Mixed Ministry: Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Part 1 of 2: Men and Women Ministering Together
with
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Welcome to The Table where we discuss issues of God and culture. I'm Darrell Bock, executive director for cultural engagement at the Hendricks Center at Dallas Theological Seminary and my guest this morning is Sue Edwards who teaches in a department that keeps getting renamed on our campus. I'm never quite sure whether I've got it right or not, but rumor has it it's Educational Ministries and Leadership.

Yes, that's it.

Okay. It used to be Christian Ed for those of you who have had some history with the seminary, which means that it's the department that Howard Hendricks actually founded years ago and has been through various leaders. I think Ken Gangle led the department at one time and you've been here how long?

11 years formally. They ramped me up for three or four very graciously. I worked beside my male colleagues and they helped me become acclimated in a very gracious process.

That's good, and what were you doing when the seminary coopted you?

Well I have about 25, 30 years of experience in the trenches working with women and some of that has been with a couple of mega churches, the first place in an informal capacity, but I did oversee the ministry with women there, taught the Bible, and then I was minister to women at Irving Bible Church on staff for seven years.

Okay, so I thought IBC -

Yes. I was there.

Very good. Let's see, and you did your work at Gordon, right?

Yes.

And what did you concentrate on?

On women, understanding women. We took a lot of -
**Darrell**

Oh man, I could use a lot of help.

**Sue**

A lot of people can, yes, and we took the secular studies on women under the tutelage of Dr. Allison Matthews and a number of her colleagues and looked at how do we take what we know about women from a secular perspective and put it through a grid of a Christian perspective, and now there's a lot more work that has been done putting all of this through that grid of a Christian perspective and that's what we do here at the seminary. I teach on the masters level but also on the doctoral level. D.Min. and D.Ed.Min. effective ministries with women.

**Darrell**

Okay. You've just done a wonderful job of introducing our topic.

**Sue**

Okay.

**Darrell**

So our topic today is women and particularly women and men and ministry side-by-side and the issues that that raises. I've debated whether to ask you this question, but usually I lose the debates with myself, and so I am going to ask, and that is you've been in ministry 30 years. How has women's ministry changed in the time that you've been involved in ministry? Has it, first of all?

**Sue**

Oh absolutely. It has greatly changed. When I began in women's ministry, women were not working in the church per se or very few were. In fact I started out in a para church women's Bible study because very little was happening formally in the church and pastors would go out and look at their parking lot on a Tuesday morning or a Wednesday morning and there would be this sea of cars and they're going. "What is happening?" Women are coming from all over the community to study God's word, and they began to see, my goodness, women are hungry for God's word, yet they were doing almost nothing related to leading, ministering, serving. They were doing lots of serving but in very marginalized kind of behind the scenes way so that the women with leadership gifts, teaching gifts, had very little opportunity.
So they were taking those gifts both to the secular world and to para church ministries. About 20, 25 years ago that began to radically change and women started coming in basically as children's ministers, women's ministers, but in the last ten years or so we've seen that expand to a number of different positions from those who head up small groups, community, acclimation. I think what happened was that the male leadership saw these women were bright and dedicated and hard working and they said "My goodness, she would be great in this role" as well as these other roles that had been pretty much specifically set aside for women.

And what's interesting about this is that this has happened across the board in the church. Obviously the role of women is a controversial topic in the church and so you've got different churches that have taken different approaches to that, but this opening up has literally happened across the board in many ways.

It has in many churches. There are still churches that where women are looked at in a rather suspicious way as a temptress, as somebody you can't or we can't work with her, we're very nervous about that, and in some of those places, in some churches and even in some para church ministries that's still going on, but in many places it's become much healthier.

So women come through the seminary or they come into your program and what kinds of things are you emphasizing with them as they think about ministry, and how are you preparing them for really this shift that's taken place?

Right. Well we talk about it. We look at all the various issues that are going on related to women, how women learn, how women lead, how to work with men, how to lead ministry with excellence, how to integrate so that you're not marginalized, just seen as a silo, but how do you integrate what you're doing, come on board with the mission and vision of the whole church, and how to help men see that we're not here to compete. We're there to compliment. We have that male pastor's back. We want him to be the finest Christian man, pastor, father, husband.
We're there to protect him in some ways from – there are women that he probably does need to protect himself from, but there are a lot of us that that's not the case at all and so we serve to help come alongside ministers to those women instead of him trying to do it, which is what we've done in the past. We've been terrorized. We're so fearful of working with qualified, godly, called women that we end up putting men in places where they're the one ministering to unhealthy women, and I think that's caused a lot of moral downfall, a lot of problems. I actually teach some of the men. I teach a core course in our concentration.

