



BAPTIST WOMEN IN MINISTRY

# BRIDGING THE GAP

The State of Women  
in Baptist Life  
Discussion Guide for  
Supporters of  
Women in Ministry



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# GETTING STARTED

The following discussion guide is meant to be used alongside the State of Women in Baptist Life Report 2021. This report, commissioned by Baptist Women in Ministry, tracks the trends of women serving in and preparing for ministry in the Baptist world. This year's report also revealed the results of a survey aimed to discover the obstacles that women continue to face in ministry and the levels of congregational support for women in ministry. If you have not already seen the report, scan the QR code below to find out more.

This is one of two resources created to be read alongside the report. This discussion guide is for any group of people who support women in ministry. The second resource is for women in ministry, found by scanning the QR code.

BWIM encourages Baptists to work through this discussion guide to determine the unique ways their community can better support women in ministry in light of the report's findings. This guide can be helpful to staffs of denominational groups, church staffs, chaplaincy groups, nonprofit staff members, hiring committees, seminary faculties and staffs, church small groups, peer learning groups, and more.

Whoever you are, we are glad you found your way to this guide. As you work through the following pages, we encourage your group will think through not only the findings of the report, but the way the findings are mirrored in your own community and the imaginative ways your community can create spaces where women can thrive.

SCAN THE QR CODE



**We recommend you use this discussion guide with your group over three sessions:**

**Session 1:** Introduction (pages 2-3)

Who are We and What Do We Profess? (pages 4-6)

**Session 2:** What are Women in Ministry Experiencing? (pages 7-8)

What Does Our Community Practice? (page 9)

**Session 3:** The Gap (page 10)

How Can We Bridge the Gap? (pages 11-14)

# GROUP COVENANT

*Read the Group Covenant together and discuss how your group will uphold these principles with one another.*

- **Practice Confidentiality**
  - While your discussions are meant to go beyond this group and lead to action in your community, no one should share stories or comments from other group members without permission.
- **Listen Attentively and Respect Compassionately**
  - Even when group members disagree, each member should listen with compassion and respect before offering a difference in opinion.
- **Be Open and Honest**
  - Be open and honest in your comments even if the conversation gets uncomfortable.
- **Focus on Changes within Your Control**
  - Avoid blaming certain people or groups of people. Focus on the ways you as an individual can promote community change, not how another person in your community is failing to do so.
- **Separate the People from the Problem**
  - Work toward ways to address the beliefs or assumptions that are causing the problem rather than getting angry at certain people inside or outside of your discussion group.
- **Avoid a Savior Complex**
  - The fact that you are going through this discussion guide means that you support women in ministry, but this is a complex topic. Respect the complexity and try to avoid swooping in to save the day or responding to members of your group with easy or superficial fixes.
- **Look for Concrete Solutions**
  - While understanding the complexity, work together toward concrete ways your community can grow more fully into a place where women in ministry are able to thrive.

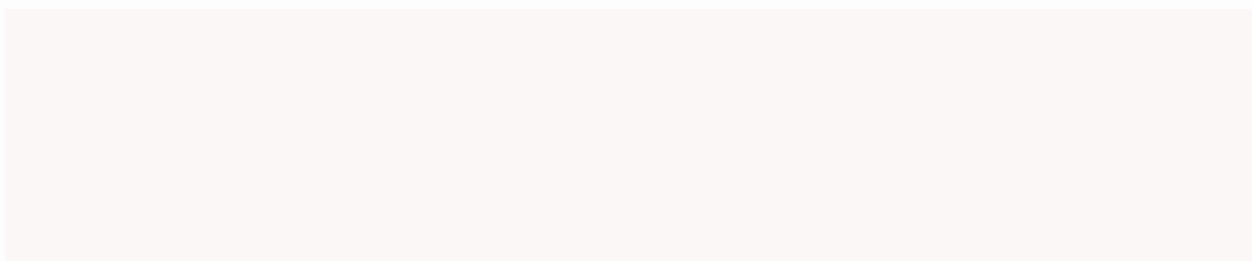
*After discussing the above principles, consider if there are additions your group would like to make to this covenant.*

