

# Swimming UPS

The first words out of his mouth were, “I didn’t think I was going to be able to receive from you because you’re a woman.” Wow, what a way to greet a visiting missionary! Sadly, it wasn’t the only time I encountered that mindset while itinerating. In fact, even before I started raising my budget, a highly respected friend said to me, “You’ll never be able to raise a budget as a single woman.” Ouch. The sad thing is, I never encountered that attitude when I worked 5 years in the secular world. When it comes to affirming

**1. Stay sweet:** You will likely be rejected or slighted at some point because of your gender, but don’t let that phase you. Remember there is a spiritual battle going on, and the enemy is the enemy—not the person who rejects you. Also remember that it is God who called you, and you don’t need a 100% approval rating to walk in that calling. The temptation is to respond to rejection with pride or self-vindication, but you must resist that and “humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:6). Stay sweet even in response to rejection and trust that God will vindicate you as He sees fit. Who knows but that your response to someone’s rejection may ultimately

change their view of women in leadership as they see the character of Christ in you.

**3. Take advantage of your season of singleness:** Instead of bemoaning your singleness, see it for what it is—a divine opportunity to fall deeply in love with Jesus your Bridegroom and also get established as a minister in your own right. One of my closest friends is an Assemblies of God minister, but she is not esteemed as a woman with the call of God on her life because she has always lived in the shadow of her husband, who is also a minister. One day I was lamenting to this friend about being in my 30’s and still single, and she told me how she wished she would have had the opportunity I have to be respected as a minister in my own right before getting married and being known as so-and-so’s wife. Secondly, think of all the extra time you have to seek the Lord and invest in the ministry—especially

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women in leadership—especially young, single women—the secular world is sometimes more open-minded than the church.

Don’t get me wrong; I’m not a feminist who’s trying to balance the playing field. I just want to obey God and walk in the call He has on my life. But of all places, I find the most resistance to that call inside the church world. As a single woman, you face unique obstacles such as pastors who are hesitant to interact with you because you’re young and single, assumptions that you’re inarticulate and not able to preach the Word under the anointing, the stereotype that you’re over-emotional and not able to handle pressure like a man, or the idea that men will not be able to submit to your leadership without somehow compromising their manhood.

So how do you handle these unique obstacles? Here are a few things I’ve learned along the way:

**2. Go the extra mile:** Women are often not taken as seriously as men, so it is especially important for young, single women to go the extra mile to establish credibility in the ministry world. Dress and act professionally. (This is an absolute necessity for me as I’m only 4’ 11¾”—yes, quarter inches count in my world—so most people see me from behind and assume I’m in junior high.) For example, when speaking in churches, the trendy tight skirt will not win you as much favor as the conservative corporate pantsuit. Older ministers may get away with jeans at District Council, but you will need to make an effort to dress professionally in district settings if you want to be esteemed as a legitimate minister. And even

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in your disciples—as a single person. If you marry, things will have to change, so seize the season and have no regrets!

**4. Be yourself:** Yes, ministry is a male-dominated world, but you don’t have to become an androgynous being just to be accepted. Stay sweet, stay feminine, and be all the woman you are. I used to think being a strong female leader meant I couldn’t

# Stream:

## SINGLE AND FEMALE

## IN MINISTRY

BY LINDA SEILER

let guys in our ministry open doors for me or carry heavy things—because I can do it myself, and they'll respect me more if I don't show weakness! But when I ended up on crutches for 6 months, I had no choice but to let others do things for me. And I learned a secret. Guys like to take care of women, and especially their woman pastor. Let them be strong males and treat you like a special woman of God. It is not a sign of weakness; it actually makes the men in your ministry respect you more because you're able to humbly accept help that is offered and esteem them in their manhood.

**5. Network with other women in ministry:** Don't try to go it alone; let the body of Christ be God's gift to you. Find other females (married or single) that are in ministry and glean all you can from them. In fact, the

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advice to stay sweet despite rejection came from a conversation I had with Stefanie Chappell when I called and asked about her experiences as a single female Chi Alpha missionary. (Thanks for the help, Stefanie!) Also, take advantage of the ways our denomination is supporting women in leadership such as joining the Women in Ministry network ([www.wim.ag.org](http://www.wim.ag.org)), and attending the biennial Women in Ministry conference.

**6. Find godly men to help:** If you are a single gal leading a ministry by yourself, start praying for godly men to help you invest in the males in your group. I meet with my guys for leadership training, counseling, and all the other things that male leaders do with their students (taking appropriate precautions, of course, to meet in a public setting so as to live above reproach). But guys still need the input of a godly man to help them in areas of sexuality or other sensitive issues that would not be appropriate for you to address. If you don't have male staff associates, consider finding some men from your local church who wouldn't mind meeting with your guys once or twice a month—or even more if they have the

time. It takes pressure off you, and your guys will appreciate your shepherd's heart in wanting to find them the help that they need to grow in Christ.

I've noticed a difference in the way I'm treated when I follow the above advice. In fact, I'm happy to report that the man who initially said he didn't think he could receive from me because I was a woman completed his statement with one of the most gracious comments I've ever received as a female minister. Days later, I received a card in the mail from him again expressing his appreciation for my obedience to the Lord and how God had used that experience to change his whole view of women in ministry. Hold your heads high, ladies! Walk in God's calling, stay sweet, and allow Him to use you as His vessel of redemption as you swim upstream!



Linda Seiler is the Chi Alpha director at Purdue University. She is an avid golfer, loves dark chocolate, and her favorite Starbucks treat is a triple grande decaf nonfat latte with whip.