



Season 10: Episode 7 | Cathie Ostapchuk | How Does Your “Yes” Help Future Generations?

Hello and welcome to Scripture Untangled, a podcast by the Canadian Bible Society. My name is Joanna la Fleur. I'm a friend of the Canadian Bible Society and I'm going to be your guide for today's episode.

Today, I have the privilege of interviewing Cathie Ostapchuk. Cathie Ostapchuk is best known as a leadership catalyst, communicator, consultant, and coach. Her career has led her to work in global non-profit organizations like World Vision and Compassion, as well as corporate boardrooms, and has taken her across Canada and as far as Africa and Australia doing work she loves.

Her mission statement is to clarify purpose and vision for individuals, teams, and organizations. Cathie is co-founder and lead catalyst of GATHER, a national movement which exists to connect, equip, and mobilize women in Canada for leadership and influence. She is a published author of *Brave Women, Bold Moves, Choosing Courage in a Culture of Conformity*, and was awarded the Best Christian Living Book Award from the Word Guild.

Cathie co-hosts the Her Influence podcast and is a national speaker for Leader Impact. She is all about and focused on developing the leaders of today and tomorrow, so enjoy this conversation.

Joanna la Fleur: Cathie Ostapchuk, I'm so delighted to have this conversation with you today. Welcome to Scripture Untangled.

Cathie Ostapchuk: It's great to be with you, Joanna.

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Joanna la Fleur: You know, as a means of introduction, we were just talking about a trip you were doing for ministry to the UK, and then there you were naming these different people that you were talking to and interviewing and recording. And so, what is that big thing as a means of introduction to you that you are sort of being driven by? What is this big ministry project that you're part of?

Cathie Ostapchuk: I think it's giving a voice to women, not only in the past, in the present, but how we can possibly shape the future. And I think in relationship to that is that word equity.

You know, how do we show up in equal places, in equal ways? And I wouldn't have chosen this path, but that seems to be a common theme throughout all the conversations I have.

Joanna la Fleur: Okay, that's very interesting. You say you wouldn't have chosen this path.

So maybe can you give us a little bit of that your faith story? Like, how did you get shaped into this path, this leadership journey that you're on?

Cathie Ostapchuk: Well, my friend Natalie Runyon, she's at @raisedtostay on Instagram, if you follow her at all. She just wrote a book called; *I Don't Even Like Women*. So, if I had to write another book, I would call it the same thing.

Because, you know, I came in kicking and screaming, always with my hand raised to serve God. But the first half of my life was in the arts, like I was you know, a conductor, a performer. And in 2006, the Lord called me in a very broken season to co-chair the Just Give Me Jesus revival in Toronto.

And that meant a two-year full-time commitment to not only working with inviting women into that space, but also men. So, at the end of the day, we had several thousand people 15-

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18,000, I'm not sure, fill the space, raised almost a million dollars, built leadership teams, and really had, you know, a pivot in the trajectory I was on. And it really moved me into the leadership space, but also got me thinking about, you know, where are the women and where to belong.

So that was the Lord's doing not mine, to get into this space. But I have to say it's not the easiest place to be in. But it's definitely a call.

Joanna la Fleur: Wow, I love that, it's sort of this, this project ignited in you, or maybe even gave you eyes to see like you maybe weren't, is it that would you say, you didn't think about this problem? Or you didn't see this as an issue before? Or it just was like you saw it, but it was somebody else's?

Cathie Ostapchuk: Yeah, because for me, you know, I was like, I'm three on the Enneagram with a side four. But I thought I'll be the youngest person to do this. I'll be the youngest person to do this.

I never thought of myself as a woman, it's going to be harder for me. But in ministry, or even going to Bible school and seminary, you're kind of primed to go change your world. But it's when you get into these spaces as a woman that you realize, oh, there actually is quite a lot of opposition to me just because of my gender.

And that was a surprise for me. But I think that that two-year project, doing the *Just Give Me Jesus* really helped shape me and helped me set a path that I again, I wouldn't have chosen by myself. But part of my saying yes, I was on a plane back to Edmonton, my dad was dying.

And every time there was a code blue, I'd get on a plane and go. And I was reading a little book by Henry Blackaby. And just a tiny little book.

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He's known for the *Experiencing God* series, but this was a little tiny book. And the chapter was, you know, sometimes God will call you outside of your area of natural giftedness. Will you say yes to the assignment? And I knew at that moment what he was calling me to do.

And I just said yes. And I think that's the magic. We want to be called into specific contexts sometimes. And we want to predefine them by this is what I can do. This is what people know I'm good at. But our yes has to be just a yes to the call, a yes to Jesus and then let him take you.

Joanna la Fleur: I love how you're describing that idea of calling because I think it is so much bigger than I we want to make it small and make calling one that my calling is to this particular little piece or project. But what you're describing is like my calling is to serve Jesus and he will take me in all kinds of unexpected places.

