

Froswa' Booker-Drew



FRONT  
PORCH  
WISDOM

Navigating Leadership Pressures and Barriers  
— as a Woman of Color —



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## Introduction

# Sit with Me on the Porch



**IT HAS BEEN A JOY FOR ME** to work with women all over the country as facilitator and content creator for the Christian Community Development Association’s Women of Color Leadership Circle. Listening to these women’s stories and re-evaluating my own journey as a leader over the past twenty-five-plus years has caused me to reflect on the challenges we face. Leadership is difficult, and despite the rewards we experience in accomplishing tasks and serving others, we also face questions and doubts. Leadership is even more complicated when race and gender are a part of the equation. How do we address issues in the workplace and use our faith as a lens to deal with bias, discrimination, and outright lack of understanding?

My journey has been filled with triumph—I started my career as a specialist and “climbed the ladder” to become a national director, yet various traumas left me doubting my abilities, worth, and belonging. I have experienced pay inequity and have been overlooked for promotions. It is in those moments we realize who God is and who we are in Christ.

Through a combination of data, my lived experiences, and the lived experiences of others, this book is designed to serve as a toolkit offering solutions, reassurance, and wisdom as you traverse your own workplace journey—after all, God’s presence extends beyond the church and into the work we do. Whether we experience disappointment or



mind-blowing success, at the end of the day, what we do matters. As believers, we recognize that our work should glorify God: “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord, and not for men. . . . You serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24).

In this book we’ll lay a foundation using God’s Word about our work life. Before we can address workplace and organizational culture as persons of color, we must focus on our personal growth, examining our thoughts, relationships, and emotions. It’s important to understand how God sees women, so we’ll draw on Scripture and the stories of people such as Deborah, Mary and Martha, Hagar, and Leah. We’ll also discuss how Christ embodies leadership qualities and the importance of rest in work. Periodically we’ll look at case studies based on interviews I conducted with women of color ranging in age from their late twenties to midfifties. This is an opportunity to learn from others’ experiences and see how they’ve adapted, what lessons they’ve learned, and how they continue to persevere.

It is my hope that this book will provide clarity, mentoring, and even coaching to remind you that you are more than capable at succeeding no matter what space you choose to enter. You are a conqueror, and God’s Word grounds you in your “why”:

I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.

(Philippians 4:13)

Commit your deeds to Yahweh,

and your plans shall succeed. (Proverbs 16:3)

Don’t you be afraid, for I am with you.

Don’t be dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you.

Yes, I will help you.

Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my  
righteousness. (Isaiah 41:10)



As a Christian Black woman who has been in leadership for more than three decades, I don't often see our voices represented. Secular materials don't account for faith, and Christian leadership books don't reflect my experiences as a woman or as a person of color. Books by White women may address my struggle from a gender perspective, but they fail to encapsulate my experience as a racial minority in the United States. When I wrote my dissertation I found a few texts that spoke to my circumstances, but those were filled with academic terminology and likely inaccessible to the average reader. I wanted to write something that could speak to the hearts of women like me in the many facets of life.

An overarching theme of my leadership journey has been mentorship. Without the powerful women who spoke into my life, I would not be who I am today; their generosity of time and wisdom helped plant seeds that sprouted. I am reminded of 1 Corinthians 3:6 where Paul shares that while he planted and Apollos watered, ultimately God gave the increase. Paul was instructing the church in Corinth that God uses each of us to complete his will and advance the kingdom. That church grew as a result of Paul and Apollos's stewardship, but we cannot neglect recognizing God's role in their lives.

Our experiences shape who we are, and God does not waste anything we go through. At the time of this writing I am going through a challenging season—leading an adult daughter who works for me along with a team of other young adults who are finding their way. I'm in a new role that is awkward; I am an adult child of an amazing woman who is struggling with losing her independence. My mother lives with me and our roles have changed. I find that I am leading her as she ages and needs support from me in a different way. I am leading a business, growing my clients through my work as their coach or consultant, helping them think differently about how they show up and lead others. It can be a lot at times, but I find that as I spend more time seeking God, I can carry the many loads that become heavy. This



allows me to lead myself differently than I have in the past. My work with others is much more impactful and productive when I recognize where my strength comes from and who I am completely relying on.

