



Ten Ways Women Serve in a Biblical Church

By Mark Powell

Before I begin, I have a disclaimer to make. I first met my wife Angie whilst studying at Moore Theological College. She was in the year ahead of me and I remember first noticing her in chapel. Yes, it's corny I know. Approximately 25 years later, we have six children and have served in the pastoral ministry in both Anglican and Presbyterian churches who hold to a conservative biblical framework regarding the roles of men and women.

My own wife was formerly a women's worker for the Greek Bible Fellowship (part of the Anglican, St Matthias network of churches). And especially before we started a family, Angie threw herself into meeting up with women one-on-one, leading small groups, being involved in music. And organising evangelistic events as well as doing hospitality.

What follows is a summary—by no means exhaustive—of what I have been blessed in witnessing over the past quarter of a century. I've used the listicle trope of a "Top Ten":

First, in their service. One of the paradoxes of being part of an evangelical congregation that understands the Bible as forbidding a woman to teach or to have authority over men (i.e. 1 Tim. 2:8-15) is that I've observed that my sisters in Christ are extremely busy in ministry. Wayne Grudem lists 83 different ways in which this often occurs. As I said in regards to my own wife, many women are involved in a plethora of different ways and there is always more to do.

Second, in their example. We recently had a dinner with the elders and their wives at our church. I was struck by the faith and godliness of the people around the table. I'll never forget Philip Jensen advising to "be careful who you marry, because she will either double your ministry or halve it." It was wise and

prescient counsel. For the married pastor, ministry is very much a matter of team work.

Third, in their visiting. A lot of the most important ministry goes on unseen and behind the scenes. In particular, it's the catching up that women do with one another. Not just in a time of crisis or need, but also throughout the regular ebb and flow of life. A woman can do this in a way that is simply not right or appropriate for a man to do.

Fourth, in their welcoming. A crucial part of coming—and staying—at a new church is being welcomed. I've visited churches while on holidays and observed first-hand how discouraging this can be. Women in particular seem to be very good in relating to those who are new. In realising that I'm making a generalisation in saying this, but that's only because it's generally true!

Fifth, in their writing. One of the highlights of my week at present is sitting down with a returned missionary and hearing her read the latest chapter of her book. This particular saint has served with her husband in Pakistan for over thirty years in a Muslim-dominated context. Her godliness, zeal and spiritual wisdom make up a little oasis in the desert of my week. We're both trusting the LORD for how He will use what she writes, but I am honoured to be able to partner with her in its production.

Sixth, in their love. One of the things which I have valued most about my sisters in Christ is their personal encouragement and practical care. Due to them also having a sinful nature like I do, that can also go the other way. But I have been deeply blessed by their thoughtfulness and emotional intelligence. Let's face it, women just tend to be more intuitive than men. Again, I'm generalising, but there is often a clear difference in the way

women view the world compare to how men do.

Seventh, in their teaching. While women should not preach in a mixed congregation, they should have an active role in teaching and training other women (see Titus 2:1-5). I have personally assisted a number of women to teach God's Word and tried to resource them with good materials. Many gifted women within Sydney evangelicalism could serve as examples.

Eight, in their ministry to children. The senior minister whom I serve under often makes the statement that, "Children are not the future of the church. They are the present of the church". It's a good corrective. Naturally, women play a vital—and often disproportionate—role in the discipleship of those who are young. Just imagine what Sunday School would look like if it wasn't for the women in our churches?

Ninth, in their running of households. In some ways, these final two points are the most important but also the easiest to dismiss as being somehow tokenistic. Yet it is not without significance that the Bible uses wisdom personified as female

in the book of Proverbs. This leads to its portrayal of the godly wife in Proverbs 31:10-31. It has been one of my greatest joys to see how much my children appreciate the sacrifices that my wife Angie has made for them. By being "busy at home" (Titus 2:5) she has created a space where they are nurtured, strengthened and most importantly, fed! This has contributed so much to us as a family, and also to the health and well-being of the broader community.

Tenth, in their help to me! When the LORD first created Adam in the garden, He knew that he needed help. Speaking personally, I know how much I value the wisdom and support not only of my own wife, but even of the wider female fellowship.

As a pastor, I deeply appreciate the women in my church. I definitely don't tell them that often enough, but it's important that we never take each other for granted.

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