# WHO ARE WE AND WHAT DO WE PROFESS?

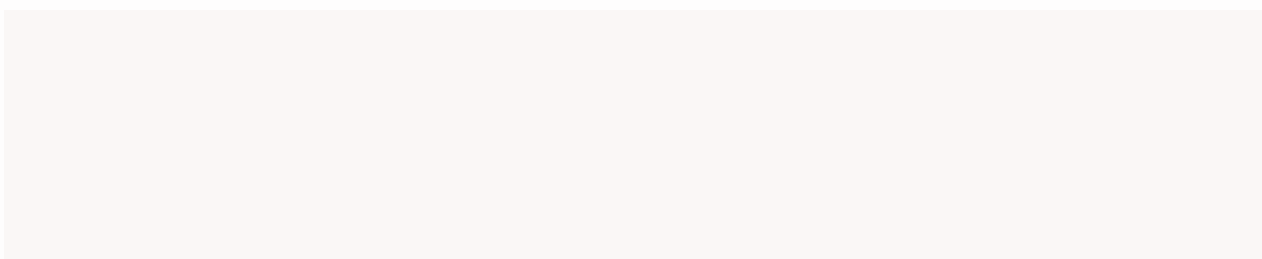
## *Your Personal Profile*

*In this section, reflect on your own beliefs about women in ministry. After working through the questions on your own, you are welcome to share some of your personal profile with the group as appropriate.*

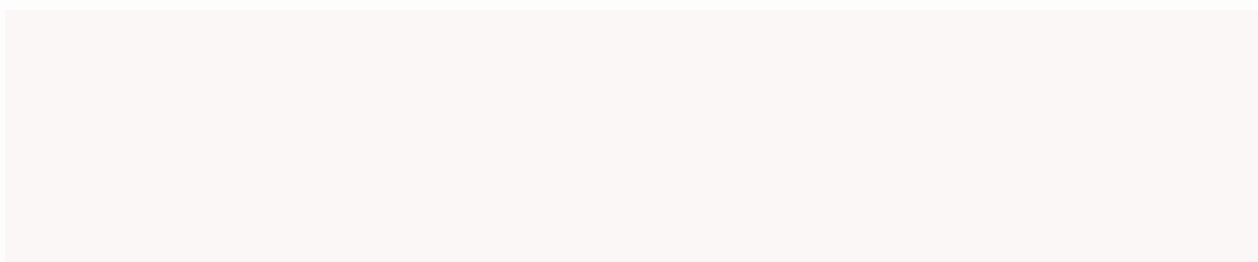
**What was your first exposure to Christian views that limit women on the basis of gender?**



**What experiences have shaped your feelings and attitudes toward women in ministry?**



**Have your attitudes toward women in ministry changed throughout your life? If so, what were some of the turning points?**



# WHO ARE WE AND WHAT DO WE PROFESS?

## *Your Community Profile*

Which of the following best describes your community?

My community is supportive of women in ministry and takes significant action to eliminate barriers for women serving in all areas of ministry and leadership.

My community is supportive of women in ministry and takes some action to implement that support.

My community expresses support of women in ministry but takes little action to implement that support.

My community is discerning the level to which it is supportive of women in ministry.

***Take some time to discuss your responses as a group.***

# WHO ARE WE AND WHAT DO WE PROFESS?

## *Your Community Profile*

***Take some time to discuss these questions together as a group.***

- What do we as a community profess about women in ministry?
- In what settings and on what occasions do we profess our beliefs about women in ministry? How often do we do so?
- How would you describe your community's perceptions and attitudes toward women in different areas of ministry in your community?
- What are some of the underlying causes in your community that affect the positive perceptions and attitudes about women in ministry?
- What are some of the underlying causes in your community that affect the negative perceptions and attitudes about women in ministry?
- What do you teach girls and young women about their place in your community?
- What resources do we use to support our professions about women in ministry?
- Do you think there is room for your community to grow as a place where women are better empowered and more able to thrive?

*In light of where your community is right now and what your community professes about women in ministry, what are three goals you want to set as you work through the remainder of this discussion guide?*

1

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2

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3

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# WHAT ARE WOMEN IN MINISTRY EXPERIENCING?

## *Obstacles Facing Women*

**86%** of women in ministry experience obstacles to their ministry because of their gender.

With such a high percentage, it is likely that the women in ministry in your community have experienced or are currently experiencing obstacles to their ministry because of their gender.

*Read through pages 2-10 of the report, which are about the obstacles that women in ministry face. Then as a group discuss the following questions.*

- What did you find challenging or surprising in these statistics?
- Looking back at the quotes, what is a phrase or a few words that stood out to you the most?
- Which obstacles do you think would be most recognizable to others? Least recognizable?
- What do you think are some of the underlying causes of these obstacles?