Cathie Ostapchuk: For sure.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, I love that. Yeah, I think some of you oh, my calling is, and you know, I think if you can say “my calling is,” and it's the same sentence for too long, perhaps we're making it too small. So that's really interesting.

And it sounds like, in some ways, this was like a really formative. I mean, you've had many formative moments. I mean, I know you enough to know that you've been walking, as you even sort of alluded to from Bible college onwards.

I mean, you've been walking this path for your whole life. But it sounds like when you describe that as sort of like a spiritually formative moment, like this two-year journey, give me just give me Jesus. And your dad was dying at this time, like there was all these things going on in your own life.

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I don't know how old your kids were at this time. But there were being you were sounds like you're being pulled in 100 directions and yet being formed.

Cathie Ostapchuk: Yeah.

And I think when God calls, particularly women, it's the most inconvenient time, you know, when he gives you something big, and you go like now, like, you know, whether you're going through the change of life, or whether it's like, this is not a good time for me. But he does that, you know, he says your name, and you have to say yes, and go with it. I think what happened after that experience is, like many women, I hadn't seen myself as a leader-leader, like I did things, I was very productive, like I could do a lot of things.

But that identification with that word, that really had to change in me. And I wish we could change the language around that so that we don't, you know, disqualify ourselves, like I did a big thing, but I still didn't, you know, I had imposter syndrome, I thought, oh, somebody else could have done it better.

Or like, why don't you ask the person behind me. But then I realized, am I ready for what's next? And so many people said, oh, what are you doing next, Cathie? Oh, like, what are you doing? What are you doing? I thought, like, what am I doing? So, I went into what I call the green room, I thought I'm going to prepare.

It's like David being anointed at a very young age. But then..., it took him 15 years to actually become king.

And he was shaped, you know, by adversity in that time. But he learned the lessons of leadership while he was on the run. And I felt that was me.

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So, I went to Bible school, I went to seminary. When I was in one of my seminary classes. I was like a lot of women, you know, running on a four-lane highway, we reinvent ourselves again, to think, okay, my calling is here.

It's here. And I wasn't quite sure where I belonged. Is it music? Is it you know, what is it? So, I was sitting in a class, we were reading Stephen Covey's *8th Habit*.

And one of the chapters is it could be the first chapter, this phrase that says, “find your voice and help others find theirs.” And I sat there, and it was like, you know, it's like that commercial, when you taste peanut butter, you think for the first time, it's like, wow, I'm going, this is it. This is my calling.

So, I need to find my voice, and then I can help others find theirs. And that really kind of funneled me into how do I find my voice, you know, going back to identity pieces, learning how to manage self, lead self. And then I can start helping others find theirs.

And that's sort of been the overarching call of my whole life and still is to this day.

Joanna la Fleur: I love that. And would you say this idea of finding your voice helping others? Do you think for you was finding your voice a one-time thing, or it's like in each new scenario or season of life, I need to find it again? Or it's like, actually, I think I found it. And now I'm helping others.

Cathie Ostapchuk: Yeah. And again, I, you know, I don't want to overemphasize the difference between guys and girls.

But really, do guys have this problem? You know, why do they not grapple with like, who am I, I'm sure they grapple with confidence. But women tend to ask, like, who am I, you know,

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outside of my roles? Like, what is my voice? Because we have lost it. We have to take care of a lot of people.

And I think Joanna, in your journey, you've had to take care of people, right? People close to you. You have a puppy. You know...

Joanna la Fleur: She's on my feet right now. As we speak, she's sitting on my feet.

Cathie Ostapchuk: Yes. So, we lose ourselves because we've been so focused on the other because we were kind of created to do that.

And so, to reclaim that it takes as long as it takes. And I think this would be one of the leadership principles. Because women also take 10 years longer on the whole, to find their confidence than men do.

So, a lot of women don't step into their true identity till they're in their 40s. Like, but that's the beauty of it. But when you're young, and you want to conquer the world, you can start to get really, really discouraged and think, oh, I've missed it, or I'm outside of God's will, or this detour means that it's like, no, this detour is another open door.

And then there's another open door. So yeah, you find your calling once, but then you find it over and over again, as God takes you deeper into what it really means.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah.

And because we, you know, here we are, it's Scripture Untangled, after all, at the Canadian Bible Society. So, we'd love to get in your thinking around, and you have done so much work and so much teaching in Scripture. So where has the Bible helped shape this calling, your

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identity, your leadership as a woman? Like, did you have to uncover new things? Or should I say, did you have to unlearn and relearn some things in the Scriptures?

Cathie Ostapchuk: Yeah, all the above.

You know, it's fascinating to me. I think the times that I've learned the most in Scripture have been the times I've been really desperate, like I've come to the end of myself. You know, when I just run out of, you know, my own gifting only takes you so far.