My relationship with God didn't happen overnight. It's been a season of transitions. After being married for almost thirty years, I recently went through an amicable divorce. I moved to a new home in a new city, and shortly thereafter I left a job that represented security for me. In this difficult transition, I learned that the only stability I had in life was my relationship with God. I was blessed with some amazing friends who supported me through ambiguous moments when I wasn't sure what was next, and my mother and daughter were rocks for me, yet their encouragement and motivation could take me only so far. It was my walk with God that truly carried me.

One of the first lessons we must acknowledge as leaders is that we need God and must stay in submission under God's authority and leadership. When we move away from that, we risk believing that our judgment and experiences are all we need. The second lesson is that as leaders, we need other people. The cross is an example of leadership. It not only points up to God but it also reaches out as well. We cannot exist without God, and we definitely cannot exist without others. Leaders cannot exist in isolation.

## **SO WHY THE FRONT PORCH?**

If leaders cannot exist in isolation, then we need spaces to gather. During my childhood, women would congregate on the front porch to converse or style each other's hair. The porch served as a space for women to share and bond. Counsel, laughter, and secrets were abundant on that front porch. This book aims to be like the front porch, providing women of color a forum to learn not just from me but from other women. It is intended to be a safe haven where we can be our authentic selves in God's and each other's company, free of judgment, and filled only with affirmation and celebration. You are



blessed. You are special. You are brilliant, even when you doubt yourself or others question your capabilities—that does not alter the essence of who you are.

This book aims to offer advice and strategies like a wise friend, helping you navigate life's difficulties through applying Christian values. It is intended for all readers, because everyone exhibits leadership in some capacity, first through managing ourselves. While not all leaders guide teams, each person leads their own life. So this book strives to help anyone improve as a leader of both self and others, by imparting lessons for personal growth. I hope you will see some of your experiences reflected on these pages, and if you don't need the other lessons, just know they are there if and when you do. The front porch is always available to you.



# 1

## What Do Leadership, Women, and Work Have to Do with It?



**SOME OF YOU MAY REMEMBER THE SONG** “What’s Love Got to Do With It?” by Tina Turner. Tina was reflecting on an abusive relationship, noting that love wasn’t enough to keep things together. Tina was married to Ike Turner, and her strength and courage eventually propelled her to leave the abusive marriage and save her own life. In the divorce she asked for nothing but to keep her name. Many would say she was starting over, but she understood she was bringing something with her that was invaluable: her power. With unwavering faith in herself and her abilities, she believed that her potential was limitless. Tina assessed her circumstances and aspired to a better future. She had developed a practice of reflection and tapped into her inner leader.

So what do leadership, women, and work have to do with the front porch and our faith? With a slight twist on the lyrics, we must conduct a similar examination. We must examine our thinking and interpretation of who we are and what God says about us. Many of us have grown up in faith communities that have led us to believe we are inferior to men. This misunderstanding is often rooted in the interpretation of Genesis 2:18, which states, “And Jehovah God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him” (ASV).



When we do not see our value in Christ, it impacts how we see ourselves in other areas of life. *Ezer kenegdo* is a Hebrew phrase that means “a helper suitable for him” and is used in the Bible to describe the relationship between Adam and Eve. *Kenegdo* says the thing God makes for Adam will be like him. So this creation will be on the same level as Adam, not better or worse. This helper will be half of a pair and will relate to Adam as the South Pole relates to the North Pole.<sup>1</sup> *Ezer* is also interpreted as “warrior,” and *ezer kenegdo* can be interpreted as “a powerful complement.” How would our lives be different if we had known earlier that we are not a “suitable helper” but were created to be a powerful complement—and that we have value to each other, to men, and to God. We must own this and walk in it. This does not minimize or diminish our brothers but recognizes our significance.

*Ezer kenegdo* has significant implications for women’s leadership. In this context, the phrase is a powerful affirmation of women’s value and potential. It suggests that women are not simply helpers or companions to men but powerful and capable leaders in their own right. This can be a powerful source of inspiration and empowerment for women who desire to lead or are currently leading. *Ezer kenegdo* can also shift the way we think about leadership. Traditionally leadership has been seen as a masculine trait; however, *ezer kenegdo* suggests that it’s not about dominance or power but partnership and collaboration. This can be a helpful framework for women who want to lead in a way that is more inclusive and collaborative.

