

HOW I CHANGED  
MY MIND ABOUT  
**women**  
IN LEADERSHIP

Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals

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# How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals

*Alan F. Johnson (Editor)*

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## **How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals** Alan F. Johnson (Editor)

This book features a number of autobiographical accounts as to how various persons have come to change their minds about women in leadership. Well-known Evangelical leaders—individuals and couples, males and females from a broad range of denominational affiliation and ethnic diversity—share their surprising journeys from a more or less restrictive view to an open inclusive view that recognizes a full shared partnership of leadership in the home and in the church based on gifts not gender. *How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership* offers a positive vision for the future of women and men together as partners of equal worth without competitiveness in the work of equipping this and the next generation of Christian disciples for the ‘work of ministry’ and service in the Kingdom of God.

## **How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals Details**

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# From Reader Review How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals for online ebook

## Greg Dill says

First, a disclaimer: I am currently in a season in my life where I am truly trying to gain an unbiased understanding on gender roles in the church and family. For all of my Christian life (over 20+ years) I have been a complementarian, ascribing to the belief that men and women have different but complementary roles and responsibilities both in the home and the church, precluding women from ecclesiastical leadership roles. However, over the past couple of years, due to a variety of reasons, I have begun to come away from this view and open to a more egalitarian view. I am still sitting on the proverbial fence on this issue. I have not been thoroughly convinced yet that egalitarianism is truly the biblical way nor am I thoroughly convinced the complementarian view is either.

It was therefore recommended to me by a couple of individuals that I should read "How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership". I was almost assured that this book would more or less bring it home for me and that I would likely become convinced that the egalitarian view is indeed the answer.

Well, I have read it and I was disappointed. It seemed to me that many of the testimonies contained within this book were drawn from human emotion (not that it's bad). That it was more or less based on a "gut feeling" which inevitably propelled many of the women into leadership roles and changed many of the mens' views on the issue. Most of the stories told of how a woman "felt" or that she was not "feeling" as if she was doing what God wanted her to do. Or, that she was raised in a very strict ultra-conservative home and merely wanted to shed her parents old ways. In other words, the biblical precedence for an egalitarian view were minimal.

However, Tony Campolo (in chapter 5) provided what I believe was the most compelling reason why he has chosen to believe women can serve in leadership roles in the church. He provided plenty of scriptural references with a healthy dose of proper hermeneutics and cultural contextualization. After reading Campolo's take on the matter I was more convinced that the Bible does allow for women in church leadership roles. But, Campolo and perhaps Nicole (chapter 13) were a rarity in a book comprised of nearly 300 pages.

The book lacks strong scriptural support, at least in proportion to the numerous non-biblical references by at least 5 to 1. There were entire chapters void of scriptural references that bothered me. While I don't discount feelings, after all God created the human emotion, they must align with scripture especially if the issue is regarding matters of ecclesiology. And, even the biblical references that were often repeatedly used throughout the book, were a bit ambiguous. While I still remain sitting on the fence on this issue, this book hasn't prodded me to jump off to the side of egalitarianism quite yet.

In summary, if you are looking for a solid and biblically based argument for egalitarianism, I wouldn't recommend this book. If you are looking to hear some remarkable stories and struggles of men and women who have wrestled with this issue, then this would be an outstanding book for you. Otherwise, we can count on waiting this out and see where this will end up 10-15 years from now where we will likely see more women in the pulpit than ever before.

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### Brenton says

While I wish this book were beefier and included younger contributors, I am appreciative of those that took the time to tell their story. There are themes that come up again and again, but there is a good diversity of testimonial, autobiography, theology, and biblical reflection in the contexts of many different kinds of leadership.

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### Thomas says

Non-religious people often seem to have this idea that Christians are stubbornly unable to change their minds about what they believe. That may be true sometimes... but most of the time, the problem is not understanding what could make a passionate or person change their minds. This book therefore does something crucial: helping us understand (autobiographically!) people's journeys in changing their minds about gender roles in the bible (mainly in ministry, and also to a lesser extent in marriage). There are people in this book who go from pretty patriarchal to pretty not-patriarchal over the course of their lives. How interesting is that?

The main takeaway for me was this: people don't change their minds because of theoretical discussions, because an external debate rarely challenges the consistency of someone's internal model to the point where they can't hold on to it any more. What usually triggers it is either:

- a. Exposure to life lived according to a different position (e.g. some of these people were pretty men-are-supposed-to-be-the-boss-in-church initially, but then went to a city or college campus where stuff was different, and it was surprisingly OK, thus mellowing them out)
- b. Noticed inconsistencies in their own model start to get really annoying (e.g. if women aren't supposed to lead in church, why do we let them run off and be missionaries in other countries and lead there? or: why are women allowed to preach as long as we don't call it a sermon?)

