

Voices: Silent on Sunday, manager on Monday

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Three of four women of working age who sit in pews on Sunday go to work on Monday. They spend their weeks as physicians and politicians, educators and editors, bankers and business leaders.

According to [U.S. Census data](#), 75 percent of women between ages 25 and 55 work outside the home.

As Millennial and Gen X women turn 40 and 50, they enter leadership positions and their peak earning years. Conversely, the younger women in churches recently began their careers.

McKinsey's [2024 Women in the Workplace report](#) reveals their priorities. Gen Z women want an equitable workplace and will leave for better opportunities—especially when they see more veteran women do the same.

In addition to quitting inequitable employers, Gen Z women have no problem leaving their religion. They depart church at higher rates than their male counterparts, according to a recent [report from the Survey Center on American Life](#).

Women tell institutions what they value—with their feet. They reveal what they cannot stand by walking away. Workplaces and churches are left to ponder and communicate about gender roles—and they do so in vastly different ways.

Disorienting differences

Women encounter disorienting differences between their Baptist churches on Sunday and their workplaces on Monday.

For example, most Baptist churches proclaim men and women as equal before God and created in his image (Genesis 1:26-27).

Churches who hold to the [2000 Baptist Faith and Message](#) go on to decree, however, restrictions on those same women: “The office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture,” and a wife “has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.”

Meanwhile, secular employers increasingly embrace diversity and champion gender equality for all positions of authority. Apple, for example, [commits](#) to “inclusion that reflects the world around us” and publicly posts statistics for accountability.

Comparing Sunday to Monday

Church leaders that want perspective on women’s experiences on Sunday would do well to peer into their lives Monday through Friday.

Sunday

Let’s imagine one woman’s journey from church to work. We’ll call her Lydia, after the wealthy businesswoman in Acts 16 who financed Paul’s church in Philippi.

Our modern Lydia walks into church on Sunday morning, eager to worship God and minister to his people. She grabs coffee in the lobby, then enters the sanctuary where men greet and seat her.

She worships, led by a worship team consisting of men and women, her heart lifted along with the corporate praises to God. She receives both the offering plate and then a sermon—each given by a man.

Lydia “should” attend a Sunday school class, but she struggles to find her place there. She longs to use her gifts of wisdom and teaching in an adult class, but leadership instead encouraged her to volunteer in the nursery or children’s program.

Lydia leaves church unfulfilled, feeling like a consumer of her faith rather than a partner with God to minister to his people. She navigates a veiled and nuanced set of rules, barriers and taboos for women she finds—in the words of Lewis Carroll—“curiouser and curiouser.”

Her church places no restrictions on her attendance and greatly encourages tithing out of her weekday earnings, but then limits her areas of service and leadership simply because of her gender. Other than singing and small talk, she is silent on Sunday.

Monday

At work on Monday, Lydia manages a small team and budget. She started out with her company years ago as an individual contributor. Her employer noticed her skill, tenure and effort and promoted her to a manager position. From Monday to Friday, she now meets with her boss, her customers and the individuals on her team.

She ponders her gender about as much as she thinks about the air she breathes. Perhaps because her company builds a culture of equality and prioritizes diversity and inclusion in their core values. Perhaps because she has work to do and simply sets about doing it.

She works alongside capable colleagues, both men and women. Fewer women than men hold positions at top levels of leadership, but her

company views the discrepancy as an opportunity to further strengthen their multifaceted leadership. They measure and report on this statistic annually.

When she does think about her gender, she does so because her employer creates intentional and safe spaces for diverse discussions. Monday through Friday she lives and moves within systemic equality.

Different experiences

A closer look at the definition of equality aids our synthesis of the story of Lydia and women like her. Oxford Languages defines equality as “the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities.”

For working women, the different experiences from Sunday to Monday boil down to opportunities. A church that limits opportunities on gender-specific lines, by definition, does not practice equality.

Even if that church views men and women as equal in dignity before God, the practice of “equal (dignity) but separate (opportunity)” ends up feeling both separate and unequal.

As [reported](#) in the *Baptist Standard*, “Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of young women said they do not believe that churches treat men and women equally.”

Unequal treatment—or the perception of it—on Sunday followed by equal treatment on Monday raises a dissonance women both young and old cannot resolve.

A more level path

What might a more level path look like? In an age of reimagining, perhaps we simply need to remember.

Lydia of Acts 16 proves women can speak with and to their brothers in Christ in God-honoring and persuasive ways. Acts records Lydia's enterprise, resources and leadership of her entire household, all without revealing her marital status or number of children.

Like Paul did with Lydia, churches can recognize women as immensely capable and invite them into a partnership that builds Christ's church. If churches chase that vision, they will offer women integrated lives with meaningful opportunities—on Sunday as well as Monday.

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