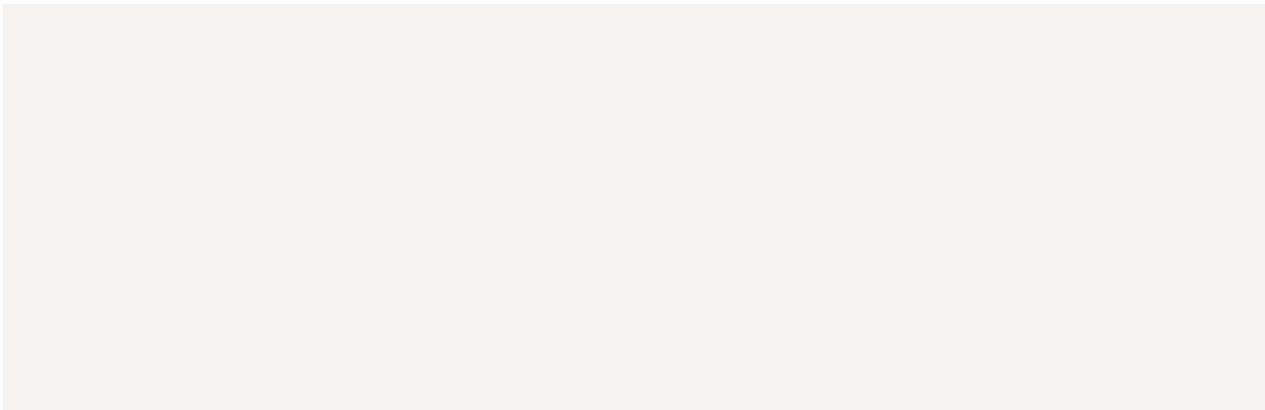


# WHAT ARE WOMEN IN MINISTRY EXPERIENCING?

## *Obstacles Facing Women in Your Community*

***Take some time to reflect individually on the following question***

Do you think any of these obstacles facing women in ministry are present in your own community? If so, which one(s)?



***After reflecting individually on the above question, begin a dialogue as a group. Discuss your response to this question about where you think there are barriers in your community for women in ministry.***

***During this discussion be respectful as well as confidential when appropriate.***

# WHAT DOES OUR COMMUNITY PRACTICE?

## *Your Community's Practices*

After reflecting on the obstacles that women in ministry face and the ways in which some obstacles might be mirrored in your community, think back to Session 1. Remember your community profile and the conversation on what your community professes about women in ministry (pg 5-6 of the discussion guide).

In what ways are the practices of supporting women in ministry in your community aligning with what you profess?

In what ways are the practices of supporting women in ministry in your community falling short of what you profess?

*If applicable, it might be helpful to reflect on the statistics tracked in Part II of the report on women serving in and preparing for ministry in various capacities. See the report for charts on pastors/co-pastors (pg 19-22), chaplains/counselors (pg 23), theological schools' enrollment in master's degrees and Doctor of Ministry degrees (pg 24-27).*

# THE GAP



Some Baptists claim support of women in ministry. And while support exists, most women continue to face significant obstacles to ministry.

For many Baptist bodies, there is still a large gap between what is professed and what is practiced.

# HOW CAN WE BRIDGE THE GAP?

## *Practicing What We Profess*

*In this section, your group will discuss solutions to the question:*

***In light of what our community professes and what we've learned about the obstacles that women in ministry experience, how do we want to change our community's practices?***

*Read through pages 11-16 of the report, which are about congregational support of women in ministry.*

*Then, whether you are in a church or another context, discuss the following questions as a group.*

- Ministry settings heavily influence women's ability to thrive in their ministries. How is community positively influencing women's ability to thrive in ministry?
- How is your community limiting women's ability to thrive in ministry?

# HOW CAN WE BRIDGE THE GAP?

## *Practicing What We Profess*

Two ways to promote affirmation and empowerment of women in ministry is to have women working and serving in all areas of your community alongside men, and using theology and belief systems that uplift women.

***Review pages 13-16 of the report, which describe these two practices to improve a community's support of women in ministry. Then as a group discuss the following questions.***

- How is your community already doing well in these areas?
- Where is there room for improvement?
- If your community is not a church, what are other categories that better fit your setting? What are the areas in your community where women should be working alongside men? And what are the theological or organizational beliefs and values that affect women in your community?

***In addition to these practices, consider the policies, structures, and various leadership pathways in your community.***

- How are these policies intentionally elevating women in leadership in your community?
- How are these policies limiting women in leadership?



# HOW CAN WE BRIDGE THE GAP?

## *Practicing What We Profess*

### **Expanding Current Practices**

***Reflect back on the positive perceptions and practices of supporting women in ministry from your personal profile, community profile, and community practices from Sessions 1 and 2 (pg 4-6 and pg 9 in the discussion guide). Then discuss these questions as a group.***

- Remember some of your personal positive turning points that affected your perceptions of women in ministry, (ie. hearing a woman preach for the first time). How can you recreate similar turning points for people in your community today?
- Remember some of the underlying conditions in your community that affected people's positive perceptions of women in ministry. How can these conditions be harnessed in your community today?
- Remember the practices in your community that successfully support women in ministry. How can you expand these practices?

### **Imagining New Practices**

- If your community fully supported and empowered women in ministry, what kinds of things would you see in your community? Hear? Feel?
- What are some of the underlying perceptions in your community that hinder the progress of women in ministry? How can your community dismantle these structures?

