

Women in ministry: Each thread matters in God's tapestry

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WACO—God uses the distinctive threads of individual lives to weave together an intricate tapestry and even takes what might be considered scraps to fashion a beautiful quilt, keynote speaker TaNikka Sheppard told the Texas Baptist Women in Ministry annual conference.

“Woven Together” was the theme of the conference, held at Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary.

Sheppard, president of Baptist Women of North America, exposed lies that discourage women from fulfilling their God-given potential and embracing their distinctiveness.

God makes each person a distinctive individual, she asserted. But too many women believe the false assumptions others make about them based on their gender, ethnicity or place of birth, said Sheppard,

“Just being from a context does not mean I am not unique,” she said.

Another lie women in ministry often hear comes from those who think women fall short of fitting an established mold, she asserted.

“Many women are tricked to operate as counterfeits,” Sheppard said. “They make us act as counterfeits, instead of who we really are.”

‘A work in progress’

Confronting lies can cause pain, but she encouraged God’s servants to find peace in knowing everyone is broken and in need of healing.

“We are all a work in progress,” she said.

As the healing continues, Sheppard suggested focusing on the present, not dwelling on the past or speculating about the future.

“You are where you’re supposed to be right now,” she said. “So, look at your patterns right now and figure out what you need to learn and unlearn.”

People are different, and some may see those differences as quirks. Instead of feeling shame, embrace distinctiveness, she urged.

“Just like the scraps of a quilt, you don’t throw those away, because they are usable,” Sheppard said. “Women and men of God, we need your perspective. We need your voice.”

Serving in unity



“Woven Together” was the theme of the Texas Baptist Women in Ministry conference, held at Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary. (Photo / Isa Torres)

The individuality of each person matters because each thread in the tapestry and each scrap of fabric in the quilt is important when they all are woven together, she noted.

“We deal with the ‘me’ because we must ultimately deal with the ‘we,’” Sheppard said. “In this interwoven tapestry, we are one.”

Rather than looking at calling as discerning God’s purpose for one’s life viewed individually, she urged her audience to ask what is God’s purpose for the world and how they can be a part of that.

Serving God in unity with others may seem difficult, but it is necessary, Sheppard insisted.

“‘Us’ are not just those who look like us and not just those who agree with us,” she said.

Every thread in the tapestry matters

Each of the pieces matters, and so individuals must believe the ministry, calling and duties of others are just as important as their own, she said.

“If we believe that, then we must pray for each other,” Sheppard asserted.

Understanding the importance of each individual thread as part of the tapestry requires people then speak up for those who have been pushed aside, she said.

“We should care about other parts of God’s tapestry because we are one,” Sheppard insisted.

Sometimes, God’s tapestry must be mended. Rather than just stitching pieces together, sometimes the artist must first deconstruct what is flawed, she noted.

“We must ask ourselves, ‘Am I willing to be deconstructed so the masterpiece can be all it is meant to be?’” she said.

Experiencing deconstruction may be uncomfortable, but it is crucial, Sheppard said.

“We are one. And in order to be a masterpiece, we must be willing to be worked,” she said. “We must be worked not until we are done, but until the masterpiece of God is finished.”