



## A Modest Ambition

### ***Women lead more than they know. Make the example godly***

Politicians who lie to Parliament; unfaithful football captains; barristers who rot the tax system — leadership has got a lot of bad press lately. Debate rages on the relevance of a leader's private life. Is a person's private life separate from what he does as a leader? In the community, the jury's still out.

What about the Christian leader? Are Christians' private lives separate from what they do as leaders? The Bible's answer is a resounding no. Passages like 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1:5-9 make it clear that a leader's private life is very relevant. The Christian leads by example. The Christian life cannot be segmented. We must aim for godliness in all areas of our lives.

Godliness isn't restricted to our role — as Sunday school teachers, Bible study leaders, music directors, president of the women's group or playgroup organisers. It includes what we do at home behind closed doors, how we act at the local shops out of the sight of fellow Christians and what we do at work when we're around non-Christian people. Leaders need to "walk the walk" and not just "talk the talk".

But is this just the case with formal positions of leadership? No. All of us "lead" people in one way or another. Mature Christians set an example for people who have just become Christians. New Christians set an example for their non-Christian family and friends. Older women set an example for younger women (Titus 2).

The Bible records the lives of many women who set examples for us even though they were not in formal positions of leadership. Tabitha was so impressive in her good works and acts of charity that the widows of Joppa wept for her when she died (Acts 9:36-43). Jesus said that the act of the woman who anointed him for his burial would be recounted in memory of her whenever the gospel is proclaimed (Mt. 26:13). Timothy's faith in Christ was nurtured by the sincere faith of his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5).

In this article, I'd like to suggest some thoughts on how Christian women can lead by example regardless of whether their leadership is formal or not.

Children: Generally speaking, women are the primary carers of children. That means we're a huge influence on our children. Our example to them will matter. My little boy Joel giggles with glee when his Daddy pulls out the Eager Beaver Bible every morning after breakfast. He loves me to pray with him at night when I put him to bed and he makes his displeasure known if I try to hurry the bedtime routine! Now it would be easy for me to act as if praying and reading the Bible with them is all I have to do to help my children grow up as Christians. But what about how I live my life? Kids watch us very carefully. They see us at the shops. They watch us relate to other people. They watch our every move.

So what kind of an example are we setting for our children? Do our children ever see us read the Bible by ourselves? Do they see us pray on our own and with our husbands? A few years ago at a beach mission, I sat around with some young adult leaders into the early hours of the morning (now I rarely make it past 10pm!). I asked one of them what was the most influential thing her parents had done for her. She said: "I saw them regularly read their Bible and pray. They proved to me that God is real and that the Bible truly is God's word. They weren't hypocrites encouraging me

to do one thing and yet not doing it themselves.” Wouldn’t it be wonderful if our children could say the same of us?

Our “private” life can’t be separated from our leadership of children. Leading our children in the ways of the Lord is not just about doing devotions with them or sending them to Sunday school. It’s also about leading by example.

And while we’re on the topic of Sunday school, this challenge also applies to anyone involved in ministry with children. We might prepare the most interactive lessons and run the most Gospel-centred kids’ club. But if our private lives don’t match what we teach, we need to seriously reconsider our leadership. Kids will notice if looking “hip” is more important to you than modesty. Teenage girls will notice whether their leaders treat their boyfriends with all purity, as a brother (1 Tim. 5:2). And they’ll follow your lead.

Wives: What we do as married women will provide leadership to other women and children (Titus 2:3-6). Recently, I watched an interview with a politician who had an affair with a married man. She kept insisting that her private life was nobody else’s business. The question I want to ask is, what example has she set for others?

Are we faithful to our husbands? Do we treat them with respect in public *and* at home? I’m sure we’ve all met the woman who speaks honourably of her husband in public, but rules the roost at home, constantly putting him down. What does your role as a wife model to other women, especially to younger women (Titus 2:3-4)? Do we lead younger women to graciously submit to their husbands as they do to the Lord (Eph. 5:22)? Or do we encourage them to rebel and spurn God’s gift of male headship?

This isn’t to say that we must pretend our marriages are perfect. But the way we speak to our husbands at home will influence others. This is especially important as women who haven’t grown up in godly Christian homes come into our sphere of influence. Will our marriages match God’s plan for marriage? Will they be different to non Christian marriages?

When I became a Christian, I spent a lot of time at the home of a family in my first church. I saw the way the wife related to her husband. She was servant-hearted, she worked hard at not giving him the cold shoulder when he wronged her, she spoke respectfully of him to others, she graciously accepted correction and tried hard to put his needs above her own without resenting it (Phil. 2:1-11). What a breath of fresh air she was to me and so many others. A fine example to follow.

Beauty: Everywhere we turn, it’s there. Television, magazines, movies, department stores all tell us we must be beautiful. And how? Label clothing, shoes, anti-wrinkle creams, botox injections, weight reduction plans — the list goes on. None of these things are inherently bad. But what priority do they have in our lives? Is outer beauty more important to you than what you’re like on the inside? If it isn’t, then is that the example you set for other people? Do women see you working hard at becoming more godly and growing in inner beauty (1 Tim. 2:9-10 and 1 Pet. 3:1-6)? Or would people say that how you look is a greater priority to you?

One of the most attractive women I know doesn’t wear expensive clothes. She dresses modestly. You wouldn’t call her trendy. In fact, she often looks the worse for wear because she’s tired from looking after her active children. And yet, so many women, married and single, keep telling me what a beautiful person she is. They tell me how much they respect her and what a great example she sets for them. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if people could say that of us?

Of course we’ll fail in all these areas. We’ll need to keep coming back to the God of grace for forgiveness and cleansing from our sin. But the same grace that saves us teaches us to say no to ungodliness and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives (Titus 2:11), lives that will set an example to others. We can’t buy into the secular lie that what we do in “private” is irrelevant to our leadership. Christian women should lead by example in all areas of their lives.

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