



THIS HOLY CALLING

DAILY WISDOM
FROM
WOMEN IN MINISTRY



WESLEYAN HOLINESS
— WOMEN CLERGY —

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FOREWORD

I had the unique privilege to read through most of these daily reflections on our shared holy calling and, frankly, my eyes were moist as I read. The thought kept going over and over in my mind: “I think this is a devotional the women who were at Pentecost and those they impacted throughout the Roman Empire would have written.” I celebrate the diversity of voices represented in these pages—voices of varying marital and parenting experiences, stages of life, and ethnic, geographic, and economic experience. They enliven my imagination of God’s Church as the Spirit intended at Pentecost.

I kept hearing the voice of Junia as she was planting the church in Rome, where the Roman philosophers taught that if anyone showed any type of mercy, they had a character flaw. Yet, she was undaunted. The theme of mercy runs through these writings at a time in our current culture when mercy and justice are losing more and more of their value. I was reminded of Lydia in some of the writings, as personal experiences of risk and losing all to follow our Lord were expressed. Then here came Priscilla as I listened to excellent exposition of the word of God, especially in understanding the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Themes of justice run boldly through these pages, and I thought of Perpetua, a young woman and mother in North Africa who defied the systems of injustice in AD 203—an early Christian martyr. Holy calling, indeed. Then, the reflections on leadership reminded me of Phoebe, a leader in the early church as noted by Paul himself.

But then my mind traveled to the Wesleyan holiness heritage and tradition which all the writers in this compilation share. I was in the company of Susanna Wesley, who courageously started a Sunday evening service in her house, preaching to crowded listeners, regularly up to two hundred people in attendance. I found myself hearing her “amen!” to each reflection. As we remember, her Anglican clergy husband did not promote women preaching, but when he saw her success, he capitulated.

Throughout these pages, I hear the fruit of B. T. Roberts’ book *Ordaining Women*, in which the founder of the Free Methodist Church wrote about the equality of women extending into church, society, and the home. Then the rambunctious words of Seth C. Rees (founder of The Wesleyan Church antecedent The Pilgrim Holiness Church) make one smile or cringe depending on one’s bent: “Nothing but jealousy, prejudice and bigotry and a stingy love for bossing in men have prevented women’s public recognition by the church. No church that is acquainted with the Holy Ghost will object to the public ministry of women.”¹

I remember the women of the Church of the Nazarene who pastored the entire West Tennessee Conference in the early 1900s. Yes, they received some criticism,

but in 1905 they responded with a book of defense entitled *Women Preachers*, as Timothy Smith described in his 1962 book, *Called unto Holiness*. Both The Wesleyan Church and the Church of God (Anderson) [USA] ordained women by the late 1800s. The first woman ordained in the United States was ordained in 1853 by the founder of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, Luther Lee; the woman—Antoinette Brown. By 1894, evangelist Julia Foote was the first woman ordained a deacon in the historic Black AME Zion denomination and in 1899 became the second woman ordained an elder in it.

From its inception in the late 1800s, the Church of God ordained both women and minorities. During the days of the Reconstruction Era of the United States, the Church of God moved women into prominent positions of church leadership.

To my knowledge, *This Holy Calling* is the first of its kind as a compilation of reflections by clergywomen from the Wesleyan holiness tradition. It is rich, Spirit-anointed, and poised for the twenty-first century. I keep thinking of the words of Phoebe Palmer in her book *The Promise of the Father*. I believe these writings and the vast public ministry represented by the women in this book are an answer to her prayer in 1859; I am humbled to be counted in their numbers:

“The church in many places is a sort of potter’s field, where the gifts of woman, as so many strangers, are buried. How long, O Lord, how long before man shall roll away the stone that we may see a resurrection?”²

Dr. Jo Anne Lyon
General Superintendent Emerita
The Wesleyan Church



1. Seth C. Rees, *The Ideal Pentecostal Church* (1897), 41.

2. Phoebe Palmer, *The Promise of the Father* (1859), 347.

CALLED
AS IMAGE
BEARERS

THE REVELATION RADIATED IN GOOD WORKS

“We are not stoning you for any good work,” they replied,
“but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.” (John 10:33)

The idea that Jesus and the Father are one was not something easily accepted by the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. As a matter of fact, the statement revolted them, so they rejected Jesus. While Jesus’ ministry frustrated the religious leaders, they were still seeing God at work. But even confronted with Jesus’ good works, they couldn’t bring themselves to believe that Jesus might really be the Son of God.