The journey of discovery that happens afterwards HAS to include some kind of theoretical / theological reorienting, otherwise it just feels like compromise or selling out. This is also something super important, if you want to convince someone of something important. Defeating or humiliating someone's perspective just makes them hold on more tightly, I think. Probably the best thing to do is to show them that it's not necessary to hold onto their old perspectives to be a good person, or maybe that a new position fits even better with what they most fundamentally believe than the old thing.

So that's been a very theoretical review, but it's important because our discussions in society / on facebook / in the news / etc will become a lot more interesting and productive when people learn how to actually help other people change their minds rather than just digging deeper trenches.

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### Brian says

Love this book! What was great about it was that so many people had so many different ways that they had explored the biblical principles of women in leadership.

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## **Matt Hartzell says**

Rather than being an exhaustive exegetical review of the Biblical text as it relates to leadership structures within the church, *How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership* takes a more casual and experiential approach to the topic. It feels much more like a group of people sitting around the fire, sharing personal stories and anecdotes about themselves and how they came to see the role of women in the church today. It's a great introduction to the egalitarian position, especially if you approach it with an open mind and willingness to listen.

Again, while this is not a broad theological treatise, there are some high marks that were really important for me. The book is a collection of short testimonies from various people in the evangelical world. I was quite impressed by the selection of contributors: pastors, teachers, professors, speakers, scholars and business executives. They have all had exemplary lives, and have made much of what they've been given. The list of accolades is long and impressive. Even more so, each of them specifically expressed their love of God and his word, and their deep devotion to Biblical inerrancy. Many touched on specific arguments against egalitarianism that have been troubling for me, such as the risk of making the Bible say something it doesn't actually say, the risk of becoming too liberal with interpretation, or the risk of the issue of female leadership opening the door for a weakening towards other cultural issues that I think the Bible speaks exceedingly clear on. These arguments hold less water for me now.

While I can't say that this book made a broad and sweeping change in my view, there were a number of points that really struck me as I read the book. One concerned the supposed "clarity" that many complementarian churches ascribe to the consideration of female leadership, clarity that just happens to spawn a wide variety of practices and rules across churches who in theory believe in the same "clear" issue. If the issue is so clear, why is there so much debate and difference in implementation, even among churches who fall along the same lines?

Furthermore, it's particularly obtuse how far some churches and denominations go in order to try to maintain their position despite some of the absurdity that results. Can a women speak in front of men? Well, maybe not, but hey, she could speak behind a curtain, or perhaps in a different room connected via a microphone and speaker. Or maybe all the men could be in the same room, as long as they face the opposite wall. Or perhaps she could speak during an interview-style format with a man on stage. But hey, aren't women heavily featured in many children's programs? So they can teach boys? But not men? At what age exactly does that become inappropriate? What verse did you get that from? Buy hey, women can be missionaries, right? We don't have a problem sending them overseas to a foreign nation, potentially with a risk of harm or death, to share the gospel. We're okay with that, right? But they can't preach at a western church? Okay, so they could teach the gospel to a black or brown man across the ocean, but not a white man at an American church? These types of stories in the book were extremely illuminating for me. Some of the places we (the global church) find ourselves in really fall down in light of honest, rational and logical examination. We need to be intellectually honest and be willing to admit when we get it wrong.

Another striking point to me was many of the contributor's ruminations on Genesis 1 and 2, before sin enters the picture. There is an absence of hierarchy in these passages. God makes both man and women in his image. Both carry the *Imago Dei*. Even further, God gives both male and female the command to subdue the earth, and to be fruitful and multiply. These two early chapters in the Biblical text have become increasingly important to me over the years, as they reveal God's intent for humanity and human flourishing, before sin

marred that ideal in any way. These passages should inform our view of male and female roles and relationships.

Many of the authors talk about denominations and traditions I am less familiar with, denominations that seem truly archaic to me, in terms of how they contextualize the gospel for the world in which we now live. For example, head coverings have not been an issue in any single church I've ever been a part of, but it apparently is still an issue for some. Yet, even in the churches I've called home, it again is troubling that such priority is given to a single verse about women having authority over men, but the same priority is not given to the single verse about head coverings. Why one and not the other?

Speaking of verses, many of the authors do deal specifically with some of the ones that have been stumbling blocks, such as 1 Timothy 2 and Ephesians 5. In all honesty, these areas are less problematic for me. One verse from Paul about women not having authority over a man does NOT meet my own personal criteria for an eternal principle for human flourishing. There are many New Testament verses that speak of slavery in a similar fashion, but I don't think nearly anyone would simply pull those out of context to justify the continued practice of one human enslaving another. Yet we do just that regarding female leadership. However, I did want some authors to speak to the passages on requirements for elders, in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. This was notably absent, which was disappointing.

