

Where Are The Men?

And Is that the Best Question?

Overview

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There has been a cry going up from church groups for as long as I have been an adult, "Where are the men?" The men who will stand for their beliefs firm against all odds. Those men who are deeply immersed in Torah and, by virtue of their own strong character training and development, can interpret it correctly for the good of their community. Those who know the difference between gentleness and weakness; and know how to be appropriately gentle as needed yet also tough in spirit when that is called for as well. Not just the ones who will do a task that a fellowship or congregation needs because "somebody has to do it"; but those who have been trained and equipped.

Men who walk in an elder level of maturity are enabled to lead from their hearts in accord with their spiritual gifts; not just by rote or what "looks right" on the outside. Not just from the training they have had in the secular workplace in how to provide leadership; but heart and spirit training, and a desire to be like Messiah.

But, is this the right question to ask?

As important as it is for men to step up to the leadership role, a focus on men's presence or absence seems to blur a more important distinction. To determine the viability of leadership based ***only*** on gender seems to me to be another subtle scheme of the enemy to keep people focused on an "either/or" type battle. This cry seems to be fed through an ongoing and unresolved "battle" over which gender is "supposed" to be the leader; distracting from the more important question of ***how*** men and women are to exercise their gifts in leadership roles.

So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1: 27

It is apparent to us that men and women have different attributes and bring different strengths and styles to leadership. These differences would ideally be complimentary and strengthening to all when utilized together; just as the ideal of the marriage relationship is to picture our Elohim in all His fullness. It is also apparent to us that the individual's maturity level is a better indicator of the ability to lead effectively than is gender.

Until recently, “missing men” has been a part of our Set Apart Ministries experience and concern, too. We, too, have personally struggled, prayed, and asked, “Where are the men?” Not just men members but also men who are leaders. We have had to deal with internal and external challenges on the subject of male and female leadership from the time our calling began to extend beyond the original group of women to include family members and unrelated people as well. As we came into Torah pursuance and realized that a community was in formation here beyond our initial understanding it had become a serious concern.

MISPERCEPTION OF WOMAN’S STATUS

A common misunderstanding has been to consider a woman somehow inferior due to her described status as “helpmeet”. When examined more closely, it is found that this term comes from the Hebrew “ezer knegdo”, and means a “deliverer for and/or against”. In fact, YHWH uses the term “ezer” or deliverer in reference to Himself so it becomes more clear that it does not imply inferiority. An in-depth study of this term can be found in a number of places; among them Walter C. Kaiser’s book: “Hard Sayings of the Old Testament”¹

Misunderstandings about the concept of submissiveness and “helpmeet” are one aspect of our history that has led us into this “either/or” perspective. No where is there any Scriptural indication that a woman as helpmeet is in any way inferior to a man. Coming from his side, she is to stand with him and together, they serve Elohim, both in submission to Him, **our** Bridegroom for both male and female believers. Within marriage in an unresolved matter, it is our understanding that a wife needs to yield to her husband; but even in this, if she knows that he is just as submitted to YHWH as she is, it is not so difficult to trust that YHWH will work out the issue.

This is a matter of order, not superiority.

LACK OF MATURITY IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

There has been much unnecessary strife in organizations that place people in leadership who really aren’t equipped to manage the job. They may be easily manipulated or fall into relational traps that harm themselves and the group. They may err on the side of too much leniency or too much rigidity, without the discernment necessary to recognize what is needed.

In fact, we see that a lack of maturity in any leader is a direct set up for a legalistic or rigid interpretation of Torah. The wisest man who ever lived admonished his readers not to forsake the teaching of their mother.² We understand this to mean the character building that needs to go on before one is put in the responsible position to discern the weightier matters of Torah. We are also quick to add that the question of character building is important for both men and women; and, in America at least, not a popular endeavor for a generation or longer.

¹ Chapter 3, “Hard Sayings of the Old Testament”, Kaiser, Jr, Walter C., Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1988.

² Proverbs 1: 8-9

DETERMINATION OF MATURITY

There are generally accepted indicators of maturity in several facets: physiological, emotional, developmental, relational and spiritual. Many different researchers and authors have contributed to this awareness. In Set Apart Ministries, we have benefited greatly from the consolidation of these different aspects into a cohesive whole called, The Life Model: Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You, by James E. Wilder, PhD, pastor psychologist, and the staff at Shepherds House in Pasadena, California. We especially appreciate the understanding that this maturity is directly related to one's family and community relationships. This resource is available through our website, www.setapartmingb.org

Wilder asserts in his book, Living with Men, that he believes the majority of men in America today are at an infant or child level of development.³ He bases this somewhat startling statement on his years of experience in professional practice and on involvement with men's ministries, including the Promise Keeper's movement of an earlier decade. To his surprise, when this is pointed out to most men, they are not offended but relieved that there is a reason why they feel so ineffective or inadequate to do what is expected of them. As he has spoken around the world on the subject of the Life Model and maturity, he has found men eager to understand and address the areas of need to allow them to actually do well at what they only found confusing before.

Dr. Wilder has also observed that more women are at adult or parent level of maturity and that they are often much more sensitive to relationship issues.⁴ He rewrote the book, The Life Model, to one specifically tailored to be of interest to men; Living with Men. He did this because he has understood that men will generally not read what they don't see applies to themselves while women will generally be able to glean what they can from material not necessarily written for them. In my years of professional practice since 1983, I have reached the same conclusion.

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Still, how do we deal with the seeming paradox that men are to have  
Leadership roles in our faith communities yet there are so few men  
who are mature enough to be able to step into the role?  
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This series of articles will address related concerns to answer these questions about presence or absence of male leadership as well as how men and women are to lead together. To our Messiah be all the glory and honor as we learn to walk in His ways.

³ Living with Men; Wilder, James E. PhD Shepherds House, Pasadena CA

⁴ Living with Men, Wilder