You don’t have to be a Christian to do good things; there are plenty of people who like to do good. You also don’t have to “do good works” to be reconciled to God. But when you are united with Christ, you are driven to do good works because of the nature of Christ at work in you. What is revealed in your own behavior is Christ in you.

When we are in Christ, we may also experience a similar response from those around us, to our actions, behaviors, and words. Without claiming to be God, we may face hostility just by claiming to be called by God. This certainly happens for women clergy; there are those who declare our ministry blasphemous. But we will not be deterred, continuing in communion with our triune God who delights in our faithfulness. And as a result of this, we can’t help but be engaged in doing good, even in the face of opposition. Our good works aren’t meant to promote ourselves but to radiate the glory of Christ through the joy of the Spirit. In this way, our preaching and faithful living will reveal God to the world.

—CARLA SUNBERG

TODAY

Spend time with our triune God so Christ is revealed in your activities.

THE VISIBLE IMAGE OF LOVE

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn
over all creation. (Col. 1:15)

There is so much about God that is difficult for us to understand or explain. Jesus “is the image of the invisible God.” In the Son, we see the invisible nature of God made visible. It’s not the physical image of the Trinity that we see, but rather the very perfect image of the heart of the Trinity, which is revealed in Christ.

If we are going to reflect the image, then we need to absorb a little more about the image. It is this perfect image we are called to carry into the world—the nature of the invisible God! Picture a mirror: the closer a mirror is to a person, the larger the person will be in that mirror. The closer we draw to Christ, the more we will reflect Christ's nature. Do you see too little of God's nature at work in the world these days? It's not that God is absent; but it may be that we are too distant from God.

To get to know God, we need to soak in the scriptures, spend time in prayer, and worship with God's people. This isn't just time preparing for sermons or teaching. As you personally seek the face of God for yourself, you will be continually drawn nearer to the image. When you draw close to Christ, you become like a musical instrument that God plays to share the song of the Trinity.

—CARLA SUNBERG

TODAY

Look for ways you can make the image of God's love visible.

[illegible]

On that day you will realize that I am in my Father,
and you are in me, and I am in you. (John 14:20)

I'll always remember the first year my husband and I celebrated Christmas without our grown daughters. It had long been our practice to invite others into our home on Christmas, welcoming them like they were part of our family. But that year, we had been in our new ministry for a month, living in temporary housing, when Christmas arrived. It was then that our usual practice of hospitality was turned upside down: we were invited into someone else's home. It was a new era, but we felt loved and welcomed to a new part of the country.

Jesus took on flesh so we would have the privilege of being loved into a new family. Today we can be called children of God! We welcome Emmanuel, God with us, but also God in us. The world needs “love, sweet love,” as the song goes, and Christ followers should be oozing with God’s love. The gift we receive in Christ overflows to our world through you and me. Why? Because Jesus is in the Father, the Father is in him, and, through the Holy Spirit, Christ is in us—and all of this because of love.

—CARLA SUNBERG

TODAY

Welcome a new era of love from God's heart flowing through you.

[illegible]

RESEMBLING THE IMAGE OF GOD

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. . . . Now Jesus . . . was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph. (Luke 3:8, 23)

The words “produce fruit” instantly grab our attention. It doesn’t matter who your parents are or if you ever knew them, it’s you who are called to “produce fruit” in your own life. No one can “ride the coattails” of their parents. Similarly, no one bears responsibility for their parents’ bad choices, either. It is your life alone that you answer for; your life is called to “produce fruit.”

John the Baptist told religious leaders their connection to Abraham would not be what identified them as God's children. Instead, to be identified as God's child, your life had to produce fruit, "fruit worthy of repentance." This was a novel idea to his audience. Surely they were God's children; their genealogy could prove it! But John preached that bearing the family resemblance occurred by producing fruit. God would change the paradigm so that even those with no heritage from Abraham could produce fruit as God's children.

What does this fruit look like? Spirit-filled children, producing the fruit of the Spirit. That is why God's children begin to look like and act like God.

I am proud of my own father and love him dearly. He's a good man who loved and nurtured me and provided an excellent example. However, as much as I love my father, I know that ultimately I am called to resemble our heavenly Creator.

From the fruit in your life, whom do you resemble?

—CARLA SUNBERG

TODAY

Remove fruit in your life that doesn't resemble God's image.

THE IMAGE OF FORGIVENESS

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” (Matt. 18:35)

Forgiveness is found in God’s character of love, so we can expect to find it reflected in God’s children. The Creator’s love for humanity was revealed in his extravagant plan for forgiveness and redemption. Note that Jesus refers to “my” Father—not “our” Father. If I refuse to participate in the family mission, I lose out on relationship with my heavenly Father and Christ my brother.