# HOW CAN WE BRIDGE THE GAP?

## *Taking Action*

***Take some time to discuss these questions together as a group.***

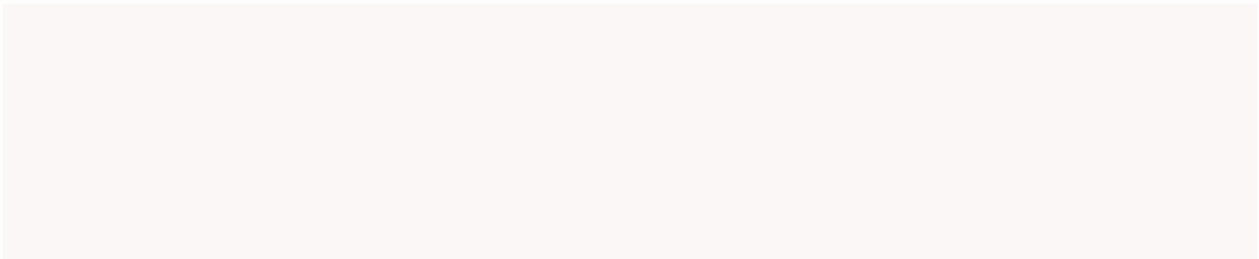
- How can you connect with others in your community to share your concerns and start taking action?
- What can you, either individually or as a group, do to change the limiting theological and organizational messages that your community “preaches” about women?
- Personally, what steps can you take reduce the barriers that women in ministry face?
- As a group, what steps can you take reduce the barriers that women in ministry face?
- As a larger community, what steps can you take reduce the barriers that women in ministry face?



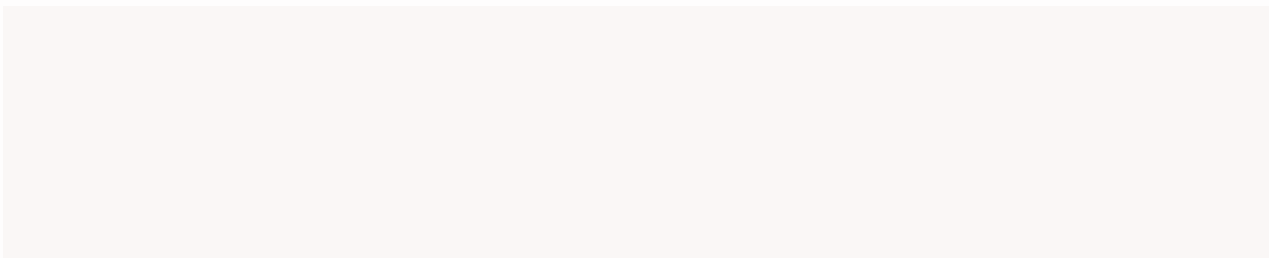
# HOW CAN WE BRIDGE THE GAP?

## *Pray, Share, Act*

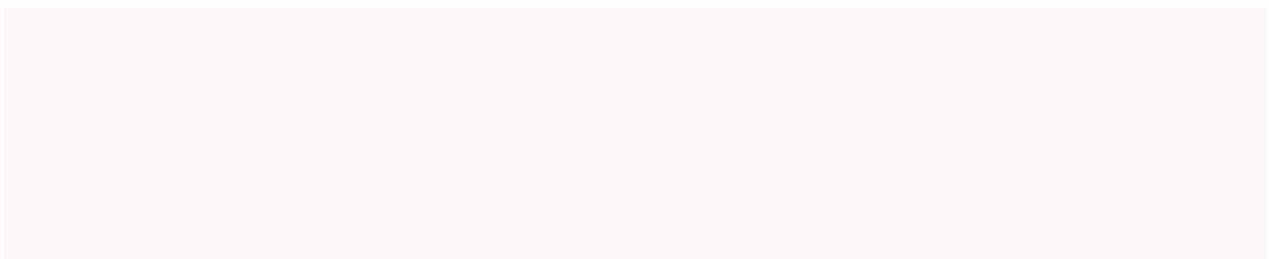
**PRAY:** In response to our group's conversation and reflection, this week I'm going to pray...



**SHARE:** In response to our group's conversation and reflection, this week I'm going to share what I've learned with someone I know. I will talk to \_\_\_\_\_ by sharing...



**ACT:** In response to our group's conversation and reflection, this week to make my community a place where women can thrive, I will...





# BAPTIST WOMEN IN MINISTRY

BWIM would love to hear about your experience of reading through the report with the help of this guide.

Email your thoughts to [\*\*lauraellis@bwim.info\*\*](mailto:lauraellis@bwim.info).

You can support BWIM's work in creating more resources like the *State of Women in Baptist Life Report* and this Discussion Guide by donating at

[\*\*www.bwim.info/give\*\*](http://www.bwim.info/give)

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