

Work in Unity
Presented by Lauren Stibgen
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Day One

I have been in the workplace for longer than I want to admit and one thing I can say is I hear more about the differences between men and women at work than what unifies us. Although I don't want to overlook the different realities men and women face in the workforce, I also don't think we talk enough about God's point of view on men and women when it comes to work. So, let's examine some of the women in the Bible and the true definition of unity, or the state of being united or joined as a whole, when it comes to men and women at work.

In Genesis 1:26-27 we see the beautiful work of unity in creation.

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:26-27).

We first see unity in the trinity before God even created man and woman. *Our image and our likeness*—not my image and my likeness—*our*. God embodies the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the image of God, working together to form creation.

And, when we read the verse about creating man, he created both male and female in his own image. Not men exalted above women or women above men but creation in his image, in unity.

If we don't look to the beginning, it is easy to look at the ways culture and society have created norms about work. The reality is, these are not God's norms for men and women. The next verses in Genesis 1:28-29 further frame God's plans for man and woman.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food" (Genesis 1:28-29).

God gave man and woman an equal command to work—in unity.

So, why do we have so much trouble with unity of men and women at work today? Sin. Your sin and mine. Men sin and women sin. We break unity. But awareness of how it should be—this is the best start. And we can look at how God used men and women together in scripture to accomplish his plans.

Day Two

We hear a lot about the prophets, but what about prophetesses? Women worked alongside men in the Old Testament, even as prophetesses of the Lord. Although the Old Testament text has a lot less to say about these women, we read that they were respected and sought after for their specific wisdom.

The history in the Bible would surely not be the same without unity between these women and the men they served with and for.

Why don't we see these stories as powerful movements for the kingdom of God? We have examined the unity God created men and women in and the unity of work he created us for. And we also examined how sin broke this sacred unity. This is the underlying why. Culture and sin both play an unintentional and sometimes intentional role in us not hearing more about these female prophets.

You could probably tell me a lot about Moses and Aaron, but what about their sister? Her name was Miriam, and she was also a prophet of the Lord. If I think about this trio more, I wish I could have heard more about their unity and the dynamics of their work together!

Miriam is one of the earliest leaders of worship! In Exodus 15:20-21 we see her leading other women in song and dance after they crossed the Red Sea. The timing of the text suggests she may have been the first to lead a victory celebration of the exodus from Egypt! Miriam was noted as one of God's chosen leaders of the exodus in Micah 6:4.

I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam (Micah 6:4).

She was "joined as a whole" in unity with her brothers in this work.

Deborah, too, was a powerful prophetess. She is described in Scripture as a judge, military strategist, warrior, and mother in Israel. No, she was not an actual mom, but rather she was a leader of Israel.

In Judges, we see Deborah working, first as a judge and then as the one who leads Israel to war.

Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided (Judges 4:4-5).

Men and women sought her counsel. In the next verse we see Deborah sends for and summons Barak.

Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go" (Judges 4:8).

You can read more about this in Judges chapters 4 and 5, but again we see God using men and women—in unity—to complete work.

How do you see examples of Miriam and Deborah and their unity with the men around them in your work today?

Day Three

When you think of your work, do you think about the most important work God has called us to? That work is to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and this work is a shared work for all of us who are brothers and sisters in Christ. Men and women share a critical, unified role in sharing the beautiful gift of mercy and eternity we have in Jesus!

Although we see the twelve disciples Jesus calls in the New Testament are all men, we cannot choose to miss all the ways women were used by Jesus for the great work of sharing the good news!

Jesus's first revelation of himself being the Messiah is to the woman at the well. This account in John 4 is significant first because Jesus is alone accepting water from a Samaritan woman. The Samaritans were the outcasts of the time, and this woman was a woman with many husbands. He breaks barriers

to bring her into unity in his revelation. The best part is her response. This woman runs all the way back to town, not caring about who she is in this community but who she is in Christ, and begins to share the good news of the living water.

We see Jesus with Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus in the scriptures. Mary and Martha provided hospitality to Jesus and the disciples with meals and a place to teach. We know Jesus deeply loved Lazarus and deeply cared for Mary and Martha, which was matched by their devotion and trust for him.

