

The Kind of Young Women the Church Needs Most

Whooping Cranes and a Culture of Womanhood

by Nicole Whitacre

Seven decades ago, the whooping crane population was nearly extinct: there were only sixteen birds left on the planet. Wildlife biologists got to work preserving the endangered bird and today there are almost six hundred whooping cranes and counting.

(Yes, this is *girltalk*, not Animal Planet. Stick with me. The relevance of the whooping crane will soon become clear.)

The scientists weren't content with boosting numbers; they wanted to restore the whooping crane "culture"—to help whooping cranes teach other whooping cranes what it means to be a real whooping crane. As it turns out, part of being a real whooping crane involves a yearly migration of upwards of a thousand kilometers to sunny Florida.

So these wildlife biologists trained and then tracked the migrating birds. But soon an anomaly appeared. While some groups of migrating whooping cranes glided straight to their destination, other groups drifted forty to fifty miles off course.

There was only one difference between the birds that flew straight and "the crooked fliers:" *an older bird in the group*. The birds that flew more accurately followed an older bird.*

You probably see where I am going with this. A parable for Christian women. As younger women trying to fly straight according to God's Word, we need *older women* to help us stay on course.

Scripture is clear about this. Titus 2 most famously tells us: "*Older women are to teach what is good, and so train the young women...that the word of God may not be reviled*" (v. 3-5). And peppered throughout the epistles are instructions for younger Christians to follow more mature Christians:

"Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (Heb. 13:7).

“Join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” (Phil 3:17).

Three things (at least) stand out in these verses:

1. Some Christians are older and some are younger (and it is important to know which you are).
2. An older Christian is one who has an “outcome” (not merely an opinion) worth following.
3. Younger Christians are to “keep their eyes on” the older Christians (not follow the younger Christians or figure it out for themselves).

These days, in our churches and on our blogs, we often get it backwards. Young women are quick to “test their wings” (sorry, I couldn’t resist!), to teach and take the lead, while older women are often marginalized or ignored. Young women can be more consumed with avoiding the mistakes of the previous generation than learning from their wisdom. We are often better at criticizing than following those who are older in the faith. We think we can find our own way.

But there are also many young women who know they are young, who know they need an older, more experienced guide. They want to be mentored, but can’t seem to find anyone. “Where did all the older women go?” they wonder.

More than ever, we need experienced, fruitful women to teach and train the young women. We need those who have flown a straight path according to the Word of God to show us the way. We need to restore a Christian culture where younger women learn from older women what it means to be real women.

How can we make this happen? What does it look like? Let’s talk.

*NPR.org: [“Wise Old Whooping Cranes Keep Captive-Bred Fledglings on Track”](#)

Help Wanted: Older Woman to Serve as Reliable Guide

by Carolyn Mahaney

Destination matters; not just how we feel along the way.

Take the whooping cranes, for example. A lone whooping crane, or batch of inexperienced flyers, may enjoy the breeze and the scenery every bit as much as the whoopers who follow an older bird, but they all have to land some time. And it matters where they touch down.

“So what is our destination?” we may well ask. What is the end goal of older women teaching younger women?

Faith. Patience. Love. Purity. Steadfastness. Progress. (Heb 13:7, 2 Tim. 3:10, 1 Tim. 4:12-15)

That the word of God may not be reviled. (Tit. 2:5)

That we may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. (Tit. 2:10)

We are to imitate and follow godly women so we might reach Destination Godliness.

But if we are honest, we sometimes want more sympathy than steadfastness out of discipleship. We prefer more understanding, less exhortation. A little more comfort and a little less correction.

So we tend to drift toward the “What you? Me too!” friend who makes us feel OK about our shortcomings. We prefer friends who can relate to our struggles, who are “real” about their faults. But we may keep our distance—and even judge—the woman who seems godlier, more “together” (we say, a tad derisively) than we are.

We may like to talk, even debate, serious theology, but resist inquiry into how that theology is working out in our home, our work-place, or our parenting. We may shower likes on blog posts where women share faults and failures as if they are badges of honor, but pass over an article or book that we fear may make us feel bad about ourselves.

We sometimes have a *take the sugar hold the medicine* approach to discipleship.

But this is not to our benefit. “Who is the friend who will be a real blessing to my soul?” asks Charles Bridges: “Is it one who will humor my fancies and flatter my vanity?...This comes far short of my need. I am a poor, straying sinner with a wayward will and a blinded heart, going wrong at every step.”

