

## SESSION 1

### ABBY'S STORY

From a very early age, Abby was taught that God does not call women to pastoral ministry. This message was taught verbally, but sometimes the absence of women in leadership roles speaks for itself. There are men and women, boys and girls who have never experienced what it is like for a woman to lead. There are girls who do not see what it looks like for someone like them to lead, and women who do not have the opportunity to be equal contributors in the body of Christ.

1. Share your experience with women in church leadership and ministry.  
(Where have you seen women leading in the church and how has it transformed your faith? What have you learned from watching women lead? Perhaps you haven't had the opportunity to experience a woman in ministry?)
2. Share examples of the ways the churches that have formed you have modeled or not modeled women in leadership roles. If you did not grow up in a church, what were you taught about the role of women in society?
3. Reflect on a time when you knew you were capable of something, but no one else believed in you.
4. What have people told you that you aren't allowed to do in life, and how has that affected you?
5. How is the work in your church divided up by gender (men on the properties team, women teaching Sunday School, etc.)?
6. Only 29% of churches have a woman serving as church chair. Has your church ever had a woman serve as church chair?
7. Only 7% of congregations are led by a woman senior, solo, or co-pastor. What are we losing by keeping women from places of leadership?



## SESSION 2

### THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Theological convictions about church leadership for women and for men must be derived from a careful interpretation of both the Old and New Testaments. Close attention must also be given to the promptings of the Holy Spirit to the early church, who encouraged the people of God to think differently about the specifics of their faith. Please be sure to read carefully each of the passages listed in these questions, and may they help you and your congregation think through this important issue.

1. In the video, Brian spoke about how he and his home church—and The Evangelical Covenant Church—have shifted their views over time about women in church leadership and ministry. What is the practice for your present church? Has it changed over time? If not, what has prevented that from taking place?
2. What were some of the long-held beliefs and customs of the early church that were re-evaluated due to the teachings of Jesus and the instruction of the Holy Spirit? For some examples, see Matthew 12:1-8, Mark 7:5-19, and Acts 11:1-18. Why is a shift in theology or practice often seen today as potentially dangerous?
3. An orchestral choir needs a leader, and so does a church. What are the inherent difficulties in proclaiming that the Holy Spirit is to be the true leader of the church, the one whose direction we are to follow? If the Holy Spirit were given that role, how would that change our typical congregational governance? (For an example of how this might work out in a practical situation, read Acts 15:1-35, noticing the practices and processes of the early church.
4. How should Jesus' teaching about leadership Luke 22:24-27 inform and instruct the organization and decision-making of our congregations?
5. Read Genesis 1:26-28 and 3:16. In the video, Brian stated that the domination of women by men is part of the curse, and not part of God's original design for how men and women were to understand their identity and relate to each other. In other words, domination of women is God's description for what would happen as a result of the fall, not a prescription for what should happen. Why is this an important distinction? If we proclaim that Jesus has reversed the curse of the fall for believers, how should this affect our interpretation of Genesis 3:16?



## SESSION 2 (CONT.)

6. From Paul's greetings in Romans 16, we learn about women serving in the roles of apostle (Junia), deacon (Phoebe), workers (Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis), and co-worker with Paul (Priscilla). He continued with this instruction: "I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned." (Romans 16:17) How should this important information and teaching in Romans 16 affect our understanding of I Corinthians 14:34-35 and I Timothy 2:11-15, which by themselves are often thought to limit the areas of ministry and service for women?
7. Peter had a history of saying "no" to God regarding several issues: Jesus' suffering, having his feet washed, the prediction of his denial, and eating foods the Law stated to be unclean. Fortunately, he realized in each case his foolishness: "who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" (Acts 11:1-17) What is your reaction to Brian's contention that the church has for centuries been stubbornly saying "no" to the Lord's intention to call both women and men to positions of leadership? What are the implications of that premise if it is true?
8. In the video, Brian stated: "like a three-legged table needing internal bracing, the "biblical position" for the Complementarian view also needs structural support of tradition". The Catholic and Orthodox churches have unapologetically held to the position that there are two foundations for theological truths and church practices: both the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God, and Holy Tradition, what the church has always taught. What are some of the ways that tradition has played an important role in the doctrines and practices of Protestant churches, including your own fellowship? Why is it hard for Protestant congregations to admit to the significant role that their cultural traditions have played?



## SESSION 3

### DEBORAH'S STORY

Deborah found a way to motivate and inspire her people; she gave them hope that something new was possible. So often we are stuck in the same patterns, the same rhythms day in and day out, looking to the same people to lead. It can be hard to imagine something new, something different. It's important to remember that God is always working in new ways, and God is always moving us forward.