Not only were women part of the ministry of Jesus in his living but also in his death and resurrection. At the crucifixion in Matthew 27:55-56 we learn there were many women there, looking from a distance. These women had followed Jesus from Galilee and ministered to him, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Again, this ministering could have been for physical needs like food and shelter or emotional and spiritual support during his ministry. Either way, these women, worked in unity with the men alongside Jesus.

The women at the cross displayed great loyalty to the end, and they were also first to learn of the resurrection.

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb (Matthew 28:1).

Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me" (Matthew 28:10).

We may not see a lot about the unity between the 12 disciples and these women, but we see a more important unity—the unity between Jesus Christ and them. How are you in unity with Jesus at work today?

Day Four

Are you under the impression that the women in the Bible weren't working women? Many of the Christian women I encounter haven't heard this important truth. Women have always worked! In fact, we examined this when we discussed the creation story of Genesis, the prophetesses Miriam and Deborah, and the women who worked in unity with Jesus! God needs us working in unity with men for his glory!

Women played an important role in the early church. I think about Mary being the first to see the resurrected Jesus. Scripture could have skipped ahead to meeting the disciples in Galilee, but it doesn't! God wants us to see how his story includes the men and women he created in his image.

The Old Testament prophet Joel states, *I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy.* This verse can be found in Joel 28 and in summary in Acts 2.

The Spirit is for sons and daughters—both to prophesy!

One of the first accounts of healing in the book of Acts is of Tabitha (also known as Dorcas) in Acts 9:36-43. We learn she had died, and she was considered a woman full of good works and charity. She was apparently a very good seamstress as the scripture speaks of the tunics and garments she had made. We learn it was men urging them to come to the bedside of Tabitha. She was clearly respected. And she was raised to life by Peter.

Lydia is described in Acts 16 as a seller of purple goods and a worshiper of God. Paul came to find a group of women who had come together in prayer. He sought them out—to be in unity with them in prayer. His seeking and the Lord's opening of Lydia's heart to hear the good news of Jesus, opened new unity and provision for Paul when Lydia invite him to stay in her home. We also see that Paul returned to Lydia when he was released from prison. Lydia needed unity with Jesus, and Paul needed unity with Lydia for his work! We also learn those in Lydia's household encouraged Paul.

Lydia was a seller. She worked. God used her work and leadership to help grow the early church!

God is still doing this today. Are you a creator like Tabitha or a seller like Lydia? Not only does your influence with others serve as an important way for the gospel to be shared, but your financial provision also can help ministries lay groundwork to encourage others to spread the good news and cause an increase in the Church of Jesus Christ! This is why your work and the unity between men and women is important to the Lord. Working together will ultimately create a much greater impact for the glory of the kingdom.

Day Five

There are so many studies about the Proverbs 31 woman and aspirations to be like her. She is a powerful example of a working woman from the Old Testament, and she is an important example of male/female unity between mothers and sons and husbands and wives. Maybe you aren't a mom or son or wife or husband, but the foundations of unity between men and women are found in this chapter and show us God's heart for male/female unity in his kingdom.

This proverb was taught by a mother to her son, the King Lamuel. I think it is important to note the unity between the mother and son—the importance of this male/female relationship. She's imparting on him rich wisdom and outlines for him the importance of unity with a woman who fears the Lord.

The unity between this man and woman—husband and wife—shows trust, gain, and good. The Proverbs 31 woman is a smart worker. She provides for her home. She invests and burns the proverbial candle at both ends. She gives to the poor and makes sure those working for her are provided for. She even dresses well! This woman is so well known that the man she is in unity with is "known" at the gates.

In addition to her work, she shares her wisdom and teaching. Her husband and children praise her! This is a long and exhaustive list. And it is a very good example of many of the Christian working women I know. There are many lessons we can take from this chapter, but let's consider the unity the Proverbs 31 woman has: unity with the Lord, her husband, her workers, her community, and her children. In all these relationships, unity is part of her success.

God wants us to be in unity with our closest male and female relationships. He wants his daughters to teach and his sons to listen to their wisdom. He wants his daughters to fear him and seek trust and unity with others. He wants his daughters to work, serve the poor, and provide for their families. He wants us to be kind and not be idle.

God created us in his image. Male and female, he created us. And, just like the unity of the trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he wants us to live in unity with others.

How can you create more unity with the closest men or women in your life?