In these ways *ezer kenegdo* can help women leaders see themselves as powerful and capable and help them build strong partnerships with others, both men and women. This can help women leaders overcome the challenges they face in the workplace and achieve success in their careers.

It’s important to emphasize the remarkable nature of women as God’s creative masterpieces. Just like men, women are the embodiment

of divine genius and are fearfully and wonderfully made. This identity as image-bearers of God is inherent and unchanging.

## WOMEN MODELS IN THE BIBLE

The Bible features numerous influential women, including Deborah, Mary, Martha, Hagar, and Leah. However, many more women have made significant contributions and their stories are worth exploring. These women can teach all of us valuable lessons and inspire us in our faith journeys. I will share a few examples, but I encourage you to seek out and learn about other women in the faith who may not be as well-known.

***The five daughters of Zelophehad.*** In Numbers 26–27, we encounter the story of the five daughters of Zelophehad: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. After their father died without sons, these women boldly approached Moses to request the rightful inheritance of their father's land, challenging the prevailing tradition that property immediately passed to males. Moses sought guidance from God, who affirmed that they should receive their father's land. To ensure that the inheritance remained within their tribe, the women were required to marry within the tribe, preserving their legacy and the integrity of their ancestral lineage.

***Abigail.*** In 1 Samuel 25:3, the Bible introduces Abigail, a beautiful and intelligent woman who was married to a challenging man named Nabal. When David sought assistance from Nabal, he was met with a refusal. David's anger flared, and he planned to kill Nabal. However, Abigail intervened, displaying quick thinking and strategic reasoning to save her husband.

Her approach was calculated; she waited until daybreak, when Nabal was sober, to confront him. Abigail revealed the consequences of his actions, causing Nabal's spirit to fail, and he became like a stone. Divine retribution followed, and about ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal, leading to his death. Upon hearing of Nabal's demise, David,

recognizing Abigail's wisdom and virtue, asked her to marry him (1 Samuel 25:40-42).

**Priscilla.** In Acts 18, we encounter the remarkable figure of Priscilla, a woman mentioned in four different biblical texts. Together with her husband, Aquila, they owned a business and dedicated their lives to supporting Paul and his ministry, becoming kingdom financiers. Priscilla's character stood out as she possessed a generous and compassionate spirit, actively involved in spreading God's word as a dedicated missionary.

**Jehosheba.** We are introduced to Jehoram's daughter Jehosheba, the wife of the high priest Jehoiada, in 2 Kings 11. After the assassination of King Ahaziah, his mother seized power and ruthlessly eliminated potential rivals. However, Jehosheba bravely saved her nephew, the infant Joash, keeping him hidden for six long years. When Joash was seven, she orchestrated his coronation as king. Jehosheba's courageous actions reveal her strength of character and unwavering determination.

**Susanna.** The Roman Catholic Bible includes the book of Susanna. Susanna was a wealthy Babylonian Jewish woman married to Jo'akim. She was the daughter of Hilki'ah and was raised to fear God. She was a stunning and devoted wife who faced a grave accusation from elders in the community who deceitfully charged her with promiscuity out of revenge for her rejection of their advances. They had a history of lying and perverting justice, abusing their power and position in the community. To further their scheme, they falsely accused her of adultery, leading to an unjust sentence of death.

Most of us are familiar with the story of Daniel, who was taken into captivity from Judah under King Nebuchadnezzar's rule and lived as an exile in Babylon. We are aware of the accounts of Daniel's faithfulness and prophetic voice, but this narrative involving Susanna isn't as well-known. Through divine intervention, God selected young Daniel to champion Susanna's defense, leading to the revelation of the

elders' deception. For me, Susanna symbolizes the resilience and bravery of standing firm in the face of tremendous adversity and opposition. Her story represents standing up against power, trusting God even when your fate looks bleak.

***Eunice and Lois.*** In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul draws attention to Timothy's mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, emphasizing their vital role in shaping Timothy's faith. Despite the limited information available about these women, Paul emphasizes the profound impact of their training and teaching on Timothy's life. In a culture dominated by male authority, these exceptional women assumed the role of mentors, sharing wisdom that transformed Timothy's trajectory. This serves as a reminder of the influence we can have on our own children's lives, underscoring the importance of providing them with a strong foundation of faith and values.

