kingdom. He assures us the Father had grand intentions in creating women.

So why do so many women still suffer physically and emotionally, marginalized and meaningless, not experiencing those good purposes for which God created them? I find my heart crying, *Who will do something?* The Lord has clearly responded: You are doing something—the most important something. You and many sisters are introducing women to that one who values and treasures them, who made them with tender love and powerful intentions and high calling. When they know Jesus, they can begin to discover that they are not worthless.

And some among us are/will be the ones who will take up the cry: We must do something. We must raise our voices, get involved, right wrongs, alleviate suffering. We must work to set our sisters free, from slavery, from poverty, from torture, from abuse, from worthlessness.

Together, we and they will discover that we are of indescribable worth.



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Jesus in the World of Worthless Daughters

(A starting place could be to read *Half the Sky*, which is filled with many disturbing stories of atrocities and wrongs, but also tells of hopeful solutions and actions that can turn things around.)

This article was originally published on

GiftedForLeadership.com.

Reflect

- *What books have influenced your perspective on the way the world sees women? What has given you hope that women's value can be elevated in the world's eyes?*
- *What should the church's role be in helping raise the value of women worldwide?*
- *How is your church addressing violence against women in the world?*
- *In what ways do you see women devalued in our own country? Do you sense God calling you to be a voice for women who are devalued and discarded by society? If so, how?*

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Additional Resources

Where to go to learn more

Women of the Bible This downloadable packet from **GiftedForLeadership.com** serves as a guide to acquaint you with the women of the Bible—as well as the Author of their stories.

How Jesus Related to Women In this downloadable resource, we examine how Jesus showed love and respect for women. First, we look at the heart of the issue—our identity in Christ. Then, we look at the interactions of Jesus with various women in the Bible. We are challenged to consider how his example might change the way we view ourselves.

Social Justice in Your Community This downloadable packet from **GiftedForLeadership.com** helps you identify the key issues surrounding social justice and gain effective tools for implementing some issue-solving ideas in your community.

Books

Half the Sky by Nicholas D. Kristof, Sheryl WuDunn (Vintage, 2010). A passionate call to arms against our era's most pervasive human rights violation—the oppression of women and girls in the developing world—by husband/wife Pulitzer Prize winning journalists, Kristof and WuDunn. In this sometimes graphic, sobering book, they present their odyssey through Africa and Asia where they met the extraordinary women struggling there, among them a Cambodian teenager sold into sex slavery and an Ethiopian woman who suffered devastating injuries in childbirth. Drawing on the breadth of their combined reporting experience, Kristof and WuDunn depict our world with anger, sadness, clarity, and, ultimately, hope.

Simple Compassion: Devotions to Make a Difference in Your Neighborhood and Your World by Keri Wyatt Kent (Zondervan, 2009). Many of us would like to make a greater impact on our world, but don't know where to start. Kent offers 52 weekly devotions that will help inspire you to greater service and compassion. Along with each insightful reading, she makes practical suggestions for living out principles of justice, right where you are.

Nice Girls Don't Change the World by Lynne Hybels (Zondervan, 2005). In this wise and tender book, Hybels tells of her struggle to stop living someone else's life and to reclaim the unique gifts, strengths, and passions God gave her. And she reveals how turning away from her false view of God as a harsh and demanding taskmaster enabled her to rest at last in God's sustaining love.



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Additional Resources

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Cultivating the Next Generation of Leaders

Additional Resources

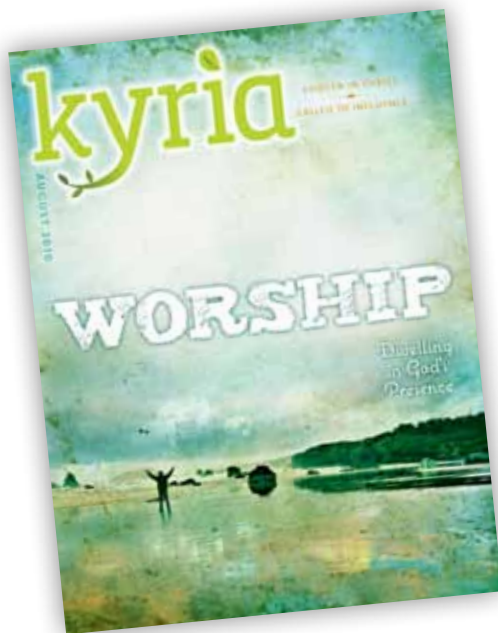
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