1. Throughout the time of the judges, the Israelites were living in opposition to God. They did whatever they saw fit, regardless of God's will. Deborah was a prophet at this time. The role of the prophet was to speak out against evil and injustice, to warn people to turn back to God. Deborah would have been responsible to call out the sin of her people, and foretell the coming destruction. Deborah was also a judge. She ruled over the people, and we learn that she is a fair and just judge. The Israelites would come to her to have their disputes decided. How would you feel to have Deborah's responsibility?
2. Would you be able to respect the leadership of a woman in a difficult time?
3. Deborah refers to herself as a mother in Israel, and in Judges 5:9 she sings, "My heart is with the princes, with the willing volunteers among the people. Praise the Lord!" What perspective and gifts was Deborah able to provide to her people?
4. What perspective and gifts do the women in your church bring to ministry? How have you seen these gifts expand the kingdom, and how have you experienced resistance to these gifts?
5. If you were having a conversation with a young woman, what would you tell her she's not allowed to do in life? What about a young man, what would you tell him he's not allowed to do in life?
6. Is it possible if we don't explicitly say these things with our words, we are saying them with our actions instead? Which is more important?
7. What obstacles need to be overcome in your church to begin to value women in leadership?
8. As disciples and as a church, we are always becoming more like Christ. We are always in process, and there is always a next step to take. What is the next step for you to take in regards to women in ministry? What is the next step for your church to take (consider the places women are absent)?



## SESSION 4

### NEXT STEPS

The new believers at Pentecost realized that their new understanding about the work of God in history required a response:

“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37)

In the same spirit, we hope that this short look at the Bible’s instruction—and specifically the story of Deborah—will stir you and your congregation to action. The encouragement and affirmation you give today to a Deborah in your midst can have a powerful impact upon her and upon the people she serves, one that will last for generations.

### GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. We read in Judges 2 that God raised up Judges, which means that Deborah was among those he called to lead his people. Project Deborah declares that he is still raising up women in this age to serve Him. Be thinking about the names of girls and women in your congregation—who are they? Could God be gifting them and calling them to serve?
2. This workshop encourages believers to take specific steps in partnering with God as he raises up leaders for today and for the next generation. Why would this be immensely important to a young leader?

### STEP 1: DISCIPLE

1. Just as young Timothy was disciplined by Paul, the stable presence of a godly mentor can be such an important role in the development of a leader. Is there a mentoring process in your congregation that could be offered to the Deborah’s among you? If not, what are some creative ways you could help her to receive it?
2. It takes courage for anyone to say “yes” to God’s call. What are some of the ways that a modern-day Deborah might face discouragement? How would it make her feel? What can her “cheering section” do for her to keep her on track?
3. It will be important for the people of your congregation to be regularly reminded of the biblical foundation for the view that gender is not a factor when the Holy Spirit distributes gifts. When was the last time this has been explained or discussed in your setting—either in sermons or in formal educational settings? There are some wonderful resources available on the ECC website [www.covchurch.org/vocational-ministry/women/](http://www.covchurch.org/vocational-ministry/women/)



## SESSION 4 (CONT.)

### STEP 2: DEMONSTRATE

1. What version of the Bible is read in your congregational worship services? Why might a concern for gender issues in translation be important for the women of your congregation?
2. What is being modeled for your congregation about who can serve on the platform or in leadership? Are the biblical convictions of your congregation about women in leadership being demonstrated practically? If not, what are some of the steps that can be taken to make your beliefs congruent?
3. In most congregations, the great majority of the sermons will be brought by one pastor. If that pastor is a male, there won't be many opportunities for the people of the congregation to hear the word of God through the voice of a woman. What are some creative ways that a congregation can ensure that it's natural and normal for people to hear a woman speak?

### STEP 3: DIRECT

1. Where is it written? That wonderful question has guided the Covenant from the beginning. So, where is it written that only a credentialed pastor can bring the message or lead the communion service? Why does the church fall into these and other patterns? Who might be asked in your congregation to serve in these capacities?
2. What qualifications are considered by the nominating committee of your church for leadership positions? Does gender come into the discussion? If women have historically been restricted from serving in certain positions, what measures can be taken to change that?
3. For some people, the idea of having a woman serve as their lead pastor can at first seem a little uncomfortable, but that can be simply because they've never had one. If that is true for you, have you considered the notion that your discomfort is merely cultural, and not the Lord's warning? Following the leadership of the Holy Spirit may indeed go against the typical church trends; why does this often prevent pastoral search committees from considering both women and men?