The authors of the epistles see our need. They don’t laugh off faults and failures. Rather, they repeatedly, relentlessly remind us that a life transformed by the gospel should look like it. They exhort us, by the grace of God and in reliance upon the Holy Spirit, to stay on course, press forward to maturity, and *make*

progress toward the goal. And if we are to reach our destination, they tell us, younger women need to follow older women. (More to come on who these older women are, anyway. Not all of them have white hair.)

While it is a wonderful blessing to have friends to walk *with* us, we also need friends who have walked *ahead* of us. We need women who have weathered storms and passed landmarks of godliness to teach us how to make progress in our faith. We need godly, older women to help us reach our destination.

A Woman to Follow

by Nicole Whitacre

What qualifies someone as an older woman who teaches younger women? In other words, who are to be the teachers and who are to be the learners? The answer is important. If we get this mixed up, we will quickly get off course.

Chronological, or even spiritual age—the number of years she has been a Christian—does not necessarily make someone an “older” woman according to Scripture. In the context of Titus 2:3-5 (see also 1 Tim. 5:3-14, Heb. 13:7, Phil. 3:17), we can see that an older woman has proven character and a fruitful lifestyle.

These two litmus tests of the godly older woman highlight the inner character and the outward result of that character. They help us to discern if we are qualified to teach and who is qualified to teach us.

Proven character – Proof of genuine character requires time and tests. A woman must be a faithful Christian for some length of time and pass tests of faith that result in greater maturity and steadfastness (James 1:3-4). In the words of Titus 2, she is reverent and godly, and has self-control over her tongue and her body. She is not yet perfect, but she is proven.

This means an “older” woman may be quite young. A girl not yet twenty who has walked through the teenage years with purity, righteousness, and love for family and church may be an older woman to younger girls. Or a young pastor’s wife may be a godly example to older members of her husband’s congregation. An older woman need not have passed *every* test, only passed *her* tests well.

Fruitful lifestyle – To identify the godly older woman, look at those around her, starting with her family. Here is where the Bible starts (Titus 2:3-5, 1 Tim. 5:3-

14). Is the woman faithful to her husband and children, to her parents and her home? Does she leave behind a lovely trail of sacrificial service in the church?

The godly older woman may have a wayward child or a difficult husband or spent hours counseling a woman who wanders from the faith. But she will also have abundant fruit in her marriage and parenting, and in the lives of the women she has counseled and served.

Last year, a prominent Christian magazine published an article entitled: “50 Women to Watch,” and it occurred to me that the fifty women to watch are probably the ones that nobody is watching (except maybe a small child or an elderly dependent or a grieving woman). The women to watch are probably serving in secret, which is why you often see the fruit of a godly woman’s life before you ever see her.

So we must be discerning. Just because a woman in our church has a compelling personality or a desire to teach other women, or just because a woman is a clever writer of books and blogs, we must not automatically assume she is a woman to follow. Take a closer look at her life. Consider the fruit. Follow a woman you want to be like. Follow a fruitful woman.

Q&A: How Can I Find an Older Woman to Mentor Me?

by Carolyn Mahaney

Sharon wrote to ask:

What do you recommend to younger woman about getting an older woman to mentor her? I have a very broken relationship with my own mother, and feel like I have been starving my whole life for an older woman to come alongside me and mentor me.

This woman echoes a cry we have heard from countless young women through the years, and I pray this cry reaches the ears of many godly, older women in our churches.

For all of the young women who are so desperate for a spiritual mother, what can you do? What if you don’t know any godly, older, women? Or what if none of them seem to have the time or inclination to mentor you? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Pray and Trust. Ask God to fulfill this desire of your heart. After all, he put it there in the first place! Given remaining pride in our hearts, the fact that we are desperate for wisdom, discipleship, and exhortation is only the fruit of the Holy Spirit at work in our hearts. And God promises to fulfill all our desires for wisdom and righteousness (James 1:5, Matt. 5:6). He will *generously* provide.

2. Learn a little from a lot (of older women). While it would be wonderful to have a designated mentor, there aren't always enough godly, older women to go around these days. So make *all* of the godly older women you know your mentors! Observe their strengths and ask each one if she would be willing to give you counsel at least *one* time in *one* area. Ask the prayer warrior to coffee so she can teach you how she prays. Ask the organized woman to come to your home one afternoon and give you some advice. See if the experienced babysitter, or the mother of disciplined school-age children, can come to the park with you and your unruly toddler and offer her counsel. Ask the woman with a strong marriage if she and her husband can spend an evening with you and your fiancé. Create your own personalized discipleship course by drawing on the godly character and experience of many women. Just imagine the wealth of wisdom you could amass in a short time!

