

Sisters at War

By
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Introduction

As a part of the research for this book, I conducted surveys with both older and younger women, asking them how they perceived the current relationship between the two groups and what they would like from that relationship. With rare exception, older and younger women alike long for a closer friendship. Younger women are especially afraid of harsh judgments from the older women. Older women often feel distant and alienated from younger women. The tendency of sisters to separate into cliques plagues both groups.

The aim of this book is to help break down the walls of separation between older and younger women. This will only be successful if each woman looks seriously at herself first. Caring, close relationships take a lot of time and heart. They also require a willingness to abandon preconceptions and unnecessary judgments. Tolerance and compassion are the keys that will unlock the gates.

This book is only a skeleton of the conversations that I hope you have among yourselves. Dialogue, study, prayer, and interaction will help turn theoretical discussions into practical metamorphosis of our own lives, and ultimately, the life and health of the church at large. God bless you in your efforts.

-Cassandra Leigh Givans

Chapter One

Recognizing the Ideal



“But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: that the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed,”

Titus 2:1-5.

Paul’s words to Titus are a clarion call to the women of today. Taken individually, each of the commands listed above are compelling enough, but even more noteworthy is God’s vision for the relationship between older and younger women that is revealed when the passage is read as a whole.

Clearly the older women are to be the leaders, the guides in this relationship. The character, wisdom, and love that they have developed through their experiences and their faith have a purpose: that the older women might teach those younger than themselves. “Older” and “younger” are relative terms, and unfortunately our society has attached such a negative stigma to the term “old” that often even the quite elderly eschew it. In our study, however, age is regarded with honor: it is a time of dignity and esteem earned by years of hard work and unrelenting love. Women who have passed through many stages of life, whose children are grown, are often older women in experience than those whose marriages are new or whose children are still at home, regardless of actual age.

The duties of these older women, as outlined by Paul, are rigorous. Some women have conceived the mistaken idea that these duties are to be dispatched by mouth: that is, once the older woman has *told* the

younger woman what she ought to be doing, her job is done. However, Paul says that the work is to *teach*, not to tell. After all, Paul had just “told” them himself. Jesus and Paul both were great teachers who understood that a teacher must model her lessons and must develop real and lasting relationships with her students based on respect and love.

Foundations for Teaching

Two things are necessary before the older woman can begin her role as guide or teacher. First, she must examine herself in light of the characteristics listed by Paul. Am I temperate, sober, sound in faith and love and patience? Do I easily speak ill of others, sometimes based on incomplete information or the words of others? Am I a teacher of good things? If I am to teach the younger women to love their children, do I love their children, or do I often speak and think harshly of them? Do I love my husband and keep my home? Am I discreet, someone who can be trusted and relied upon even with the secrets of others?

Second, the older woman must cultivate a relationship with the younger women. Regardless of my own experiences, when I judge someone else’s situation based on appearances, I am speaking out of bias and not of wisdom. If I am to help someone to grow spiritually, to become a better wife or a more loving mother, then I first need to know her heart. I need to understand what obstacles are in her way before I can help her to move them. Simply pointing out that she’s moving mighty slow isn’t going to help her arrive at her destination any faster. Likewise, if she is to trust my judgment, then she needs to know *me*, that I am her sister who has her best interests at heart, not simply a self-righteous busybody who enjoys judging others and then instructing them on how better to live up to my standards.

The role of the older woman is not a passive one. She is a guide, a teacher, a spiritual leader who does not wait for others to come to her. The primary responsibility of the relationship rests with her. God demands of each of us all that our individual time, talents, and opportunities permit, and no more. The older woman with all her experiences, wisdom, love, and humor is an incredible asset and source of strength to the church, and one that God does not intend to waste. Therefore, she must be aggressive and joyful in both seizing and creating opportunities to act as the guide God needs her to be. However,

this does not mean that the younger women carry no responsibility.

Making Room for Learning

First of all, the younger women, either with or without families of their own, need to be looking outside of their own interests and homes. The very best guide can accomplish nothing if her followers insist on gazing at their own feet and so walking off the trail and over the cliff. If age is honor, then honor should be given. Younger women must recognize the character and grace of such older women as Paul described, and follow them gladly. We need to listen when they speak, watch when they act, and imitate when they serve.

Just as the older women are to work to create relationships with the younger women, the younger women need to make real time and place in their own lives for the older women. If we want to be understood by the older women, we must share our lives with them; open our hearts and our homes. Above all, both parties must speak always with love and honesty.

Even the wisest and most loving older woman will not always give the right advice. Even the sweetest and most respectful younger woman will not always heed good advice. It is the manner in which such observations are shared and received that is either encouraging or hurtful to the relationship. Younger women must strive not to be defensive and to recognize when words are spoken in true love and concern. That love and concern should be respected and gratefully received, *even when disagreed with*. Older women must use both love and discretion when offering advice and not feel hurt or rejected when the advice is not taken. The point is not, ultimately, who was right and who was wrong. The point is can I trust you? Do you love me? Can you help me to be a better, stronger person? The answers to those questions should be yes for both parties.

Just as God's demands for older women are based on their abilities, so are God's demands for younger women. Although many "older" women are physically quite healthy and vigorous, many more are not. Youth and energy should be joyful and eager to serve wisdom and age when needed. Younger women must make room in their hearts for those older women whose age or health creates difficulties for them, and they must use their own vitality and strength to help carry those burdens.

We need to spend time in visits with those who cannot visit us and look after the physical needs of those who care so well for our spiritual needs. Lastly, we need to beware of the depression that loneliness often engenders among those confined by age or health. We must ensure that the older women whom we love never doubt how vital they are to our well-being and growth in Christ, and that they remain assured of our honor, respect, service, and love.

The ideal relationship between older and younger women in Christ is a beautiful one of strength and harmony, faith and wisdom and love. It should be a mutual relationship, whereby both older and younger women learn from one another and bear one another's burdens. The standards are high, but we can and must meet them if the church is to be a true bride of Christ. God needs us, and we need each other. In the following chapters, we will explore different examples of this relationship throughout the Bible, both good and bad, and make direct application to our lives today.

Class Work for Chapter One

1. Separate yourselves into two groups, one of younger and one of older women.
 2. Allow time for each group to make a list of practical, positive actions they can take to better achieve their part of the ideal relationship between older and younger women.
 3. Allow time for each group to make a list of the obstacles they perceive as standing in the way of their goals. Although obstacles that are created primarily by the opposite age group can be noted, emphasis should be placed on those obstacles which each group can eliminate of themselves.
 4. As a class, discuss your findings. Together try to find solutions to the obstacles mentioned.
 5. As an individual, choose one positive action you can make (feel free to take along a classmate, if appropriate). Make a date, write it on your calendar, and follow through. *Be practical and specific.*
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