I talk with the men about how wise it is to partner with what we call a Titus Two woman who's called, who has his back, who's mature. Let her, especially in the area of counseling, taking care of those really tough issues. I can do that better than a man can just because I've walked in those shoes. So we teach women all about who women are, how they lead, how they learn, and we teach them, I teach a course women teaching women. How does a woman teach women the Bible?

They need that desperately and the younger women today are clamoring. They don't want fluff the way women's ministry has looked in churches so often because they find what I call the go-to woman, that prayer warrior. She's a delightful woman. She has absolutely no training whatsoever and they say "By the way, here, you take charge of shepherding", and it is actually in most churches 60 percent of the congregation are female. Barna discovered that in 2000, so six out of every ten of the people that are sitting in the pews, coming into the church doors, they are gifted, they are called.

They want to serve their families. They want to serve the church and they want to lead according to their giftedness. So how can we help them do that? We need ministries that teach them sound doctrine, sound theology, that are missional. You get them serving, not just head knowledge. There's so many aspects of helping women minister to women and then to children and then in some capacities to the congregation at large, wherever the leadership says that that is appropriate.

**Darrell**

Okay. Now I see you brought a resource here with you, so why don't you tell us about that?
Sue
Okay. Well this is a book, Mixed Ministries: Working together as brothers and sisters in an oversexed society, and I partnered with Kelly Matthews and Henry Rogers in 2007 to write this resource. I was seeing how important it is that we begin to shift our thinking about men and women working together to more of a family focus. The Biblical resource is 1 Timothy 5:1-2, which talks about – let me get it exact – "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters."

Darrell
So there's the family metaphor.

Sue
With the family metaphor, with absolute purity it says. That's the way Paul ends that. So I was seeing we are called as brothers and sisters to work in partnership together. What does that look like? And I didn't know, honestly. I've written several books and the others I came with I knew what I was talking about. This one we brought a team of four women and a couple of men. We interviewed tons of men throughout the country, professors here. Every chapter we sat down. I wrote the first draft and then we sat down and we wrangled over what does that mean today? There were four generations involved in the project.

I had an intern who's very young, Eva Bleeker, Lesa Engelthaler who's a writer here in Dallas, and then Kelly who's younger than me, and I was the older woman on the project. I wanted to get all of the generations' insight into this issue of what does it look like for us to work together as brothers and sisters in the family, and how do we change the way that men particularly look at women in the church?

Darrell
Okay, now you've opened the door. I don't know if it's a box or not, but we'll find out, see if Pandora is in it or not.

Sue
Okay. All right.

Darrell
This is exactly what we wanted to talk about. I take it that there were concerns that motivated the book and that motivated this shift of getting around a family metaphor. Where did you feel like the church was and why did you feel like this needed to be addressed?
Sue

Well, because working as a minister to women, also working here at the seminary, and even today, two weeks ago I was in Illinois. I was speaking there and I had lunch with a woman who was the only woman on her staff in the church and she was telling me that in their staff meetings she'll come up with an idea. She's a leader on the staff and she'll come up with an idea and the male colleagues will kind of look at her and think about it and pretty much ignore her idea, and then a little bit later one of the men will articulate almost an identical idea and they'll all go "Yes, yes, that's great." And she's going, "Hello? I just said that. I am here."

And I see that happens often, sadly. I have tears in my office of women who feel marginalized and I don't think a lot of men do this intentionally. There are a few who are mean-spirited about it but very few. Mostly I think men are just busy. They see things from a male perspective.

Women bring often a different perspective, presented in a different way, and men are so used to having things done in terms they understand and said in the way that they would say it that that takes them aback a little bit when it's said differently. So very often unintentionally women find themselves ignored, marginalized, and actually women shut themselves down a lot too. We're our own worst enemy many times. That's the confusion that's out there.

Darrell

I actually have found that I almost have to be clear about giving permission initially so that the woman feels comfortable stepping forward and expressing herself clearly about what it is, and I don't have that problem with my wife. She expresses herself very clear. I'm very aware of what she's thinking, but generally speaking in ministry I have found that I would say it's almost the rule versus the exception, that without having opened the door and saying to the woman who's ministering alongside of me, "You feel every freedom to contribute as much as you want. In fact, I'm looking for that, expecting that, hoping for it", etc. and in as affirming a way as possible to open that door and make that possible, and then reinforcing it the first few times it happens because those are very important moments.
They are, and even saying in the discussion, "Dorothy, what would you say? I'd love to hear what you have to contribute." Because imagine if you're sitting in a room with people who are probably looking at it in a different perspective and you don't know how – if they're gonna judge you if you open your mouth at all until you get to know them well, and sometimes this is an issue that's so taboo that often we never talk about it at all. So we don't know where we stand and we don't want to come across as aggressive, as going against what Christ would teach. We want to do what the Bible says that we are to do.

