

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS AND EXAMPLES FOR CHRISTIAN WOMEN

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There is little in the Word of God in the way of detailed and specific instructions for women of God. Therefore, these suggestions are simply that: possible ways of applying the Scriptures to our own needs.

Example: Preachers' wives must sometimes learn to accept the fact that we are not good at certain things—for instance, coordinating and serving meals to those families who have lost loved ones, even if the previous preacher's wife did this quite well for years. We may find that our talents lie instead in such areas as cataloging the library, if any. If there is none, we might consider beginning one.

Some of us have absolutely no talent for finding or making visual aids, but we do have a knowledge of the Scriptures and the ability to present the lessons clearly. We must choose the method that suits our particular personalities, and we must make sure that the importance of God's message comes through, rather than the beauty and cleverness of our methods or even our personalities. One excellent solution would be for one who is artistic and imaginative to help make visual aids, charts, and other things for a seasoned teacher who is better with making the Bible lesson come alive. Such teamwork or partnership (and you can think of other ideas) would produce much better results than either woman or girl could do alone.

My experience as a young preacher's wife might prove instructive here. For many years, as I attended Ladies' Bible Classes, Preachers' Wives' Workshops, lectureships, and other classes for women, the idea was repeatedly pounded into my head that there is a creature called a "Preacher's Wife" (and the same would apply to

the wives of other leaders), with qualifications listed in God's Word—#1, #2, #3, and so on. If I did not “fit the mold,” then I could never qualify as a good preacher's wife. I didn't. I also remember that, invariably, if such a wife had any kind of problem (especially between her and her husband, and also with her children), she alone was to blame. Her husband deserved better.

Furthermore, it would be selfish of her to expect anything from him, since he was doing the Lord's work, and all his time, energy, and effort were needed and expended elsewhere. (Several times through the years a total stranger [or someone I just met] has laid a hand on my shoulder, looked me in the eye, and commanded, “You take good care of that man, because he is doing the Lord's work!” All the while, I was laboring under the delusion that I was doing the Lord's work, also!) She alone must see to it that their children were properly brought up. (I once heard a preacher [one of those who traveled the country presiding over “weekend workshops”] say, “My wife has brought up our sons [and she did a good job!]; I have not been home on a weekend for 20 years!” Thinking of Ephesians 6:4, I wanted to stand up and say, “You have sinned and you need to repent!” but I restrained myself.] Needless to say, since I never fit the mold nor did I ever measure up to the standards set by those who were teaching (and not, I finally realized, by God's Word), I was continually discouraged, depressed, and plagued by feelings of guilt. All my efforts to improve seemed to fall short.

Some wives of preachers, elders, and deacons are great hostesses. They have just the right touch in artistic and culinary matters. They keep their houses spotless, and they can be prepared for guests at the drop of a hat. And then there are the rest of us. For my part, I just try to stay one jump ahead of the health department. I have never

been organized or methodical. The only thing I know how to do is try to make my guests feel comfortable, at home, and at ease. The food I serve is very plain. (I wouldn't dare try anything fancy; I am just an old country cook.) Our table is just as plain, and most of the time we use a plastic tablecloth, sometimes even when we have guests.

Some women are extroverts, enjoy being with people continually, and even like to be in the public eye. Others are more introverted and are more attuned to pursuits such as reading, studying, and writing. They might be good at such things as writing articles for periodicals or for a series of studies for Bible classes, cataloging the church library, proof-reading bulletin articles, or writing songs (lyrics or music or both—for children or for adults). Many situations come to mind in which this kind of personality would accomplish much. Think of the assistance she could provide for other teachers, from nursery age to adults. There is a vital need for both the extroverts and the introverts. However, we need to stress here that none of us is exempt from teaching others—women and children, in a group or individually—and sometimes (in a private setting, such as Priscilla did) men. We may plant, as Paul did, or we may water, as Apollos did, but we must all be teaching (1 Cor. 3:3–11).

Yes, how well do I know that it is hard to find a time when we can be alone and have peace long enough to study. No one protects our study time (answering phone, doing necessary household chores, caring for children) the way we try to shield our husbands so they can study. Each one of us must find her own time, place, and method. I am a morning person, so when our three children were small—and when, day after day, I would find myself exhausted at the end of the day with absolutely no study at all done—I formed the habit of getting up early in the morning, before my husband or

my children were up (two of the children were very early risers), to have a few quiet minutes of reading, study, and prayer before time to start breakfast. That might not work for others at all. Maybe you would prefer to wait until everyone is in bed at night, and have that time alone. If your children still take naps, and if you are a stay-at-home mother, you might like to set that time aside for your study.

Should a preacher's wife or an elder's wife go to the back of the auditorium after worship so that she can stand with her husband and greet people? Doing this helps her to get to know the members of the church and their families. It helps the members of the church to see her as a part of her husband's work and possibly to gain respect for her (something she needs!). Another important consideration is that, if she does not do this, many of the visitors may get away before she can seek them out and meet them.

On the other hand, to some people that practice seems to be "affected"—like trying to look important and "official." Then, too, if she has young children, there will be problems if she does not supervise them. I can well remember being criticized for holding on to my small sons' hands and not getting around to meeting people. So I started trying to get around and meet people, and then I was criticized for letting my children run wild. This is not a hugely important matter, but it is one that a wife will have to think about.

Many have said that, if a leader's wife is willing to hire a baby sitter so she can have some recreation, she should also hire a baby sitter so she can go out to visit and to teach. I'm not sure I would go this far, but the idea would merit some thought and discussion. Some are never able to afford a baby-sitter for any reason, but there are alternative solutions, which might work. For instance, we might offer to trade child-care

duties with another mother in the church (either for recreation or for visiting).

As the children get a little older, it might be good to take them along when we visit. Nursing home visits are a good place to start. Older people, especially, love to see children. It is very important that children learn to respect, love, and appreciate older people. Think of the countless ways and areas in which children (not to mention young parents) can learn from the elderly! There is, of course, the problem of behavior; some children are particularly active, noisy, and rowdy, while others are naturally quieter. But as they get older, they can be taught about appropriate behavior in different settings and about being gentle with frail, delicate older people, and can learn to subdue themselves for short periods.

CONCLUSION

The reader can doubtless think of many more practical applications of Scriptures directed toward women or that apply to women as well as to men. It would be good to form the habit, whenever we study the Bible, of concentrating on possible ways to implement Scriptural commands and exhortations and incorporate them into our own areas of service.