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Embracing the Second Half of Life: Journey into Leadership
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I first came to know Dr. Betty Sue Brewster as a student in 1992 when I took her language learning class. As a mid-career student who had never done well in language classes, I was scared stiff about this required class—to learn a language from your community in five weeks??? You have to be kidding! But I dove in, wore the “spots” off my practice tapes trying to memorize the guiding questions in Mandarin and then trying it out on the local exercise class that met every morning in the neighborhood park. I survived the course and gained a friend.

In 1994, after graduating with my Masters in Cross Cultural Studies, I was invited to be part of a small peer mentoring group¹ with Betty Sue and three others. We were a very diverse group: two MKs (missionary kids) from conservative evangelical missions, a messianic Jew, a contemplative Catholic, and myself. Over the previous couple of years I had described myself as a “Jack-of-all-trades but a Master-of-none.” I had been through a chain of denominational churches since a child: Episcopal, then liberal Congregational (because they were using the same Sunday School materials when we moved), InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in college where I really came to faith, a more evangelical Congregational church, the Presbyterian Church after marriage, then the charismatic movement and the Presbyterian Charismatic Communion, the Word-Faith movement, and finally the Vineyard movement. There wasn’t much in common among the peer mentoring group except that we all were interested in growing as leaders, had done some work with J. Robert (Bobby) Clinton and all had a spiritual hunger for more.

It was a unique time for all of us in the group, in that we were free every Wednesday morning for about three hours over six months, and we were all at points of transition in our lives in some way. But the very fact that we were so different actually forced us to explore our unique gifts and contributions. Each of us designed a study project that fit us, and then took turns sharing what we were learning and walking the others through a learning experience related to

¹ For more about peer mentoring and mentoring groups see *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life* (Stanley and Clinton 1993).

that. We prayed together, supported one another, talked about decisions, and more. Most of us look back on that six month period as a life-changing experience, I know I do.

Some of these life changes had really begun in the fall of 1991 when I returned to seminary to audit a leadership course with Bobby Clinton. Early in the course, God began to speak to me about being a leader: “I have called you to be a leader, not just the wife of a leader.” My husband and I had been in ministry together for over twenty-five years. We worked side by side, loved working together, and really complemented each other’s strengths. Even though we were ordained together, he was the official leader, the one with the title and the pay check.

Now God was signaling something different, and I had to figure that out. Most of the circles we had been moving in, in retrospect, held a pretty traditional theological perspective regarding women in leadership in ministry. The men were supposed to be the leaders and the women were the “helpers.” Later I came to realize that although Lew and I worked within a complementarian,² hierarchical theology, we functioned as egalitarians³ with each supporting one another through our unique gifts. We worked as a team, but he was definitely the primary leader.

The peer mentoring group was one of those times when I was forced to become who I was, discover my gifts, use my gifts, and not have to conform to anyone else’s expectations, nor any church doctrine or practices. This group was not part of any one church that expected people to behave, minister, pray, teach, in a particular way. Our backgrounds were so different that there was no one “right” way. So we talked and shared what seemed to work for us—How did we each hear from God? How did we best learn? How did we study the Word? What was our gifting and how did we function in it? There was never only one answer. I came up with a list of about 44 different ways God speaks to people which became so freeing to me and to others! I was accepted because of who I was and what I brought to the discussion, not on the basis of how I fit the system or expectations of others. This was part of the process of discovering that leader within.

² Complementarians hold a theological position that states that men and women are equal spiritually, but are created with functional differences that result in gender specific roles and hierarchical relationships between men and women (Glanville 2000:300)

³ Egalitarians hold a theological position that states that men and women are created equal, so that roles for women as well as men are determined by gifting, abilities, education, and the call of God, not simply by gender (Glanville 2000:301).

One of my big discoveries about this time was to see myself, as a woman, created in the image of God. Somehow, unconsciously, I had always thought of my “person” as created in the image of God, but never really thought about my “femaleness” being part of God’s image also. I had been a tomboy growing up, much like my Mom—loved sports, raced sailboats, camping, and most anything outdoors. In reflection, I realized that I was my Dad’s “oldest son” as I followed him (or my maternal grandfather) on boats, or in the woodshop. But now I was discovering that being a woman was God’s idea and that my femaleness reflected the image of God, and even being a ‘tomboy’ reflected the image of God because that is the way God made me!

As a result, I discovered that one of my gifts was in being a “bridge” person between “male” thinking and “female” thinking. I loved science and math, so I thought logically, loved research, and was good with details—great for connecting with the male leaders in my life, but I could also relate to the more feminine feeling side, explain (or translate) things in terms that women seemed to understand. This was an important gift in the church, in our small home group, and when I was a teaching assistant for leadership classes. I discovered that I could take the more technical, detailed language and “translate” it in a way that women, who had been confused, actually “got it.”