Now the "we" here you're talking about women in ministry.

Women in general by and large. We love the Lord. These are godly women who are called to serve. We want to do that and we wanna contribute, and way too many women, I don't know what it is about the way a lot of women are made, but we tend to be our own worst enemy, look down on ourselves. I see this with male and female students. If a woman makes a good grade she often says "Well the test was easy." If a man makes a good grade he goes "Wow."

"What a great theologian."

"I am really a smart guy." Yes. But the opposite, if he does poorly, the test was bad. If she does poorly, "I'm stupid. I'm not capable." I don't know if this sociologically occurs because of the way we're raised or if it's really something within us that we tend to come down on ourselves more, and that's a lot of what we do is just help women realize that God has gifted them. Every gift in the Bible is given to women too and for them to be developed as a person, a lot of women think if I develop myself, someone else loses. It's a crazy way of thinking, but women tend to think that way. So a lot of what we do is give them confidence. I can't over-encourage a woman, but I can over-encourage a man.

No you can't.

Well, maybe not, I don't know, but they seem to get cocky a lot easier.
Darrell

There you go. Another question that I have is you said you dealt with four generations. So is there a difference in the different generations as to how they look at this area in general?

Sue

Oh absolutely. There's another book that just came out, Organic Mentoring, which the first two chapters talk about the – and we divided into younger and older and that's a little bit simplistic, but for someone who's just looking at mentoring, yes there are huge differences in the way that younger women and older women look at life, look at themselves, look at the church, at their faith. My goodness. They're looking for something less programmed, more authentic. They want to do something with what they learn.

My generation, builders and boomers, we pretty much went into the church saying "Well my role is to learn the Bible and I want to know it, and if I know it I'm a godly Christian woman. Now I may not do much with it. I may go back home and rearrange my furniture for the umpteenth time and decorate my living room again. I'm not going out. I'm not ministering. I'm not using it.

It's strictly a knowledge-based endeavor", where younger women are saying "No, that's not what I see in the Scriptures. Yes I want to learn, but I want" – they're much more community-oriented and they really are much more missional. They want to do something with what they learn. There's I think technology has done so much to change how women are just as much involved, maybe more, in technology than men. It's huge changes.

Darrell

Now one of the key issues it seems to me is how men treat women. We've already alluded to this already in giving confidence, but another element of this is how they view the partnership of the ministry itself, not just affirming the woman but even having recognized that she's there. There are things men sometimes do, and as you've suggested it's not necessarily intentional. It can be completely unintentional. We can be completely oblivious to what's going on.

Sue

Right, and often that's the case. Yes.

Darrell

So this is your chance.
Sue

Okay. Well I can tell you a few stories, and there are many. I've had many tears in my office where a woman feels she's free to unload. A woman came in, she'd been hired on staff and it was the tradition, although she didn't know it, at the annual staff retreat for the new hires to share their testimony, to share a vision of their ministry. There were two new men and she was the new woman and the men were asked to do that and she was not, and she came to me asking, "Was I just overlooked or was this intentional?" It's very difficult to go to the leadership and point this out. You look a little petty if you do and so she's wondering why? What's going on here?

What happens normally, because she was in a similar staff position that these men were, and yet she was not invited to the table. So she's wondering – I have a couple of personal examples myself where my department chair asked me to overtake, to take charge of, to lead something that our department needed to do for a year. It was a number of gatherings and I was delighted to take that on for our department. When I went to someone in administration that I needed to help us with this he was extremely reticent.

Made it very clear that he didn't think I should lead these meetings, that I should certainly delegate this out, and yet my department chair had told me he wanted me to lead the meetings. I did lead the meetings. It went very well. I did it in a very collaborative style and that gentleman has been very gracious to me, and I wonder if he later questioned his own way he handled it, but his initial response was to assume that because – I think – because I'm female I should not have been put in charge of something that my chair put me in charge of. I've had a couple of experiences like that.

Darrell

I find that in talking to some of the female students here myself that they occasionally have certain reactions. Usually it's to students, fortunately, and not faculty, but still where they very much are given the impression that they, one, don't belong here, or in some cases, well you belong here but the quieter the better.

Sue

Yes.
Darrell: And they're not treated as fellow students pursuing the development of skills and gifts alongside the other students but somehow almost treated as almost a second class. That can be the outgrowth of perceived theological concerns, and I say that very, very carefully, or it can just be an insensitivity, a gender insensitivity, and yet it's picked up.

Sue: Oh yes.

Darrell: Those vibes are definitely picked up. If a person who's training for male leadership in ministry who has those tendencies will take that into ministry if they don't face it.

Sue: Absolutely. Yes.

Darrell: So that's not a healthy situation.

