

# **Baptist Women in Ministry: Broken systems can be reshaped**

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ABILENE—Too often, men have overlooked and silenced women who have sought to proclaim the gospel or exercise leadership in the church, Meredith Stone told the Texas Baptist Women in Ministry Conference.

Women in ministry have been treated as “forgettable,” “ignorable,” “disposable” and “invisible,” the executive director of national Baptist Women in Ministry said to the Sept. 16 conference at Abilene Christian University.

The perspective of women frequently has been discounted or dismissed, Stone said.

“We don’t hear from women. We hear about women,” she said.

Stone cited the story of a slave girl whom the Apostle Paul and his companions encountered in Philippi, challenging her audience to “see the invisible woman” in the narrative recorded in Acts 16:16-19.

The girl had a spirit of divination, from which her owners profited. She followed Paul and his traveling party, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” When she continued to do this “many days,” Paul was “annoyed” and cast the spirit out of her.

# **‘Victim of a broken system’**

Stone noted the story was told entirely from the male perspective. The girl—unnamed in the Scripture—was treated as little more than a plot device by the narrator and as an annoyance by the protagonist, Stone asserted.

“Her pain and needs were not acknowledged,” she said. “She was the victim of a broken system. She was treated as property.

“But she was made in the image of God and open to the revelation of God. ... She was different. Her difference enabled her to see things from another perspective. She proclaimed the gospel, but she did it in a different way and not in the normalized voice.”

Stone cited findings from the [State of Women in Baptist Life Report 2021](#). The survey revealed 86 percent of respondents reported they experienced obstacles in ministry because they are female. About 6 in 10 (59 percent) said they felt overlooked or silenced in their ministry settings. At least 7 in 10 (72 percent) said they had to demonstrate greater evidence of competence than their male counterparts.

“These statistics reveal brokenness,” Stone said. “The system created by men and for men is broken.”

However, Jesus showed another way, she said. Instead of treating women as forgettable, ignorable, disposable or invisible, he highlighted them, cited them examples to be remembered, respected and honored them, and entrusted the message of his resurrection to them.

“The system is broken, but it can be reshaped by following the example of Jesus,” Stone said. “The system can be renewed, but it’s going to take all of us.”

## **‘Go to the potter’s house’**

Lynn Brinkley, associate director of national Baptist Women in Ministry, encouraged conference participants to “go to the potter’s house” as described in Jeremiah 18.

“The potter’s house is the destination for those who have been wounded,” Brinkley said.



Lynn Brinkley, associate director of national Baptist Women in Ministry, encouraged conference participants to “go to the potter’s house” as described in Jeremiah 18. (Photo / Ken Camp)

Sometimes, women in ministry are clay in the hands of the Master Potter, and sometimes they seek to take on the potter’s role, she said.

“We have been like potters at the wheel, reshaping broken places in our own lives,” she said, pointing specifically to the disruption and isolation the COVID pandemic caused.

Whether making adjustments in the midst of a public health crisis or responding to injustice, churches cannot afford to take the position, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," she noted.

"Women in ministry are broken, and some things need fixin'," she said.

Oppressive systems, patriarchal structures and toxic narratives have wounded women who felt God's call to ministry but were ignored, disregarded or disrespected, she noted.

Describing "lumps in the clay" the potter must smooth out, Brinkley said, "We have been blemished by systems that hurt us."

Churches, individuals and society in general all "need fixin'," she said, but God is capable of renewing and reshaping.

"The Lord is near the brokenhearted," Brinkley said. "God is able to restore broken things. ... Divine hands are at the wheel, shaping and forming us into new vessels."

But to become a usable vessel, women who are being shaped for ministry must commit to spending time on the wheel and enduring the fire, trusting God with the outcome, she said. God not only can renew, reshape and reform individuals, but also can do the same to denominations.

"The Bible shows us God can do anything but fail," Brinkley said.

She challenged women to go where God calls.

"Go and become change agents. ... You may be broken, but you are still useful," she said. "You are a gift to the church."