And for most women, like our gifting will only take us so far. And then you need the anointing, you need the Holy Spirit, you need to understand, you know, that you're here to serve the glory of God. But in the midst of that, Psalm 84 is my life Scripture, because it checks the boxes in terms of our journey.

Like we do come to the Valley of Baca. We do come to the Valley of Baca. And it's a myth to think that we're never supposed to be unsuccessful, or that we're never supposed to fail, or that everybody is going to love us all the time.

It's not true. So, we come to this valley, whatever brought us there, and we sit there for a while. And we hate sitting there for a while.

But while we're there, the refreshing rains come like God ministers to us. His goodness is most experienced in our suffering, because we're so busy the rest of our life that we don't stop and really receive those refreshing rains. And then we leave there.

And the Scripture says we go from strength to strength until we appear before the Lord, our God in Zion. So, I just put it like, I go from strength to strength, I'm leaving this place stronger, and I will finish, I will appear before Him because what you know, God starts, He finishes. And

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what He's given you to do, He will be sure He'll do everything in His power to make sure you complete it.

And so that's a beautiful verse just to kind of give a picture of the journey, because we get stuck in different parts of the journey and think, okay, that's it, I'm done. I can't tell you how many times Joanna, recently even, okay, I'm done. I guess I'm done now.

Like, okay, I guess it was good. But, but now I'm done. God, you must be done with me.

Recently, I've said that. And it's like, yeah, the journey's not over.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, well, it reminds me of that, that famous C.S. Lewis quote, I'm butchering it, but that idea of like, he whispers in her joy, but he shouts in our suffering that suffering is the megaphone of God.

I mean, again, I'm butchering the paraphrasing, but that's the general idea of like, we hear him so clearly in the struggles. And so, you know, in in the context of that, we always love to ask on this podcast around what, what does engaging with Scripture look like for you? And what I mean is not the perfect idealized version of, you know, the perfect setup every morning. Some people have had a lot of discipline around that.

But I think most people, its real life, every day is a little bit different, or week to week, or even our own energy. So how does engaging with Scripture look these days in this season of your life? How do you get into it? And is it right? Are you reading it? Are you listening to it? Like, where are you finding it?

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Cathie Ostapchuk: Yeah, I feel like I'm, I think Eugene Peterson had a book called *Eat This Book*, or somebody said that. I feel like I'm literally feeding on it, just again, out of my own desperation.

But I'm not young anymore. So, you know, when I was young, did I need it as much? Like, did I recognize the need for it? But now I think it's absolutely everything because it shapes you. So, a couple of defining moments last year, was a difficult time in the life of the ministry and also my personal life.

You know, quite a large betrayal, actually, and I wasn't ready for it, because I thought I'm too old for this. Well, it drove me into the Psalms. You know, it drove me to journal everything in my Bible now, you know, particularly in Psalm 119 has like coffee stains and tear stains.

And, you know, it's sort of like an ugly hot mess. But I think the way I'm really aligning myself with Scripture is that it's my real life meeting a real God. And I think when you're desperate, you just find him in a new way.

And it's such a beautiful thing. The other thing that was defining, you know, was writing my first book again, I just did not want to write that book because and you have a piece in that book, which is amazing, your story's in there. Because it does pigeonhole you into oh, this woman's thing, but I had to write it because it was the stories of women.

It was particularly Moses's mother that just like, blew me away because I grew up reading about her. We called it Sunday school back in the day. And back in the day, we used flannelgraph.

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And you know, they took us off into the side room. And they told us these stories. And she was just a story like she had, you know, her baby in a basket she made, and she put him in the Nile River.

And that's the Moses story. Well, I am reading it in a new way. And I go, she did what none of her girlfriends did what she did.

And they were all fearful that their baby boys were going to be killed. She did something different. There's something about her where she knew that Joseph had said, like, you know, there's going to be a redeemer that comes and rescues the nation of Israel.

Her name, Yokobed meant glory, the glory of God, the first time it's ever used in a name, and it's a woman. And she saw her son who's not his name was told, like she said, this is good. This is a good thing. I wonder if there's something about him, that is going to be a redemptive force for the future.

So, nobody else did what she did. She's weaving her basket, weaving her basket, weaving her basket, everybody else is probably freaking out and she's weaving her basket.

She sees an opportunity, but then she has to place her most precious thing, which is her son, put him in the basket and literally drop them in the Nile River. And the Nile River is not like, you know, it's not a beautiful place. There's all kinds of things that could happen.

So, in the life I'm going, if I was her living right now, would I be doing that? Would I be doing something that's so counter cultural, but I heard God say, you know, I have a strategy, you know, just trust me on this. And that just blew my mind. And then as I looked at other women that were actually in the lineage of Christ, had they not stepped out and done things that were

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actually even illegal, but followed the voice of God, I'm actually preaching on that this Sunday in church, like the rebel saints, and they're women.

