

Cultivate Your Calling in Each Stage of Life

Angie Ward discusses cultivating leadership amid ever-changing responsibilities.

INTERVIEW BY NATALIE LEDERHOUSE

*Angie Ward, author of the recently published *I Am a Leader*, has 30 years of leadership experience in diverse roles in ministry. I was excited to talk with Angie about how our calling shifts through the various seasons of life.*

How can a woman's calling change over the course of her life?

Sometimes we think as young women that we have one calling, and that's it. We just have to find it, and we put so much weight on that one thing. But for most people, it changes how it looks and how it's lived out based on seasons of life and age. Our calling can also change

because *we* change. Who we are, our gifts, our passions. And that's okay.

For me, I started out in youth ministry, but then God expanded it. It didn't shift entirely. It was still vocational/occupational ministry, but it went to more broad ministry—leadership and to leadership development. When I was 22, just out of college, I didn't have the experience or the wisdom to train other leaders. I was just working with students who were sometimes only four years younger than me. The Holy Spirit moves and flows. Working with kids in children's ministry at your church may make you aware of the needs of foster kids. It opens a door to a whole new thing.

How can we discover what our calling is today?

Cultivate an ear for the Holy Spirit—a heart and a mind that's receptive, that knows the Shepherd's voice, and a heart that's obedient and responsive to whatever it is during that season.

A lot of times we get focused on the wrong question: What is *it*? We focus on trying to figure out the *it*. Instead, the real focus should be on cultivating our relationship with Jesus and walking with him. We want steps to cling to. If I do A, B, and C, we'll get D. But there is a mysterious piece to discovering our calling; it's not just a rigid set of steps.

What does it look like to fully embrace each season of life?

First, embrace the concept of seasons. We live in an age, in an era, where we've lost the agrarian ideas of seasons and rhythms. Any time you hit a wall, right around the time change, we become aware that light and darkness—the seasons of the earth—actually do affect us physically and emotionally. There are times when it's okay that you lie fallow. This illusion that there has to be constant fruit and constant summer and constant peak production is an erroneous way of thinking.

Second, accept that we have limitations, and that's by God's design. That's not a flaw. I'm a high sleep person. I need eight or nine hours a night. I've always been envious of people that can do four or five hours a night, or six. I'm like, "I would do so much more for you God if you would just . . ." But God's like, *I made you this way. This is by design.* Seasons and

rhythms and the need for rest and limitations—those are safety valves by God's design. They're not flaws.

What's the relationship between motherhood and calling?

Some people have the belief that a calling to motherhood automatically replaces any other calling. I don't think that's automatically true. It is for some people, but it's not a blanket judgment you can make on everyone.

Before I was married and before I had kids, I felt the calling to vocational ministry, started out in youth ministry and then broader leadership development. I went to seminary, met and married my husband, and I was in ministry in Minnesota. Then I had our boys—and I felt this tension: I knew God had never said my ministry outside the home was done, but my kids were my primary responsibility. I knew I couldn't do both jobs full-time and do them well.

Having a mentor in my life who felt that same strain was significant. I wasn't alone in feeling that pressure. Andy Stanley describes it not as a problem to be solved but a tension to be managed and a season to live through.

I'm married to a pastor, so on Sunday mornings delivering the sermon took priority for him. As a result, I had to be available on Sunday mornings in case a kid got sick. That limited what I could do on Sunday mornings.

It's a dance you continue to figure out with your spouse. It'll continue to shift and morph over time. Every year your kids get older, and they have a different set of needs.

What are some unique obstacles women face when navigating a calling toward church or ministry leadership?

One of the unique ones is around this parenting thing. You don't hear employers generally saying to a male, "So are you going to take time off, or are we going to lose you as an employee when you have kids?" Sometimes women don't have the same opportunities because employers are afraid of losing or investing in a woman.

Unfortunately, there are also unspoken assumptions about women and parenting and how that relates to job ability or availability. A lot of those things are just not discussed. They're assumed by different people on staff or in the leadership governing board. Putting those out in the open, having those conversations, is so important.

How can women grow as leaders in their own community and circles of influence?

Look for any opportunities to lead. I define "leadership" in my book as broadly as influence. There's a lot of opportunities to be doing that. If you have kids, your kid's activities through community things. Local government. You don't have to have a paid position at the top of an organizational chart to grow as a leader.

Leaders are learners. That learning could be reading or listening to podcasts. It could be auditing a class or getting together with other women who are ahead of you on the journey who are doing what you want to do. Pick their brains—take them to lunch and ask, "Hey, what have you learned?"

Women more than men tend to wait for leadership to be bestowed upon us or for an invitation to be given instead of us just stepping out. One of my life maxims is it never hurts to ask. The worst they're going to say is no. But is that really the worst thing? Then at least you have more information and more clarity. If you keep getting a bunch of no's, then you go, "Well, maybe I need to look for a different place or system."

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