3. Don't waste an "older woman moment." In other words, don't despise or overlook even the smallest opportunity to learn from a godly, older woman. Maybe you are seated next to her at a friend's house for dinner or you run into her in the hallway at church. You can learn life-changing truth in five minutes with a godly woman, so come prepared. Have a list of questions and whenever you have the chance ask a godly woman for a quick word of advice or encouragement. Or send her a short email or message her on Facebook or Twitter. For example, ask a godly woman what she is studying in her daily times in God's Word, or how she would handle a parenting situation you are dealing with. Like paparazzi chasing a movie star, we should *hound* the older women in our churches for godly counsel.

4. Go secondhand shopping. Learn vicariously if you can't learn directly. Ask the godly teenage girl what she appreciates about her mother. Ask your friend who has a godly mentor to share what she has learned from her about walking with God through suffering. Get parenting counsel from another mom who is getting godly counsel from an older woman. Ask any younger woman who has access to an older woman: What have you learned from so and so? What would so and so do in this situation? Like sheaves left in a field after harvest, there is much wisdom to be gleaned secondhand.

5. Be a bookworm. Even if there is a shortage of godly, older women in your church, we also live in an age with unprecedented access to the written word, and thus some of the greatest "older women" of all time. Every one of us can learn

from Susannah Spurgeon or Sarah Edwards, Elisabeth Elliot or Nancy Wilson. And you can return to books again and again for wise counsel on godly womanhood. There is much more I could say here, but my friend Jodi Ware has already written a [wonderful post](#) on this topic, which I would encourage you to read.

6. Come to learn. Show an older woman that you value her time and her godly wisdom by asking genuine, thoughtful, open-ended questions. Come to her eager to learn and receive instruction, even course-correction at times, not merely validation or affirmation. It helps to plan your questions ahead of time, and avoid questions that are not really questions at all, but make it awkward for an older woman to share a different perspective. Remember, older women have a unique calling to teach us how to be godly women. Let's make it easy for them to do just that.

7. Become an older woman. Take what you learn from godly, older woman and apply it. Be faithful in the small things, today. Sit at the Savior's feet and serve others in the humble place God has called you. Sow now, so you can reap later. If you take to heart the wise counsel and biblical wisdom of women who fear the Lord, and apply what they teach, you will become a woman with proven character and a fruitful lifestyle. And God-willing, some day in the near future, a young woman won't have to look too far for a godly older woman to mentor her, for you will be the mother who raised her or the spiritual mother who is right beside her all the way. May God raise up a generation of godly women to teach the younger women "what is good" (Titus 2:3).

The Kind of Young Women the Church Needs Most

by Carolyn Mahaney

My friend, Joy, recently told me about a conversation her family had with [author Jerry Bridges](#). He was preaching at our church's [Sunday service](#), and Joy's family invited him to their home for lunch. Joy asked him about how he got into writing and Mr. Bridges told her that he did not publish his first book until he was in his mid-forties. He may have gotten a late start, he told Joy, but he thought it was necessary to have gone through all he had experienced in order to be able to write what God had called him to write.

I, for one, am grateful that Jerry Bridges wasn't writing books in his twenties. His biblical wisdom is valuable precisely because it has been refined for years in the daily grind of obscure obedience. He didn't write fresh out of a trial or high off an accomplishment. He learned his lessons slowly, over decades of walking faithfully with God, with no one watching or publishing.

There is a time for living and a time for writing. A time for every season, the wise teacher tells us (Ecc. 3:1-8).

A time for sowing and a time for reaping.

A time for teaching and a time for learning.

A time for speaking publicly and a time for serving silently.

For young women, yours is primarily a time to learn and sow.

Young women, full of zeal and overflowing with desires to serve Christ's kingdom, let me encourage you to channel your energies to learning from older women, to striving after maturity, to seeking out lowly places of service.

Mothers of small children, yours is a season for gathering up seeds of wisdom from older women and planting them in the fertile soil of your family. Each day you stand at the head of an endless row of seeds to be sown—disciplines to be lovingly administered, squabbles to be settled, splinters to be extracted, plates to be cleared, lessons to be taught to little ones. Make it your aim to faithfully sow.

And may I encourage you, young woman, not to despise the sowing time? You may feel as if your kingdom influence is small at best. You may feel as if your time and talents are going to waste. You may feel as if everyone else is teaching and you are still stuck learning. You may feel as if your seeds will never sprout.