I thought, okay, I need to be different. I can't be this like, perceived as this good Christian girl, because I'm not. But to gather kind of came out of that, like, what do we need to do that's different, that is creating something out of nothing that is allowing God to move.

So that's Scripture. Very, very real becoming very untangled. Because all of the myths about these stories of women in the Bible, we've just adopted them as like, oh, yeah, like, that's, you know, it's a cool story.

But no, like, we're here because of these women.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, well, and even the story of Moses, just how it's fresh in my mind as well, because I just listened to a Bible Project podcast about the topic. Yes.

And there were seven women in those early days of his life. There's these nurses, their midwives, there's his little sister, not his little his big sister, who's still little, but she's bigger, older than him. And there's, you know, the Pharaoh's daughter, and they're all sort of a bit of like tricksters and bold moves.

And, you know, subverting oppression, you know, at every turn. And, you know, I love the midwives say, like, you know, when the order is given to, if it's a male baby, you should kill the baby when they're born. And the midwives are saying to Pharaoh, like, well, we'd love to, but the women, these Hebrew women are so robust, they give birth before we even get there, we don't even have a chance, you know, and just, they're all in it together.

All these women are like, conspiring against the most powerful person in the nation.

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Cathie Ostapchuk: I love it. And they lied. I mean, you know, and it's...

Joanna la Fleur: They lied, and it was determined to be good.

Cathie Ostapchuk: Yes, yeah. And I think we're really; we live so much out of fear.

It's incredible. I didn't realize that for me, I just wanted everybody to like me and, you know, be welcomed in places. And this is what Christian leadership looks like.

And I think especially in, you know, this climate that we're in right now, we don't need the yes people, we need people that know the Scripture. And if you know the Scripture, if you know the life of these women, then you get to know God and you go, he's a risk taker. Look what he did, you know, into the garden.

You know, he creates us and puts us in his favorite place, we blow it, but then into our garden, he puts Jesus knowing exactly what's going to happen with him, but he risked everything. And I feel like we're just very comfortable. I'm very comfortable.

But it's not reading another self-help book. I mean, reading is great, but it's reading the Bible. What does the Bible say? What does it mean? What does it mean to me? What's going to change for me? It's not a storybook.

You know, it's the narrative of the world. And when we don't step into it, we don't see ourselves as being part of it. We don't know that if we don't take a risk now, there are future generations that may not have opportunities.

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Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, and I think it sounds like even what you're saying, too, is it's at some level about our responsibility to be Biblically literate, like as in to know the book to know the stories to understand, even how it fits together and things like that. And, you know, I think we're not here to guilt people. We're here to encourage and inspire.

So again, you know, when you when you think of that, we're all in different places. Not everybody has had as much exposure, even if some people listening may be very new in their faith or just never really were taught how to do it. Do you have a place to start or whether it's like this book of the Bible or an approach to the Bible that, you know, if people are saying, I don't even know, I don't even know where to do this.

I feel like I need to know the Bible more, but it's so intimidating. And I'm not asking you to solve all of their problems, but, you know, is there something you could encourage people with? Where would you point them?

Cathie Ostapchuk: Right. I mean, obviously, everybody suggests start with the book of John.

You know, it's really about Jesus coming. But I would say Google stories. Like start with the Bible but you can always start on YouTube. And, you know, fascinating people, stories you've heard about because it's through the stories, like I said, you get to know God but read anything you can on Jesus.

If you start with the Old Testament, you know, it's pretty hard to understand. Right. You know, the bigger narrative, I think if you start with Jesus, and just anywhere, even if you bought a Red Letter Bible, or found something that says, you know, these are the words of Jesus, you know what He did say what He didn't say, you know, how He began conversations, how He left people, He always left people changed.

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And I think His words do give life, you know, the way He refers to himself, like I'm the way the truth, the resurrection, you know, I'm the vine, I think start there with Jesus, because it does begin and end. And I think any other problems we have with Scripture, we always have to go back to, you know, not only what would Jesus say, but what did Jesus say? What didn't he say?

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Joanna la Fleur: Right.

And if you don't know, that's, you know, if you don't know what He said, it's very difficult, you know, even like I like the laugh about the old in the 90s, that WWJD bracelet, what would Jesus do bracelet, which fundamentally implies that you know something about Him and His character and His habits and His words and what He said, or what He did. So, you could answer that question. But I think part of that problem is, well, maybe you need to explore that first.

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So yeah, I want to, you know, move into talking not just about how Scripture and calling in you, but particularly how it is played out here with this, the story of Gather Women, because I happen to be in a room, I don't even remember the date. I have in my mind, it was like 2017. But you can correct me.

And it was a house full of a huge gathering of women asking, you know, do we want to do something, like there was sort of a vision casting moment, and small beginnings. So, tell us a little bit of that story of how that happened. And then where it's gone since like what this stirring was.

Cathie Ostapchuk: Right, the stirring was, I went to school in the States for five years.