As I began to discover who I was as a woman, created in the image of God, I was challenged to consider doing a doctoral degree. Bobby Clinton invited me to consider researching how his Leadership Emergence Theory worked for women, what might be different from their perspective, what might we add or change that could help women emerging as leaders. I was definitely interested, but I had three initial reactions: (1) Can I really do a doctoral degree in my fifties? (2) I didn’t want to be labeled as a “women’s teacher” but wanted to be sure I was able to teach both men and women. (3) I thought it would need to be a Doctor of Missiology because that was the degree my husband was working on and as a “good wife” I shouldn’t do the degree that as half a step higher than his.

One by one, the Lord kept knocking each of these objections or hurdles out of the way. First, I began reading Gail Sheehy’s book *New Passages: Mapping Your Life across Time* (Sheehy 1995), and particularly her concept of the second adulthood. She talked of women in their forties and fifties starting whole new careers after they had raised their families, were still healthy, and looking for new challenges. That was me, and indeed it gave me perspective and permission to consider starting an entirely new career path in my mid-fifties.

Secondly, Bobby Clinton reassured me that a study on women in leadership need not pigeon-hole me as a “women’s teacher” and he would support that goal. The third objection was a bit more challenging and I initially started to pursue the DMiss degree by taking the required research design course where I could begin to shape a possible program. But the Lord was not going to let me off the hook! On the last day of class, when we all had to give brief presentations and overviews of our program design, I experienced God shouting at me through the class: “This is too important. It needs to be a PhD!” I went out of the class in shock and was overwhelmed by the experience. I later asked several classmates what had happened, and the best I could piece together was that several students, at pretty much the same time had said that my program needed to be a PhD and several others had chimed in. What I experienced was God’s voice, loud and clear.

I saw Bobby Clinton shortly after class, mentioned what had happened, and from then on, as far as he was concerned, my program was going to be a PhD which is what he wanted from the beginning. Now I had to go home and convince my husband that I was supposed to do the PhD, and I was convinced that would be no easy job. Imagine my surprise when I relayed the experience at dinner and he responds with, “If that is what you really want to do, then go for it! Furthermore, it sounds like you.” You could have knocked me over with a feather! Here I was expecting an argument or at least a heated discussion, and in one sentence, he had opened the door and said go through it. What else could I do? Though I didn’t realize it at the time, it was one of the best decisions I could have made. Four years later we graduated together, me with a PhD, Lew with a DMiss. What a wonderful celebration!

As I worked on my PhD, I discovered that I was actually living my research.⁴ My journey was unique, but there were many other women on similar paths, dealing with similar issues that were unique to women. For example, women are shaped by the theological environment of their contexts in ways men never are. Women are asking the question, “Can I really be a leader? A preacher? A pastor?” They had to resolve the biblical questions of women in leadership for themselves before they could begin to pursue leadership roles at whatever level they believed were appropriate. Women are already leaders, but their theology and the theology of their church or denomination shape where and how they can lead.

⁴ For details on these examples see my dissertation, “Leadership Development for Women in Christian Ministry” (Glanville 2000).

Additionally married women have to navigate motherhood. Is this a “time out” or a “season of growth”? Women who see motherhood as a season where they continue to grow and develop both as a person and as a leader are better prepared to move into or back into significant leadership opportunities as their children grow. The Second Adulthood is the outgrowth as these women emerge into new leadership positions, building on life learning experiences from raising children. Those who continue in leadership positions, such as a pastoral role, are able to do so if they have family support and child care, as well as flexibility in their work schedules.

The challenges facing single women are different. At one level their leadership development paths look similar to their male counterparts. The biggest difference is in the timing: the marriage question is frequently a factor for women in their twenties, so they do not fully engage a career path in ministry until their thirties. If they marry in their thirties, they are more likely to continue in ministry and limit their family size.

So women’s paths are often more circuitous than a man’s. Mine certainly has been. But understanding the differences provides perspective, understanding, and hope for women who know God is calling them to be leaders for his Kingdom, even as they struggle to understand what their call is. For me, the past twelve years have been a dream–come–true. I have worked at Fuller Seminary, School of Intercultural Studies (SIS) formerly School of World Mission (SWM), in several different positions, all of which have proved to be a great fit for my gifting and opened doors for many other teaching opportunities. Quite by chance, I took over the part–time position of the Research Librarian who was going to Africa to do her research. The job title is something of a misnomer, as my primary responsibility was doing the final review on dissertations of graduating doctoral students. In this position, I began working with faculty and students, at the same time teaching several leadership courses as an adjunct. When I was teaching a class, I was invited to join the SWM faculty for their weekly lunch time of sharing and prayer. I was welcomed as a colleague, though I felt like I was the little kid on the block but they allowed me to play in the same sandbox with the big kids. More and more the professors became my friends and colleagues—a very different relationship than student to professor.