It’s so easy to slip into a critical spirit. The twenty-four-hour news cycle provides a simple path to negativity. Whether through a screen or fretting over how we’ve been wronged, little by little, our thoughts are consumed by an attitude that corrodes our relationship with God and others. Instead of basking in the love of God who delights in his children, we slip toward the downward spiral of criticism. Suddenly, there is nothing good in our thoughts left to be said. The conversation changes: “our” heavenly Father becomes an unfamiliar stranger. If you and I allow our attitudes to be overwhelmed by others’ harmful attitudes and actions, ultimately, we destroy our relationship with God. In the long run, we are the ones who suffer.

God lavishes radiant love and forgiveness on us. Of all the times we fall short, God loves us anyhow. When you and I weren’t looking for restored relationship, the Word became flesh so we could find our way home to the heart of the Trinity. If God did all this for me and you, then, through the power of the Holy Spirit, what will we choose to do for others?

—CARLA SUNBERG

TODAY

Pray for the loving grace of God to empower you for forgiveness.

PERFECTLY RELATED

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt. 5:48)

There is always a relational aspect to sin and its inward curve toward self: it damages relationships. Our relationship with God is damaged. But when our relationship with God is in alignment, we are set free to be face-to-face with God. We become a reflection of God to the world. When we live face-to-face with God, God challenges us to be “perfect.” This isn’t about human perfection or absolute flawlessness. Rather, the root of this Greek word in Matthew is *telos*. The *telos* of something is its goal or completion, end or aim. Our goal is to become what God created us to be: a perfect or complete reflection of Triune love. This comes through repentance, turning away from our inward-curving sin, and moving toward the goal of our lives, which is Christ.

Through sin, our relationships with others are also damaged. When Adam and Eve sinned, their relationship with God changed; so did their relationship with each other. They were no longer equal partners, but Eve was now subservient to Adam. This was not God's *telos* for humanity, but rather the fallout of sin-corrupted relationships.

In the inbreaking kingdom, relationships are called to be rightly aligned. When we relate to others in ways that are holy and just, we find perfection: a whole and complete reflection of God's heart. In the Trinity, God is one: pure, holy love in three persons. This is the kingdom wholeness we are called to reflect!

—CARLA SUNBERG

TODAY

Pray over your calling to live in anointed, just relationship with others.

[illegible]

THE LIVELY SPIRIT OF HOLY LOVE

And who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 1:4)

Have you allowed faulty concepts of dead or sour holiness to distract you so deeply you've lost your zeal to live in the Spirit of holiness found in Christ? This would be a tragic loss! The promise of genuine holiness is powerful and transformational—exactly what our world needs today. Most people would probably be shocked to discover what true holiness looks like.

This is the holy calling of every follower of Jesus Christ: we are invited into the Spirit of holiness, life in Jesus Christ. We are called to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus, so that his nature of holy love will flow through every one of us. You and I are called to live in the holiness of Christ through the lively power of the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not dull us or deaden our fervor; it's not a legalistic path for a few strict people. It is the enlivening way of Christ through the creative power of the Spirit. It is for all God's people, everywhere, always. We are all called to be lively like Jesus; a holy, loving people.


PRAYER

Lord, help my sisters to lean into your lively Spirit of holy love.
May we move forward in your boldness through resurrection power,
embracing your Spirit and loving our world. Amen.



REV. DR. CARLA SUNBERG

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YOUR
CALLED
VOICE

Rediscover the joy, community, and fresh possibility of

THIS HOLY CALLING

In a chorus of fresh, bold voices, *This Holy Calling* features six months of unique, daily reflections specifically crafted by women in ministry for women in ministry.

From a diverse array of women in leadership, daily reflections unfold with rich wisdom for women following their sacred calling while sharing from a treasury of faith with the personal warmth of a hand-written note.

In these pages you will find:

- Nuanced wisdom from experienced lead pastors, professors, church planters, superintendents, bi-vocational preachers, youth pastors, denominational leaders, and more;
- Encouragement, clarity, and resilience in the face of isolation, discouragement, untruth, injustice, and uncertainty;
- Rich insights for ongoing spiritual formation from the Wesleyan heritage of holy love;
- Representation of women from differing countries, cultures, ages, races, ethnicities, relational and parenting experiences, economic backgrounds, languages, and denominations, and
- A fresh awareness of the anointed community of women ministering alongside you.

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