And, you know, everything was bigger there, like, you know, big conferences and things were happening there. And I wanted to be where things are happening. So, I just remember coming back from a conference, I think Priscilla Shirer was a speaker, and I was on the plane.

And I thought, oh, I'm going back to Canada. Where are the women? And I think back then when Twitter existed, I tweeted this, like, where are the women coming back to Canada? I wasn't excited about it. I thought, well, why aren't I excited? Two daughters, you know, young adult women, they weren't all that excited about, you know, being part of the females in the church.

They weren't, you know, particularly vital, you know, in their expression of faith. And I thought, okay, you know, so I started googling, like, where are the women and back then 10 years ago, it's 2014. We had that gathering.

Joanna la Fleur: Was it that long ago?

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Cathie Ostapchuk: Yeah, 2016, we became a charitable ministry. And so, it'll be 10 years next year. And there wasn't a lot on the Canadian landscape.

So, in that room that day, we asked, like, what has impacted you? Who has impacted you? And a lot of our references were from, you know, south of the border. It's like...

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, the way we were, you know, resources from then. That's right. All these women speakers or authors, conferences from the US. Beth Moore is awesome.

Cathie Ostapchuk: But also in that room, that's the first time I met you.

We sat beside each other. We talked about if anything was possible in Canada, what could it be? And there seemed to be enough energy in that room. You know that, okay, what could this be? And so, lots of iterations.

You know, we just started to gather basically. And the first year we went across Canada, I think to six cities. And I was like a deer caught in headlights.

I had no idea. I mean, really, like, I didn't know who women were and where they were. But God has brought, you know, community together.

Now, it's really interesting that it's changed so much over the years. We went through COVID and post COVID. We've had a lot of challenges.

People generally don't invest in Christian women, just if you wondered. They don't.

Joanna la Fleur: Do you mean like financial investment?

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Cathie Ostapchuk: Financially and like we, you know, what I've learned is that, oh, you're a women's thing.

We love you. We think you're great. But oh, that's a women's thing.

And when they say it's sort of like, oh, you're out there. Here's the church. And here are the women.

We love you. We think you're great. And I thought, okay, that is the biggest learning for me.

I just thought, you know, I was naive in that. I think now I work part time at the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada because it's an opportunity to have access to networks where we can bring women in and integrate us. And even through Gather, you know, I will always say, like, don't let somebody tell you who you are and who you're not and where you belong.

Go study the Bible for yourself, know what you believe and act out of that. And the Bible will say, you know, you are an ambassador of the Most High. You are you have authority, walk in your authority, partner with your authority.

But we won't tell you what to believe or where you belong. But the Bible is pretty clear that you have a part to play in the story. So, Gather over the years.

You know, our values have never changed. We're to be bold, you know, not fearful or to be invitational, genuine, not cloaked in fear and self-preservation. And we're to be harmonious, you know, harmony, harmony embracing diversity.

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So that was the original vision. And it's just been interesting. The thing I've noticed most is that women that have been part of Gather have left to go on and do amazing things that didn't exist 10 years ago.

And that's the greatest blessing. Like we don't exist to compete with, you know, women's ministry groups or I think the more the merrier. We need more women.

We need more women in every sphere of influence. We just tried to create a space where, you know, over the years, there were 260 women, including you, on that platform over 10 years. And that's a lot of voices that had an opportunity to say something, to declare something.

And I know it wasn't perfect all the time, but we also wanted to talk about justice, you know, and reconciliation, poverty. We wanted to present issues to women and have them respond. I think just elevating the voice and presence of Canadian women was the ultimate goal.

And, you know, if you didn't ask this, but I will say it's really hard to measure success because we want it to be by fruit. But again, if you want to untangle the truth of Scripture, God honors faithfulness over fruitfulness. He honors obedience over outcome.

He honors internal renewal over external recognition. You know, it's a different ballgame. Jesus flipped the tables on success, but for some reason in North America, we still think it's big platforms.

It's large numbers. It's, you know, bums in seats. It's, you know, and it's like some things you need to quantify, obviously, for donors and budget, but some things are immeasurable, the impact on one woman's life.

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And so, I've changed in my thinking, you know, one room, one conversation, Jesus at the well with the woman. I think we will never know until we get to heaven how being faithful was the standard, not trying to measure the success.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, that's interesting.

I mean, it leads me to, you know, hear what you're saying about yourself, but wonder about that for everyone who's been through the Gather Women community. What has been sort of the, what has been that thing in them? And a lot of that, as you said, is difficult to quantify, which as you said, if we're looking for how do we get investment in women, as you said, well, a donor wants literally to know what's the data, what's the quantitative thing. And of course, some of that is possible.

We can put something in a spreadsheet, but so much of the impact of formation in Christ is in story, it's a narrative, it's in the internal workings that is so difficult to put in the spreadsheet. And it sounds like, would you say that's how it's been happening in you? It sounds like you've been formed in that as well as you lead.