That year and a half prepared me for the big step to Director of Doctoral Studies for SWM. Sherwood Lingenfelter was the SWM dean who hired me, and I often kidded him that that was a risky decision. I had not worked full–time for almost thirty years, though I had experience as part–time director of the Vineyard Bible Institute and a homeschool program with

the church we had planted, but this was a big step. He had worked with women making major mid-career changes, and had full confidence in my ability to handle the position, and he was right. The position fit my pastoral gifts, my administrative skills, and my teaching gifts all together. I got to rebuild and shape the office to reflect me. I loved working with the students, working with the faculty, being the connection across campus to numerous offices. About a year later my title was changed to Administrative Faculty, rather than Administrator with adjunct teaching responsibilities.

At the same time that I started working as Director of the Doctoral Studies, I also had opportunities to teach leadership in a variety of contexts both in the US and overseas. Once or twice a year I would be overseas for either teaching, mentoring, or presenting papers at conferences, including Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Austria, Hungary, and South Africa. In the US I was teaching for conferences, church seminars, and other opportunities.

As part of the Doctoral Committee and SIS faculty, I had the opportunity (and privilege) to help redesign our doctor of missiology program. Doug McConnell, the new SIS dean, and Professor Dan Shaw began dreaming of a cohort based program for mid-career leaders who would come to campus or other central meeting point for a two week intensive that would be preceded by extensive reading and followed by further research, both in the library and in the field. The term would cover nine months, and would repeat every year for four years, writing a dissertation in the last year. Very early on, I became part of the team to help “make it happen.” It soon became like having a “tiger by the tail” as word spread.

We had hit a need for field missionaries who wanted to do a doctoral program, and had burning questions that needed research, but could not resettle to Pasadena for a lengthy residency program. I not only began working on the administrative side, but soon had the opportunity to actually teach the third cohort. I would come back to the office after teaching a cohort for two weeks and say, “This was a really great cohort, the best I have had!” They were all great, so the current one was always “the best.” I was really finding my unique contribution to the mission of the school in the combination of both teaching and administrative responsibilities.

In 2007, Lew, my husband was officially diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. We had seen issues of memory loss as early as 2004, but could not get him to agree to medication until much later. He also had lost a kidney to cancer in 2006. As a result of these various factors, my life, outside of work, became more and more focused on his needs and support. This was a cruel

challenge for someone who loved to “think” and preach, and had few other hobbies that really interested him. Though he was basically retired, he continued to dream, journal, try to develop study materials for a number of years, even though the end product was often confusing and not coherent.

By 2009, it was clear (at least to my Dean) that I needed more flexibility in my schedule. Since we were in the process of re-structuring the PhD program, the timing was right to move me to a teaching role in the Doctor of Missiology program, and turn over the administrative responsibilities for the new structures to someone else. This gave me more flexibility to work at home as I needed, to take Lew to doctor’s appointments, and generally be available to help with his needs.

While I recognize that everyone’s journey as a caregiver is unique, I do want to share some important lessons that I have learned along the way. It is a role that most frequently falls to women to care for aging parents or a spouse. Early on, it was apparent that we needed a support network—both of us. When I was teaching an intensive, I would arrange for friends or family to be with Lew for lunch. Initially, I found someone for several times a week, then it became necessary for every day. Our daughter, Karissa, and I weaned him off driving the car—I had gotten a new car so I just always jumped into the driver’s seat, and Karissa was using the van most of the time because she had sold her car. So when he needed to do something, he usually did it with our daughter who lived not far away. These strategies worked pretty well, until the last year. We were seeing gradual increased loss of memory, but nothing dramatic.

On July 1, 2011, I was officially half time. Over the summer we were able to spend three weeks on the East Coast, on Cape Cod, in our favorite cottage, with family, especially the week with our daughter and her four Asian God-daughters who call us Grampa and Gramma. It was Lew’s last major trip and I discovered that I needed “family bathrooms” where I could take him when we traveled. Newer airports have them, but in older airports—that’s another story and quite a challenge. I could no longer have him wait for me while I used the restroom and know he would be there when I returned. By fall, it was clear that his general health was gradually deteriorating. In early December, he was hospitalized for a urinary tract infection. The next two and a half weeks proved for me to be a ride on a fast train, or falling off the edge of a cliff, as Lew went from being relatively alert and functional, to passing away sixteen days later.

