

# WOMEN OF ACTION

1 Peter 3:5-6, Selected Texts (NASB)

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We live in a day when basic adult behavior is a mystery to many people. A new popular television show is called Supernanny, where a family having trouble with their young children invites an expert English nanny into their home to give them child-rearing lessons. I find it hard to watch the parts where the children take over the house and abuse the parents with impunity. I end up shouting at the television.

A recent program showed a young couple with cute young boys whose behavior was outrageous, and it seemed like there was nothing the parents could do to stop it. The nanny observed them for a while and then sat the parents down for a very difficult conversation. She said the same to the man, but particularly to the woman she said: "When did you give up? Whenever you approached your children I could read your body language, and you were slumped in defeat. When did you stop trying for the joy that should be in every family? Instead of two parents and two children in the house this is a house with four children!"

It is a strange truth that in a day of relative freedom for women many women struggle to overcome a passivity toward things that really matter. How else can we explain the low statistics for birth control use among women who choose abortions? Why would anyone be passive about that? The high rate of divorces reveals an unwillingness of couples to fight for their marriages. Parents have become passive toward their children, letting them grow like weeds instead of tended plants.

We will study men at another time, but in this study we are going to review a remarkable array of women of action in the Bible. The lie of our time is that in order to be godly, women must be passive and unfulfilled. Nothing could be further from the truth.

1. Mary, the mother of Jesus, jumped into what God was doing even though it made her a fallen woman in the eyes of Israel: **"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly"** (Matthew 1:18-19). When the angel came to tell Mary that she was going to become a fallen woman for the Lord she could have responded: "No, my lord, but have you spoken with my cousin Elizabeth?" Passivity would have avoided her the bad reputation, but she would also have missed becoming the woman honored above all others as the mother of Jesus.

What good opportunity has God placed before you that will require you to be a woman of action? The passive woman looks at the negative side and says to herself: "If I sit here quietly maybe this angel will go away!" Have you been trying to avoid being called a holy roller or a

cultist at work? You can escape those words of derision by doing nothing, and what you will miss is becoming a woman after God's own heart and an ambassador for his Christ.

2. Deborah did the work of God in Israel as a judge when no one else was willing to bear the load: **"Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment"** (Judges 4:4-5). Where were the elders of the people? Where were the priests?

People sometimes mistakenly think that the positions of great authority are the most fun. Then where was the line of people aspiring to do this godly work? It almost killed Moses. All day long Deborah would sit under a palm tree and listen to every conflict, sorrow, and broken relationship in Israel. Then, in a spirit of dependence on God, she would dispense some word of divine wisdom to help people find a solution. She could have hidden in her house and pretended not to know the answers to these problems. She could have given herself an excuse because there had not yet been a woman judge in Israel. And the level of chaos in Israel would have increased with every passing day.

Honestly, this is how I got placed on the rules committees in our district and at the national level. There was never a time when I earnestly desired to study four hundred pages of abstruse regulations and commit them to memory. It was simply that I could not stand the chaos which would sometimes arise.

Do not fear to make wise judgments in the Lord! Study the word of God, rely on the Holy Spirit, and believe that Christ has given everything necessary for life and godliness to his church. The church today desperately needs women of action to give input at all levels. There is also a crying need for women of wisdom to speak to other women about a whole range of issues which are not in the purview of men.

3. Jael seized the opportunity to finish off the commander of the army which had invaded Israel: **"Now Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, 'Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me! Do not be afraid.' And he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. He said to her, 'Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.' So she opened a bottle of milk and gave him a drink; then she covered him. He said to her, 'Stand in the doorway of the tent, and it shall be if anyone comes and inquires of you, and says, 'Is there anyone here?' that you shall say, 'No.'" But Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died"** (Judges 4:17-21).

Ladies, there is a time to take up hammer and tent peg and fight! Fight for the reputation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Fight for your marriages, your families, your wayward children, and your country. Is this a time to hide quietly in our homes? It is not. Could you strike an intruder who was threatening your family? I am reminded of an unnamed woman from the same time period as Jael who was barricaded into a tower and was about to be burned to death by enemies

along with dozens of other men and women. She looked out the window, targeted the evil leader, Abimelech, and took him out by dropping a millstone on his head. Do you think the others said: "You can't do that--you're a woman!" No, I think they probably danced the dance of joy and threw jewelry at her.

4. Abigail stopped David from needless killing. David had a dispute with Abigail's husband, Nabal, who had received protection from David's army and given nothing in return. David was planning to kill Nabal and Abigail packed some animals full of food and threw herself at David's feet. She pleaded with him that such killing would be an evil that would haunt David for life, and that when he became king God would deal with David's enemies. Here is what David said in response: **"Then David said to Abigail, 'Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand. Nevertheless, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from harming you, unless you had come quickly to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light as much as one male.'** So David received from her hand what she had brought him and said to her, **'Go up to your house in peace. See, I have listened to you and granted your request'"** (1 Samuel 25:32-35).

Ladies, there is a time to be a woman of action and keep your men--and sometimes your women--from following their baser instincts. There is a time to get in their faces, with all godliness, and make them see the foolishness of their actions. It will not do to sit idly by and let events take their course.