Cathie Ostapchuk: I'm not the same person for sure, as I was 10 years ago, like, thank God, oh my gosh, like I keep thinking, okay, I'm on the journey as well as everybody else, but we just tend to elevate people around us.

And, you know, of course, we all know Helen Burns, and I keep thinking I want to be like her when I grew up, but we can only be, you know, who God created us to be. I will say we did have 30 women come through the internship program. We had 30 women come through our Gather Voices program.

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Um, there has been, um, I know there has been impact, but we're looking at something called Gather 2.0. Now, as we head into the 10th year, it's time for every organization to reassess, reevaluate, because the whole world has changed. The whole world. Nothing is the same.

Are women the same? Like, we are still the same, but what we have to navigate now is so complex. And what do we need now? I think, which we did not identify early on was, you know, um, the power of like the happy few, you know, the band of sisters. And as much as I hate that word, sisterhood is overused.

We need the sisterhood. We need healthy sisterhood, not to compare, not to compete. We need the small groups, and we need leadership.

So, we know how to lead ourselves and lead others. Because when everybody, you know, around us is flailing or high anxiety or suffering from, you know, fear or economic pressure or, you know, uh, dysfunctional families, there need to be women that stand and say, you know, I'm a non-anxious presence in this world. We are the immune system, whatever context we walk into favorable or unfavorable.

And most of them are unfavorable. I hate to say, but most of them, not all of them, we need to bring something where like, we're the immune system. We kind of see where the disease is, where the health is, and we, we can't fix things, but we bring possibilities.

We bring solutions. We care for people. We nurture people.

We focus on the relationships, you know, more than we have to get things done too. So, I think we're a gift to the world. We've always been, but in this prophetic, imaginative, you know, opportunity we have in the days, I really think that women, we need women who are securing their identity, um, have a clear focus, look up and you can hear the Holy Spirit.

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And this was the magic about being at the Alpha Leadership Conference. The focus was the Holy Spirit. And I don't know if it's because I've been too Baptist all my life, but I knew about the Holy Spirit.

Did I always focus on the Holy Spirit? But even when you go into Scripture and see the role of the Holy Spirit, you know, we may have through different denominational upbringings forgotten, this is the power. And, you know, if we harness that as women, if we harness our natural gifting, if we hear our call, if we're prepared to stay, you know, and suffer, um, but be clear on the goal. I think we are at the beginning of a new era and a new opportunity.

And I believe it for women in the Canadian church. Absolutely.

Joanna la Fleur: Well, it sounds like you're sort of articulating what is the strength of women in the church today, women as leaders, women as contributors in a meaningful way to their own communities, whatever kind of church denomination, you know, you use this word almost like, I think you said something like an immunization.

Is that the word that you use? But this idea of like seeing where immune system, the story, the immune system, do you have a story of someone that stands out when you think of these sort of ideas? Do you have a story or an illustration that is someone that stands out to you or someone you've seen do that over the years?

Cathie Ostapchuk: I think it's women that have come into the room when I've been in the room and all of a sudden, you know, you feel different. Like you, you feel there's a strength there. There's like gravitas, they hold something, but they don't, they're not there to be transactional.

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You know, they're there to be transformational and to look for the one that needs what they have to offer. I mean, we tend to come into rooms and say, okay, who's better than me? Who's worse than me? Like we have to find ourselves in this space.

Joanna la Fleur: You're like the jostling for position. Yeah.

Cathie Ostapchuk: Yeah. We need to know where do we fit? Like, you know, who's wearing what, um, but who's got more education.

So, I was just teaching at Moody Bible Institute a couple of weeks ago and everyone on platform had their PhDs. And I'm going like, I got to get my PhD, like, come on, you know, and I was talking to my son who has a PhD. And he said, like, mom, honestly, you would get it for you.

Nobody else really cares. And I'm going, yeah, like it's that spirit of I need to fit in, I need to compare, I need to be competing. And I think I've just grown up with that in the ministry world.

And I don't think I'm alone. So, what's it like to come in without any of that, to come in with open hands and say, who am I here to serve? I may not bring what somebody else brings, but what I bring is unique. And I think Jesus entered every conversation with like, how can I, how can I leave it better than I found it? So, I do that in my, in my life, when I visit my daughter in Winnipeg and her family, my goal is how do I leave them better than I found them? That means I'm really nice to my son-in-law.

That means, you know, I'll do whatever I can to make their life easier. If that points them to, to God and makes them feel loved. And I think we need to be those women that are not so concerned.

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I had a mentor. I was so I've always been concerned about, you know, how do I look so that, you know, I'm presentable out in the world. And, you know, with the body shape like mine, it's always, it's not always easy.

And she said...

Joanna la Fleur: I think every woman would say that.

Cathie Ostapchuk: She said, invest in you so that you're confident. So, when you leave the door, it's all about everybody else.