But I think, perhaps, that the church needs young women like you most of all. More than young women teachers, we need young women learners. More than young women leaders, we need young women doers. More than young women bloggers and speakers we need young mothers and sisters to raise the next generation in the ways of the Lord.

The church desperately needs young women who are fervently learning and faithfully sowing today so that they can become the older women of tomorrow. If the present dearth of qualified, older women has taught us anything, it has taught us this.

So let me encourage you, young woman. Do not chafe at the learning and do not despair in the sowing. Delight in this season, in this time appointed by our gracious Lord. Toil and struggle, learn and sow, with all his energy that he powerfully works within you (Col. 1:29).

What is Essential for Women's Discipleship in the Local Church

by Carolyn Mahaney

What are the most urgent needs for Christian women today?

We believe that *the greatest need for Christian women today is to be women of God's Word*. And so we began our "Timely Cautions" series back in the spring by urging all of us to not neglect our pastor's preaching.

The pastor's preaching tops our list because God has appointed gifted men to "teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (Tit. 2:1, see also Acts 2:42, Heb. 13:7) and to deliver his Word to his church. If preachers are God's messengers, called to bring his Word to us, we best pay close attention (J.I. Packer). We must also continually encourage and exhort one another to make it our "first great and primary business" to be in God's Word on a daily basis (George Müller).

Which brings us, these many months later, to our second concern: that the Word of God "*would not be reviled*"—that we would not deny our doctrine with our lives, open a door to gospel-ridicule by our behavior, or give the enemies of Christ a reason to say evil about us, but that as Christian women, we would show forth the beauty and power of the gospel (Titus 2:5,8,10).

How can we accomplish such a daunting task? Paul tells Titus:

"Older women...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).

This list of goodness, as with any list in Scripture, is not exhaustive. Discipleship of Christian women includes more than the teaching of Titus 2, but never less. Here is an explicit agenda for a home-focused curriculum to be taught by older women to younger women that we dare not neglect if we are to remain faithful to Scripture.

Paul's instructions do not limit or restrict Christian discipleship for women, but they should shape our priorities. If our one-on-one or church-wide discipleship for women ignores or neglects passages like Titus 2—if we (intentionally or accidentally) leave *the application of sound doctrine to a woman's life and home* in the back supply closet with the broken chairs and old wedding decorations—then we need to reconsider whether our ministry priorities line up with the priorities of God's Word.

Does this mean women must not teach beyond Titus 2 or biblical womanhood? Of course not! Christian discipleship entails a variety of topics that arise from God's Word, and I rejoice when I see God raise up godly women who are gifted to teach other women, and who are in a season of life where they can do so while remaining faithful to their God-given responsibilities in the home.

But as we shape ministry to women and define discipleship in our local churches, a healthy church, like the one Paul is describing for Titus, needs a pastor who preaches sound doctrine, and older women who teach younger women how to live according to that sound doctrine.

The pastor cannot do our part any more than we are called to do his part in leading the church. A pastor must teach sound doctrine, “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), but there are many lessons of godly womanhood that a woman needs to learn from the example and instruction of another woman. Therefore we must not marginalize or shrug off our assignment.

And what does our assignment involve? Elisabeth Elliot explains:

It is doubtful that the Apostle Paul had in mind Bible classes or seminars or books when he spoke of teaching younger women. He meant the simple things, the everyday example, the willingness to take time from one's own concerns to pray with the anxious mother, to walk with her the way of the cross—with its tremendous demands of patience, selflessness, lovingkindness—and to show her, in the ordinariness of Monday through Saturday, how to keep a quiet heart.... Through such an example, one young woman—single or married, Christian or not—may glimpse the mystery of charity and the glory of womanhood.

To teach biblical womanhood is not shallow or frivolous. Titus 2 is not the Pinterest passage of Scripture. It is “the way of the cross.” It is a call to Christian women to help other Christian women glimpse “the mystery of charity and the glory of womanhood.”

Titus 2 calls women to a deep and profound understanding of the gospel that issues forth in a genuine and sacrificial love of family and home, a counter-cultural purity and self-control that is only possible through the power of the

Holy Spirit. It is a lifestyle that proclaims in a loud and joyful voice to our dying world:

[T]he grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Titus 2:11-14).

This question—*what do Christian women need most?*—is personal and immediate before it is church-wide and global. What do you and I need most? What does the young woman sitting next to me in church need most?

We all need a “Titus,” a pastor to teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. We all need to delight in and meditate on God’s Word day and night (Ps. 1:2). And we all need older women to help us apply gospel-centered teaching to our daily lives—all for the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.¹

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