5. Martha was a woman of action who ministered by providing for the work of Jesus: **"Now as they were traveling along, [Jesus] entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me'"** (Luke 10:38-40). Let's be clear: There was no fault in Martha's hard work for the sake of the Lord's ministry. The fault was in her critical attitude toward her sister, which the Lord gently corrected.

Notice that Martha did not say: "Oh, I can't serve food, I see myself as more of a Bible study leader." She took up the ministry at hand. Many of our missionaries, who have spent years studying a particular people group, get reassigned to a different people group as the needs change. Good ministry is where you find it.

6. Mary, Martha's sister, did the work of devotion by sitting at Jesus' feet. This is not passive! Women, when all sorts of things need to be done, when family members are calling for help, when you lose track of your many commitments, how much energy does it take to do the work of devotion? A lot! Mary was not being lazy. She was a woman of action, too.

I think you know this instinctively. The moment you become passive about your devotional life it evaporates. One of our elders has a saying about Christians who do not make coming to worship on Sunday a priority: "They're worshipping at the Church of the Mattress on

Spring Street." I have my worst struggle worshipping in very liturgical churches. But whose fault is it if I fail to worship when the style doesn't suit my preferences? My own! We must vigorously seek the Lord every day in every context. It's all about Jesus.

7. Lydia, a single businesswoman, was a woman of action in prayer and hospitality. Paul encountered her on a missionary journey: **"And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us"** (Acts 16:13-15).

Paul found Lydia already engaged in prayer with other Jewish women down by the river. Prayer is not a passive matter. If it is passive, why don't we all pray more? Lydia was also a spiritual leader in her home. No husband is mentioned, so we assume she took up the work of guiding her family and servants in spiritual things. First she came to faith in Christ, then her whole household. Lydia was also proactive in hospitality. How significant is the ministry of hospitality? Lydia's home became a beachhead in the expanding missionary endeavor. Her dwelling became an incubator for the church. Notice that she herself did not need to be the teacher in order to have those impacts.

8. Priscilla was a woman of action in standing up for the truth of Christ. The Book of Acts describes a critical intervention she and her husband made: **"Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately"** (Acts 18:24-26).

Are you able to straighten someone out when he or she is teaching something that is not the gospel? Priscilla was an active agent in confronting a man of great stature, learning, and eloquence. She was not merely along for the ride with her husband.

There are two parts to this. First, Priscilla had to have a rigorous grasp of the truth herself. Secondly, she had to be willing to take a risk in confronting an eminent man along with her husband. What was at stake? The eternal lives of men, women, and children. Be a Priscilla! Don't be passive about the truth! We live in a day where the majority of people who claim to be born again cannot explain the central truths of the Christian faith. We cannot afford to be lackadaisical about the word of life.

9. Phoebe, in a male-dominated society, actively used her gifts of service and leadership. Listen to what Paul said to the Roman church leadership as Phoebe was traveling there: **"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter**

**she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well"** (Romans 16:1-2). There are two code words in this text which reveal the significance of her ministry. First, Paul calls her a "servant" using the Greek word for deacon. Since there is no separate word for female deacon, we conclude that she held that office. Secondly, he calls her a "helper" using the Greek word for overseer. It seems she had the gift of leadership. Doesn't that change the picture?

Paul said: "I'm sending deacon Phoebe who is leading big ministries. Give her whatever she needs." It is vital that women today embrace the gift of leadership wherever God has given it and use it according to God's plan for the church.

10. Eunice was an active discipler. Did you ever wonder about the difficult and mystical process of finding someone to build up in the faith of Christ? Some of us never get started due to that! I recommend you simply look about your environment and disciple whoever is there. Eunice looked around and found her son, Timothy. Paul wrote to Timothy: **"For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well....that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."** (2 Timothy 1:5, 3:15).

Eunice disciplined her son who became a leader of the church and part of the Bible. If you are a mother start with your children, but most women do not have a child in the house. Who is at work, in your wider family, your neighborhood, or community? If it won't grow, convert it; if it will grow, disciple it. Eunice and her mom, Lois, changed the world through active discipling.

11. There are many more examples of women of action in the Bible, but we must conclude with Sarah who chose active submission to God. Brace yourself for an icy shock as you listen to Peter describe what gave Sarah joy: **"For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear"** (1 Peter 3:5-6 ).

Submission to God is not passive! It means being energized along the power lines of God's purpose for you. Notice that it does not say: "Sarah obeyed Abraham, skulking around in angry silence." It also does not say: "Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him an overbearing stinker." No, active submission to God rejoices to honor those whom God honors. In fact, every one of these eleven women of action found blessing, one way or another, by acting vigorously in submission to God. There is no blessing to be found in any other way.

CONCLUSION: What magic did the Supernanny bring to the troubled parents? She merely followed: **"Train up a child in the way he should go"** without quoting it. That family was transformed! God is looking for women of action to change the world by moving out energetically on the wisdom he has given. Start where you are and then let the Lord send you.