And so, I'm attracted to women that, you see somebody in a room, and you think, oh, I would, I want to be friends with her. And why is that? It's like, because they're open to, you know, something that is mutually beneficial. And I think women in women's rooms is one whole thing, but women, often the minority in rooms of men is another thing.

You need to be secure. You need to have confidence, not based on external recognition, but who you are and what you bring so that you're not trying to become like them or lead like them but also understanding that most of the time they won't get you right at the outset. And they may not, they may say they like you, but they maybe won't.

And you may not be invited into their world, and you may not be able to make decisions. But this internal security, this confidence that you are unique, if God has put you there, that's your credibility will help you. And then when it's time, you know, where there's some kind of conflict, you'll know whether to stay or whether to go, but you won't, you won't allow other people to always define that for you.

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And I think where women have, you know, come short most of the time is that we've allowed other people to put value on us or withhold it from us. So that's where Scripture comes in. I mean, I would say to almost every woman read Psalm 139, a million times a day, like, listen to it in the car, read it, you know, whatever you need to do, memorize it, write it out.

You are fearfully and wonderfully made. And that is directly, you know, I mean, it couldn't be more beautiful. And so how the distance has been created between that verse and the way we actually live with lots of fear and no wonder, you know, we've allowed the world to kind of tell us and so let's not be those women.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, I love that. I mean, you're talking about, you know, some of these barriers, and there's many barriers to women, leading barriers in themselves, barriers in maybe cultural and context, theological context. But I see also that you get a lot of these insights, because you're listening to women all across the country all the time.

And so, you're hearing these stories, like I think of your book, *Brave Women, Bold Moves*, you referenced it earlier, but I don't think you said the name, *Brave Women, Bold Moves*. And I mean, in the working out of this book, maybe you can tell us a little bit about it, but you were gathering these stories and listening to the experiences of women across the country. Like what was some of what was maybe for you that the greatest impact of writing that writing that book?

Cathie Ostapchuk: Yeah, I think just realizing there's a lot of opportunities, but it's quite challenging.

Yeah. You know, in the landscape as it currently is, because there's such a difference between theory and practice. So again, people will tell us that we're valued, but the practice is that we

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don't have, we haven't been given, you know, the responsibility that goes with our title sometimes, you know, people will always hold on to power, men and women.

So, it's really hard to move ahead. And even if we're called to something, for instance, I was talking to Marilyn Draper at Tyndale, you know, we talk about where are the women and women could sign up for, you know, the pastoral program, but 75% end up in the counseling program because there are challenges and where are the opportunities? So, there was a statistic. I don't know how recent it is.

67% of all seminary students are women, but only 3% of all women on staff in churches or ministry are women. Like, so where, where did those women go?

Joanna la Fleur: What did they do with their education? Yeah.

Cathie Ostapchuk: Where are they going? So, into counseling, finding something.

And I think the other myth is that we can, we have guys that will support us. Look, if you're a single woman, solo pursuit, you have to do all the things for your life. You have to fully support yourself.

You need to make that income. You're not relying on other people. You need a market value that's fair.

And I think sometimes in church and ministry, my daughter's on staff at a church in Winnipeg and it's lovely. It's a lovely place to be, but she's always advocating for that. And we shouldn't have to advocate.

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There's another statistic that says within a year of women coming from the corporate world or marketplace into ministry or church position, their self-esteem plummets.

Joanna la Fleur: Really?

Cathie Ostapchuk: My question is what is in the water? What, what are we drinking? Why? And these are the stories, whether I'm here, whether I'm in the States, whether I'm in Nairobi, the stories are the same. And I'm looking for the positive deviance.

I'm looking for the day where we all say, I'm in a really great situation. I feel honored. I feel valued.

I've got authority. I get to take risks and get rewarded for it. But what can we do is I think build trusting relationships with the people that are the hardest.

Because if we come in with fists raised, you know, and be a change maker that way, that's not how Jesus did it. One conversation, one relationship at a time. But understand what the challenges are, like be wise.

And then what are the tools available for you? So that's why I believe in leadership equipping. And that's why Gather is moving into, you know, this new area of Gather to lead. Like we need to see ourselves as leaders, or at least have influence that we can change situations, we can change, you know, people's hearts, we can change people's minds.

But we need to be very confident in who we are and what we're carrying. We need to be, our humility, we need to have a humble confidence, like the humility. When's the last time you washed somebody's feet? And if we're victim, if we feel like we're victims, we're gonna say, well, somebody should be washing my feet.

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It's like, no, that's no. We need to be always like; how do we serve? How do we serve? Even though we've been slotted into serving a serving tier, all through history, we are the servers. Women are always coming under.

How do we serve from a strong position?

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, Philippians to your attitude should be like Christ Jesus. Yeah.

Cathie Ostapchuk: Exactly.

If we women can be more like Jesus, the whole world will change. But we're trying so hard to be like other women or other men or, you know, definitions of leadership, just lead like Jesus. That will be transformational.