Many of the contributors also speak not only of leadership in the church but of the role of men and women in marriage, and in these places, I have very little resistance. At the core of my beliefs, I have always viewed marriage as a partnership. I have not always acted in accordance with this view, because I did grow up in a home that was male-lead, and have also been in churches where women were not allowed to become elders. Those environments have pressed upon me some subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which I interact with my wife with the assumption that I hold the leadership role. I think I have used this approach in positive and negative ways over the years, but at the deepest level, I'd prefer a partnership with Ciara. So I agree with the authors. One of the most common arguments used in favor of husband-focused leadership is the scenario where man and wife cannot agree, and someone needs to make the decision. What an eye-opening experience it was to realize, through the authors of this book, that this scenario almost never occurs in most marriages! It's laughable to think now why that one specific and rare situation has been used to justify such a massive view on marriage. In almost a decade of marriage, this scenario has not occurred even one time, and if it did, I would take the position posited by one of the authors: if you can't decide, then wait until you can. Or, perhaps, I would actually follow ALL of the instruction of Ephesians 5, to be the head of my wife by dying to myself and laying down my life for her, as Christ does the church. It seems that headship implies that we as husbands would more often than not be doing the things our wives request.

In the end, what *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership* did for me was to truly cement the whole topic as an open-handed issue for me. It really is. It's not an issue I feel the church should divide over. I know many, many people who deeply and authentically love Jesus and his Bible, and land on complementarianism as well as many who land on egalitarianism. I think I could love and serve a church who falls on either divide. However, what this book also solidified for me is something that is no longer an open-handed issue for me, and that is the voice of women in the church. Even if a church honestly evaluates the text and decides that the role of elder is for men and not for women, women ABSOLUTELY must have loud, strong and prominent voice into the decisions, direction and vision of the church. Anything less falls dramatically short of God's intent for his church and his world. We cannot simply cast aside literally half the church, with all of their giftings and callings and abilities. Any church that is not encouraging women, listening to them, empowering them, discipling them, and allowing to serve at some level of leadership is falling drastically short of the kind of church that God calls us to be.

There is so much more I could expound here, but this review is already too long. I think *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership* is a great read, will challenge some of your assumptions, and will open up the broader conversation of women in leadership. The book went a long way towards removing some of the fear I had surrounding this topic. I hope to read more detailed books about female leadership in the years to come.

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### **D.j. Lang says**

To add to that title so that it's clearer: ...who changed their mind from women not being in leadership to women being in leadership. I read this at least a year ago, but for one reason or another did not review it (didn't want to get caught up with politics at the time or had no time myself to write it). However, I just heard a sermon on "check what the bible has to say" and not to believe everything one is told. Excellent! That is exactly how I and the contributors of this book came to believe leadership is "based on gifts, not gender." Lest anyone feel the need to discredit the scholarship in the book, the contributors are not folks trying to make names for themselves. Also, while the editor asked them to put their pieces in narrative form, they could not help themselves, they brought in the best in hermeneutics, exegesis, language translations, context, culture, etc., all of it, not just random "whatever fits my opinion." When preparing students for university, my colleagues and I used to let our students know that they were not helpless when facing a professor who tried to demolish their views. They could ask the professor if she or he knew the actual facts of the other side (and our students ought to be prepared with their own research on all sides as well!). For those tempted to reject, out of hand, women in leadership, I recommend this book. I also recommend it for those, like me, who have been reading the whole bible for years and what is being read doesn't seem to fit what is being taught but you thought the teachers must know what they're talking about. So many, like many of the contributors, taught what they had always been taught, not because they had actually done the studying themselves. This ought to lead to some interesting discussion!

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### **Elke Speliopoulos says**

One of the most eye-opening books to me as a female follower of Christ. Absolutely 100% loved the affirmation I received from it.

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### **K.D. Winchester says**

This book tells the stories of theologians/pastors/seminary professors who changed their minds about women in church leadership. Most of the writers conclude that marriage is a matter of mutual submission and partnership, rather than a hierarchy. However, every writer holds a different view of women in leadership, the varying degrees of which a woman can lead in the church, and woman's "true roles."

While about 1/3 of the essays are written women, including the chapters written where she is part of a marriage team, most of the perspectives present views from men. (But I believe men are the target audience of this book, so this strategy seems to make sense in that context.) Though some men arrogantly proclaim their humble revelations about scripture, most of the writers humbly present the case for a woman's right to be more active in church leadership. These men with a heart for God are horrified at how women have been treated over the centuries and how the world's sinful view of women has infiltrated the church's very

structure.

From a writer's perspective, the quality of each essay varies as much as the views of the writers, and this book presents a series of mini biographies instead of focusing on selected arguments. Those seeking to read more about this topic should probably skim this book, reading select essays, rather than reading the book in its entirety.