## **JESUS AS THE ULTIMATE LEADERSHIP EXAMPLE**

The Bible is full of female figures who exhibited exceptional leadership qualities. Let's explore what the Bible teaches us through the example of Jesus, our ultimate model of leadership.

- ♦ Jesus is a powerful leader whose impact continues well beyond his followers' earthly existence (Matthew 11:27; 28:18-20; John 17:2; Ephesians 1:20-21).
- ♦ Jesus is a servant leader who submits to God's authority (Mark 10:45).
- ♦ Jesus mentors and disciples others. He sees their potential instead of focusing solely on their problems (Matthew 28:16-20; John 8:31-38; 13:34-35).
- ♦ Jesus takes time to pray and seek God's guidance (Luke 6:12; 9:28).
- ♦ Jesus does not heal everyone he comes in contact with. He could, but he knows his assignment and who he came for (John 5:1-15).



- ♦ Jesus recognizes when power goes out of him (Luke 8:46-48). Many of us exhaust ourselves because we don't realize power leaves us daily.
- ♦ Jesus speaks truth in love (John 18:37-38).
- ♦ Jesus rests. He takes time away from the crowds (Luke 5:16).
- ♦ Jesus is enjoyable to be around. How could twelve men spend three years around someone who was constantly condemning them? They obviously want to follow him (Mark 6:7).
- ♦ Jesus is prepared for leadership as a child and is thirty when he begins his earthly ministry (Luke 2:42-47; 3:23). Leadership doesn't have to be something that happens when you're old.
- ♦ Jesus' leadership impact is immediate as the disciples multiply in number (Acts 2:47; 6:7). Leadership doesn't have to take generations to accomplish its work.
- ♦ Jesus understands that people have needs. He cares for them and makes sure their basic needs—like food and a comfortable place to sit—are met (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 8:1-9).

Jesus is the consummate leader, and we can learn many lessons from his interactions with others. Notice the tremendous impact he made when in community, modeling behavior, mentoring, and working with the disciples and the people he encountered. Jesus' work was intentional and comprehensive, and its importance should not be lost on us.

Labor holds great significance in the eyes of God. The Bible tells us in Genesis 2:15 that God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden to work and care for it. Humans were not designed to remain idle but to fulfill a purpose. Work was not a consequence of the fall but preceded it, although Adam and Eve's sinful choices made their work more challenging.

In the book of Revelation we get a glimpse of a future where there will be a new heaven and a new earth. This world will be free from sin and all things be made new. Consequently, the nature of work will also

be transformed. The apostle Paul encouraged believers to do their work before Christ's second coming with a willing spirit, as if serving the Lord directly rather than seeking recognition or reward from people. He reminded them—and us—that our ultimate reward comes from God, and we are working for Christ, the Master who will bring the inheritance of eternal life.

In the journey of life, while we secure financial stability and pursue purpose, it is imperative that we seek divine favor and establish our work with God's guidance. Jesus' servant leadership is how we as Christians and women of color can live out being *ezer kenegdo* today.

## SCRIPTURES TO CONSIDER

The hands of the diligent ones shall rule,  
but laziness ends in slave labor. (Proverbs 12:24)

In all hard work there is profit,  
but the talk of the lips leads only to poverty. (Proverbs 14:23)

Commit your deeds to Yahweh,  
and your plans shall succeed. (Proverbs 16:3)

It shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. Whoever desires to be first among you shall be your bondservant, even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:26-28)

To whomever much is given, of him will much be required; and to whom much was entrusted, of him more will be asked. (Luke 12:48)

Doing nothing through rivalry or through conceit, but in humility, each counting others better than himself; each of you not just looking to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does the meaning of *ezer kenegdo* resonate with you? In what ways are you a warrior?
2. What is God saying to you about your leadership journey through the stories of women in the Bible?
3. Does Jesus' leadership example help you find purpose in your work? Why or why not?

## PRAYER

Dear Lord, I am grateful for revealing the significance of women in the Scriptures to me. I am confident there is a divine purpose for my life and the work I am called to do. I ask you to empower me to make a positive impact on the world. Grant me the strength to serve others, lead with wisdom and compassion, and live a life that brings honor and glory to your name. In the precious name of Jesus, amen.

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