You know, we're only as good as our closest relationships, like we want to lead. And, you know, we I mean, women, we want recognition. We want people to hear us.

We want a mic. We want a platform. But I'm only as good as my relationship with my person, you know, my plus one, which is like the guy I'm married to, my son, you know, my son in laws, my nephews.

So, if women work on their closest relationships and then move out from there rather than trying to get the recognition of all the people out there. But this is dysfunctional. I think this is where the enemy goes like he goes right for those that are closest to you.

And you'll never be successful in ministry. You'll never be successful in ministry, whatever that means. If you take your betrayals and your burnings and your offenses and your hurts, and you

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think you can take them from one context to a next, you have to deal with your stuff, because it's going to follow you.

And so, you know, Gather, we always say, like, walk through fire, but don't smell of smoke. And so, there's a lot of work. It's not magic.

You have to do the work.

Joanna la Fleur: I love that. You know, you're talking about this encouragement is lead like Jesus, serve like Jesus.

That's why I mentioned Philippians 2. You know, your attitude to be like Christ, who being in very nature God, didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the nature of a servant. He humbled himself. It goes on from there.

But there's a Scripture I had to memorize as a kid. But more than that, I'm hearing you say the encouragement to deal with your own things, to not be seeking outside affirmation, but to know where your fruitfulness comes from, where your internal work needs to be done and internal work in your family and those closest to you, not just those outside. But as you know, just a last a last question for you is, you know, when you think of Canada and all that God is doing, what gives you hope? Where are you excited about what God is doing across the country?

Cathie Ostapchuk: Yeah, I mean, I'm excited.

I feel like we I mean, we don't mix our faith in our politics. So, I think that's one plus. We have a lot of things to work on, for sure, morally, socially, quite liberal.

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But we are agile because our even though we're all spread out, you know, we have we're a newer country in terms of I think we could pivot quickly. I think there are many people that I'm meeting in Canada, especially having been in Seoul, South Korea last year at the Lausanne Gathering, meeting incredible Canadian people who are on the cutting edge of prophetic adventure, even the team I work on, you know, work with at the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, missiologists like global leaders. We're seeing where God is moving.

And I think God is raising up a contingent of leaders in Canada that are in tune with what the Holy Spirit is saying. And I want to be part of that. I think we're in the days of, you know, it's sons and daughters, men and women like old and new prophesying and, you know, seeking revival.

And again, at the Alpha Leadership Conference, like we witnessed there, there's revival happening. It's so interesting that the largest demographic of people returning to the church is young men. And I'm really encouraged by that.

But also, the largest demographic leaving the church are women. And so, let's do the work.

But honestly, at every point in history where revival happened, women were often on the forefront. So, we need to be part of the story. But Canada is agile.

I think we can move quickly. I think there are leaders positioned right now in Canada that are really listening to the Holy Spirit. And I think if we see what God is doing, particularly in the majority world, and we don't distance ourselves from that, but we partner with that.

These are the days of collaboration as well, which is why we're doing this leadership tour in the fall with women from the UK and women from the US. Let's partner. Let's collaborate.

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Let's see what God wants to do prophetically. There's just something very, very special about, I think, the call on Canada. And so especially what's going on with Alpha is incredible and Canadian Bible Society.

I mean, the focus on the Word of God, there couldn't be a better time. You know, I think the Bible, Bible sales have shot up.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah, the hunger is at an all-time high.

Cathie Ostapchuk: That's right. Are you kidding me? Well, if you take my own personal journey, I'm not surprised. I mean, it has totally shaped me.

And I grew up reading the Bible. But now when I read the Bible, like I expect, you know, transformation with every word, you know, even little words that you don't like, although or also, and then and yet, you know.

Joanna la Fleur: Like you're finding new you're finding new nuggets where in Scripture you might have been familiar with. I love that.

It's just as exactly as you said, there's there is a new thing. It's collaborative, it's cross gender and generation and nation. And we're seeing something happening.

And we're seeing this in Canada, we're seeing it around the world, just as you said, it is an exciting day. So, Cathie, thank you so much for joining us here on the podcast, we're going to make sure links to the things you've referenced, they're in the show notes. So, people can find you, they can find your book, they can find this tour that you've referenced coming up, that's going to be in the fall.

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We want to make sure that people can get to that. And also, you know, we referenced in here, The Bible Course, which is all about like, if you don't know where to start, you know, it's another, it's just one of the examples of like, how to understand what the Bible is as a whole from start to finish and how it all connects together. So we're just really glad for the conversation, but also the encouragement today, as you shared, I think, honestly, about the journey that you've been on and how you have more than a decade, really become an expert in the Canadian space around what's going on with women in the church.

So, Cathie, thanks so much for your time. And for your work, ongoing work in this area.

Cathie Ostapchuk: It's a privilege. Thanks, Joanna.