How did I survive all this? That's my support system. I had a regular, irregular as needed, prayer letter that I would send out by e-mail with updates and prayer needs. I had been doing this for several years, starting with about ten or fifteen people, gradually adding others as they requested or showed interest. By the time of the last crisis, there were about one hundred and twenty on that list. I sent an e-mail out at 6:30 on a Sunday morning with a plea to pray for us. At that time of the day, on a Sunday morning, I was not at all sure who or when anyone would read it. But, within a half hour, I had responses from half way around the world—by then it was mid-afternoon for them and they were checking e-mail. What a comfort that was. I felt held by the body of Christ, and by the love of the Lord during that time.

During that last year, the Lord had given me a reinterpretation of Psalm 23 where He told me He was my caregiver, and He would care for me. In addition I found myself soaking in passages that expressed His expansive love, grace and mercy for me that was not based on anything I had done, but on the fact He had chosen and called me. What a gift.

The Lord is my caregiver, even as I am my husband's caregiver.
He watches over me so that I have times of refreshing, rest, relaxation, in order to restore my inner sense of peace and balance.
He gets the praise and glory, because I cannot sustain myself.
Even though it seems like I am walking in a valley of death, it is a shadow.
Yes, there is "dying" but He is with me, step by step and will not leave me nor forsake me. I will come through to the other side when I keep my eyes on Him.
He watches over me to protect and to guide me.
My enemies—the devil, the disease, sickness—shall not prevail. (My husband is not my enemy.) I have a feast of God's goodness, love, and mercy, and walk in their presence always.⁵

On the last day of Lew's life, I was compelled to go to the nursing home and pray that love from Ephesians 1 over him, declaring through tears, God's great love and faithfulness for him. There was such a thick sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit and though Lew was not responding much, I knew he was aware of my presence at his bedside—a precious time. In retrospect, it was like anointing him for burial. He died less than twelve hours later.

Those sixteen days were indeed a severe mercy or a grace disguised.⁶ God's love and presence were so tangible. The gathering of family and friends for a memorial service help to

⁵ *Psalm 23 for Caregivers*, by Elizabeth "Betsy" Glanville (this came out of my reflection on Psalm 23 in light of the fact that I am the primary caregiver for my husband who has moderate level Alzheimer's. This was God's Christmas gift to me on Christmas Eve 2010).

⁶ See *Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss* (Sittser 2004).

bring all the good memories of forty–six years together bubbling up to the surface again. I was getting a full night’s sleep again. But what was the next season of my life? Gradually it became apparent that the timing was God’s gift in more ways than I can describe. He had promised stability before I started the next intensive in January. I had assumed we would have some regular caregivers for those two weeks—and we had made arrangements and were working towards that. I had no idea that the stability would be a whole new life for me. I went ahead and taught the intensive, even though it was less than three weeks after Lew’s death. As crazy as it seemed, it was the best thing I could have done, and provided a new sense of grounding and purpose for the journey ahead.

I don’t know all that is before me yet, but I know it includes continued teaching in the DMiss program, probably traveling and teaching internationally again, the opportunity to write and publish again, and more opportunities that I am probably not even aware of. Grief is surprising. What I have thought might be difficult has usually proven to be not so difficult. But other times, I am overwhelmed with that sense of sorrow and loss, usually when I am least expecting it. So I flow with it, one day at a time. Decision making is hard, particularly a number of major decisions regarding home repairs. We did that together, now it’s my decision. I still wear Lew’s wedding ring that I took off his finger after he died. It is hard to think of myself as a widow. My heart is still married to Lew. But I am embracing the future and not letting moss grow under my feet. This is clearly the beginning of a new season.

As a professor of leadership, teaching students from around the world, I offer here some reflections on leadership development for men and women. The more stories I hear, the more I am aware of both the uniqueness of each story and the similarities across many stories. Our lives are a journey with marker points along the way: events like conversion, marriage, ordination, children, new positions, life crises, death of someone close. Our lives are also marked by developmental stages. For those in ministry and missions this includes stages of learning who we are as a child and minister of God, becoming aware and developing our unique gifts for the benefit of others, and moving into positions that bring fulfillment to all we are and were meant to be. I observe women, like myself, who really find their calling in ministry as a second career, moving into something very different in their forties or fifties.⁷

⁷ For details on leadership development see *The Making of a Leader* (Clinton 1988) and *Leadership Development for Women in Christian Ministry* (Glanville 2000).

The journey continues to have its challenges whether it is life crises or cultural changes, and so we have to be life-long learners. At each juncture, we make choices—do we embrace what God is doing in our midst? Do we embrace the changes that face us? Can I continue to grow in the love and mercy of God and be an expression of that to the students and others around me as I go forward? To these I say a resounding “Yes!” even though some days that is a statement of faith and allegiance, not a statement of feelings. My Lord, God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all I can even dare to ask or think! (see Ephesians 3:20).

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