Sue: It's not, and I think the worst one was when I had a woman student come into my office, plop down almost in tears, and she said "I was just on the elevator. I was going just a few floors. The gentleman walked on. I said to him 'Good morning' and he said 'I can't talk to you, I'm married.' And she was so taken aback that she hardly knew how to respond. She said "I wasn't flirting. I had no desire in any way. I wasn't approaching, I was just being pleasant", and yet she felt like I can't even have a conversation with this person who I want to see as my brother. That's one of the things we say in the book is if we can begin to see each other in our heads as brother and sister, we have biological brothers and sisters.

We have no sexual temptation if we're healthy toward them at all. We can learn to do this, and yet we tend to look at all women in – some men do – as temptresses, as somebody that I can't go near, I can't talk to, that you know that that man in that elevator as you just said, he's not going to be a man who will have a woman on his staff, which could very well mean that his whole church will look like a single parent family. Strong male, no mother there, no woman to bring in that we're all created in the image of God and it's both male and female that bring that image, the beauty of that together.
Darrell

So as we think about this, and you've raised this nicely and subtly if I may say it that way, I find I was told things in ministry, and I'm going to probably step on some toes, that I find hard to put together with the idea that we're a community and we're brothers and sisters in Christ and we're family, to use the metaphor that you've talked about. For example, if I'm counseling someone and it's a male student and they come in and they want to talk to me about something that's relatively private, they need the space of the privacy to interact with me, they walk into my office, I shut the doors so they can talk to me and they know no one else is going to hear what they're going to share.

But generally what I've been told with regard to women is no, we can't – if you have a woman in your office you should leave your door open, period. And I feel like by my doing that, the flipside of it is by my doing that, I'm communicating something to her about who she is that in one sense she doesn't deserve, and it has to do with this cultural aura that we put around this that actually gets in the way of probably why she has come to talk to me to begin with.

Sue

Mm-hmm.

Darrell

And so I find that awkward, and I like to say to institutions if you're worried about those kinds of concerns then build your buildings in such a way that you solve the problem you're concerned about without compromising excessively the reason why someone would seek you out for counsel.

Sue

Exactly.

Darrell

Put a window in your door.

Sue

Exactly.

Darrell

It's not hard. It may cost a little money, but it's worth it because what it communicates is that you can talk to me as a minister as a sister in Christ and I'm not going to send signals about who I think you might be in the process. I actually think this is very underappreciated as a problem.

Sue

Yes. I would agree.
And so learning how to minister alongside someone with which you communicate, you really are a sister in Christ. You bring and bear the image of God uniquely and I want to affirm who you are as a person without sending out all these fears, etc. I know places that have rules where you're in a big room, you're ministering together, there are multiple people in the room, and the argument is you can't have a male and a female in the same room ministering side-by-side with one another. I go, I understand why that's done on the one hand, but on the other hand, what are you actually communicating as your most significant concern when you do that?

Yes. Well you're communicating that this woman cannot be trusted. You're putting it on her really when I would say it may well be your issue that you need to handle.

Right.

We interviewed many leaders throughout the country for our mixed ministry book and what we heard from over and over and over, Howard Hendrix, Mike Lawson, here and then John Ortberg, a variety of different men who work with women, was that we must see them as sisters. We must not put that on them as a result – really that our own spiritual and emotional health is a far better fence or protection. I do understand why we need to protect ourselves. I mean if you go under in this deal, all of your studying, it's a death sentence to ministry.

The consequences are significant.

The consequences are so significant, so I get that, but we erected these high walls. We have these huge walls that what they do is they break down community and family and I honestly think they haven't been all that successful in keeping those who struggle with these issues apart.

Yeah because there's an almost inauthenticity in dealing with the issue that it creates, if I can say it that way.
Yes, and there's – secret poison is sweet, that if someone is unhealthy and their emotional tank is not full and they see someone over there, they're going to find a way, and that's what happens, and the higher those walls are the more attractive that person looks. I don't think we face the reality that attractions are normal. Everybody has them whether you're married or not, but we've shut down.

You can't have a conversation with somebody about "Help me with this. Pray for me. Let's have somebody on your staff that you can go to privately to talk about an attraction." And what I've found is that once I get to know that person I've had a couple of attractions and I'm happily married. Once I really get to know that brother -

To a big guy no less.

I'm married to a great guy. Yes. And I get to know that brother a little bit and most of the time I go, what was I thinking? And the attraction is completely gone just because – now if there is a serious attraction, and we talk in our book about red alert people. I can work with almost any man. There have been a few in my life I've been attracted to. That's a red alert person. Then I put those boundaries in place. Then I might actually quit my job and go somewhere else, but I know myself and I try to work through those things without ever having to go to those extremes and most of the time that's worked. That's been fine. So why do we punish everyone because we might have an attraction to one person?