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### **Deborah-Ruth says**

This book provides a collection of short essays written by some fairly prominent Christians (both men and women). Some names include: Gilbert Bilezikian, Stuart and Jill Briscoe, Tony Campolo, John and Nancy Ortberg, and Ronald Sider. Each one of these authors explains how they have moved from a complementarian (IE. Male leadership only) model to an egalitarian one. They write from a practical viewpoint as well as a theological one bringing in the socio-historic context of the early church and troubling texts that are often proof-texted such as 1 Timothy 2. I love this book for the honesty it provides, the journey it shows, and the respect it gives to women. Even though we still have a long way to go before our churches (and world) are truly egalitarian, I believe this work is seminal in showing that this is a topic many people have wrestled with and changed their mind about. What I loved is that right at the beginning, the book mentions that whereas many have changed their mind in favour of egalitarianism, no one has ever changed their mind against it. It really shows us the freedom that is offered to both men and women in Christ if only we take the risk to grab hold of it.

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### **Carolyn says**

While this book doesn't walk through the biblical issues in a linear fashion, I do think there's great value in hearing people's stories. In such a polarized society, I think we probably don't spend enough time reading or hearing about people who have changed their mind on an important topic. I haven't read all of the testimonies here, but the ones I read represented a spectrum of backgrounds and were insightful.

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### **Carol says**

I highly recommend this book as a primer on biblical egalitarianism and its implications for the life of the church. Especially relevant for anyone accustomed to patriarchy or plagued by nagging questions. Tony Campolo's contribution is quite a scorcher; read it when you are ready to have your eyebrows singed.

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### **Michael says**

This book is interesting in that you get to hear the stories of how a number of Evangelical leaders (both men and women) came to change their views on women in the leadership of the church. Unlike some books which are primarily designed to present arguments (whether Scriptural, contextual, etc) to persuade, this book is designed to give you glimpses into the journeys of people. For this reason it is very accessible. For

me, some of the stories I found very interesting, while others didn't really resonate as much. Along the way in the various stories, there are numerous reasons and support given for why women should not be excluded from leadership in a church.

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### **Patrice Fischer says**

I've recently started a project on Women's Issues Within Messianic Judaism, & this book had been recommended to me by Rabbi Jake Rosenberg as a resource that meant a lot to him.

It's amazing how many of these authors John & I have met, talked with, and/or were friends of friends of ours. So I was very happy to see their views in print after all these years, and was not surprised at all by their stories.

Very informative for anyone, male or female, who wishes to search out why women can be allowed biblically to speak in a church (or a Messianic congregation), lead adult bible studies, serve on congregation "elder boards" (zakenim), and eventually to ordination if desired.

There is 1 giant black blot on some of these arguments. Some of these writers use Judaism as a "whipping boy" in building their argument. They portray Yeshua's ministry as the solution to wrong/bad viewpoints within Judaism concerning women during the Second Temple Era. They quote rabbis' texts without knowing the context, and cite Middle Ages Jewish practice as though it was Second Temple practice.

In short, they build a straw man argument called Judaism, and then spend time tearing the straw man down without providing accurate historical evidence. They don't intend to be anti-semitic, but they are. Part of our task as Messianics will be to try to correct these common Christian misconceptions about Jewish life & practice during Second Temple Judaism.

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### **Jan says**

Wonderful book. I recommend it to anyone who wonders about whether or not women should have leadership positions in the church -- or anyone who thinks they shouldn't -- or anyone who believes they should....excellent book. Thank you, Alan, for writing it -- and hugs to Rea! I always knew there was something special about you two!!

Another thing that struck me is that most of the people that wrote chapters are older than I am -- and I'm no young'un any more. I really appreciated hearing from those that have trod this road before me....

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### **Adam Shields says**

Short review: These are short essays by fairly prominent Evangelical leaders about how they changed their mind about women in leadership. All the essays are from people that were changing their mind from a more restrictive position to a less restrictive or open embrace of women in leadership. About half of the authors I was fairly familiar with and about half were pretty much unknown to me, but I was often aware of the organizations that they lead or work for. So there is real credibility in the authors. The stories were a bit

repetative (as you may expect) because the stories were often fairly similar. The authors grew up in conservative churches that believed that women should not lead men, they questioned the position or they observed how restricting women in leadership was harming the gospel, they spent time investigating scripture and talking to people that supported women in leadership and over time came to change their minds.

If your objections to women in leadership are primarily Biblical/theological this book has a good summary of current scholarship about the matter. A couple of authors admitted that their prior objections were primarily cultural and not theological and I think that part of the story is important too.

Full review on my blog at <http://bookwi.se/women-in-leadership/>

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