



Brothers and Sisters, Love One Another

Men and Women: A United Siblinghood in God's Mission

The opening chapters of Genesis paint a beautiful picture and pattern for us of men and women co-laboring together. Men and women, together, were to reflect the beauty, goodness, and creativity of God's image (Genesis 1:27). From the very beginning—and all throughout the rest of the Bible—men and women were meant to engage in God's mission as a united siblinghood of brothers and sisters. What God said of Adam, then, is true of our church as well: "It is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18).

At the Summit, we believe that the sibling relationship defines the way that men and women should interact with one another. Since both men and women are indispensable to the mission of the church, we know that we will engage in the work of the ministry with people of the opposite gender. In fact, we welcome it! God's renewed people, the church, should be a place where male-female relationships portray a vision of God's kingdom, in which we are known by the way we love one another (John 13:35).

So, what do healthy relationships between men and women look like in the church? How exactly do men and women at the Summit "love one another" as brothers and sisters?

Note: As the Summit continues to grow in the ways that men and women minister together as a united siblinghood in God's mission, many other related questions present themselves. For instance, *How can we give visibility to the women of our church who already hold positions of influence? What are the leadership pipelines for the women in our church? How can we create more of these opportunities? What obstacles continue to stand in the way of women developing their leadership skills?* These are enormously critical questions, and we are encouraged by current conversations addressing many of them. We've omitted those issues here, not because we find the questions minor but because we want to highlight the unique angle of the sibling relationship in the church. (In other words, this is just one slice of the pie. And we want to keep baking the whole thing!)

We Love Each Other Through Friendship

As fellow partners in the mission of God, believers are called to more than merely polite interactions with one another. In his letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul writes, "Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity" (1 Timothy 5:1–2 NIV). In Paul's mind, the notion of purity is linked with the concept of family. A sibling relationship implies a deep mutuality and desire for each other's flourishing. Seeing each other as siblings enables men and women in the church to relate to one another as both partners in the gospel and as friends. We protect purity in our relationships, then, not by avoiding members of the opposite sex, but by honoring them as siblings.

So, let us say a quick word **to the men**. *Get to know the female believers in your small group, on your ministry team, and at your campus—just as you would a man in the same role.* Say hello to them as you pass on the sidewalk. Ask them how they're doing, and offer to pray for them (and follow up on those prayer requests!). Ask them about significant upcoming life events. Include them in group activities. Encourage, affirm, and listen. If they are married, get to know their husbands. It's easier to have healthy interactions when you know someone. **Friendship cultivates relational clarity, while distance only cultivates awkwardness.**

Sadly, many women in the church have had the experience of feeling like their very *presence* is a threat to the purity of the men with whom they volunteer. Sometimes this comes across in the unspoken attitudes of men. At other times it is plainly and directly expressed. For those of us at the Summit, we want to make both the attitude and the overt expression of it a myth. Sisters are not a threat, and God forbid we ever even hint at this.

As an essential part of the body of Christ, when women do not utilize their strengths and bring them to light, the rest of the body will suffer. So, **to the ladies**, we encourage you that, though it seems obvious, it is worth reminding yourself daily that men and women think differently. Believe the best in the person you're interacting with. Don't assume that the other person understands what you mean; lean into the conversation, and take time to explain the why and how behind your thoughts. Rather than, "Why don't they get that?" the better question to ask may be, "What did I fail to communicate?" If you are excluded from ministry opportunities, speak up. And, if you don't feel your voice is being heard, consider that the men you're interacting with may just need a little time to process what you've said.

There will be many opportunities for you to model the kind of grace that we are called to show each other in every area of life. Will there be awkward situations and uncomfortable moments? Yes. These are opportunities for you to practice what we often say at the Summit: *Give the benefit of the doubt, and believe the best in one another.* Most of the men around you are trying, even if they botch it at times. Assume good intentions until proven otherwise.

If you have an idea for how we can grow in this area, let someone know. As a woman, you can help the Summit move forward in unique ways, so don't squander that gift. If you see a problem, don't assume that someone else has noticed it. If you think of a new ministry idea, don't assume that someone else has already suggested it.

For both men and women, it's crucial that we not only make ourselves accountable but that as a body of believers, we strive for the holiness of others, meaning we ask questions or bring it up when we observe something that needs to be addressed, without hesitation. Iron sharpens iron, and as brothers and sisters in Christ, we should be diligent to do that for one another.

We Love Each Other Through Wisdom

Men and women in the church can and should be friends. But we recognize that a critical aspect of love is maintaining appropriate boundaries. Some of us recoil at the talk of "boundaries," because we think of boundaries as barriers that we create to protect us from unsafe situations or people. In this context, however, we should not think of boundaries as separating certain "safe people" from other "risky people" but as creating a barrier for *all* of us—between wisdom and folly.

It is tragically common to hear of affairs that began with small and seemingly harmless compromises. We want the Summit to be a place in which the holiness of our people is protected and in which inappropriate relationships are unheard of.

In other words, we love each other by being *smart* in the way that we interact with one another. We avoid situations that put us at a higher risk for moral failure. We encourage transparency in our communication so that nothing can be hidden. We create and encourage boundaries that make it difficult for unhealthy relationships to flourish.

Most of all, we encourage transparency to be expressed through accountability in community. As David Powlison says, "When you create a secret garden of any sort in your life, mutant things inevitably grow." Every one of our church members should be in an accountability relationship with someone who regularly asks about key struggles in his or her life—including but not limited to male-female relationships.

More than "accountability relationships," though, we need an environment in which we openly speak into one another's lives, helping each other to apply the liberating power of the gospel with wisdom. [This kind of accountability](#) can only

come from true community. We need people in our lives who are close enough to notice when something may not be quite right. If we're spending too much time texting with someone, we need friends who can challenge us about it. If our friendship—which began innocently enough—has crossed a line, we need people who are close enough to see it and who love us well enough to pull us aside. As we often say, "[Discipleship happens in relationships.](#)"

Believe the Best

Loving each other as brothers and sisters in Christ will not come naturally or easily to any of us. Just think of your experience with your own biological siblings! Even with our own flesh and blood, we often struggle to love each other well. Remember: We are all sinners, prone to take God's good gifts and twist them. There is no set of rules, no carefully crafted document, no official Summit philosophy that can fully extract the sinful root that lies in each of our hearts. We need the grace of God.

But while there are challenges ahead, there is also great opportunity. We have the opportunity to lead our church in demonstrating sibling love, shepherding them to be the united and compassionate community that Jesus promised we would be. We have the opportunity to redeem the notion of spiritual siblinghood.

And we have more than an opportunity; we have a guide. God has sent a helper, the Holy Spirit, to lead us forward in love. The Holy Spirit, powerful enough to reconcile us to God, is also powerful enough to draw us together as a united family of faith. He alone cultivates compassion in our hearts, convicts us when we approach foolish decisions, and spurs us on to holiness. Ultimately, this is his work, and we are his workmanship. As the Apostle Paul said, the fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22).

Brothers and sisters, let's believe the best in one another. We all want the Summit to be a place where men and women flourish, where our families are protected, and where God is honored. Ask God to show you how to cultivate these friendships with a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood. Open your life up to the counsel of others. Above all, let's pray that what God has already declared to be true would become manifest in our midst, as we daily become a more united siblinghood engaged in God's mission.