

Am I a Prophet, Priest, or a King?



The Hidden All-Male Leadership
Typology Many Church Planters Are
Bringing With Them to Boston

Triperspectivalism
Prophet, Priest, King
Leadership Teams Built Around Jesus

by Emily Nielsen Jones, writer, philanthropist, global human rights advocate, mother of three who has been living in the Boston area and attending evangelical churches here since the early 90's

The fifth in a series: "Band of Brothers: A Case Study of Church Planting in Boston"

Indispensable: Women Who Plant Churches by Carolyn Custis James

A "Band of Brothers": The Very Young, Very Male Face of Boston Church Planting by Emily Nielsen Jones

Godless Land or Revival City? It Depends on Your Theology of Gender by Kelly Ladd Bishop

Why Women Don't Plant Churches (& How to Change It) by Dave Swaim

***"You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ
But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." ~ 1 Peter 2:5-9***

Like many, I find myself continually infatuated by this new pope. I am in love with his refreshingly simple humanity and his daring gestures to to eschew so many of royal trappings of status and privilege that accompany his position. As a low church Protestant—I grew up Southern Baptist in upstate New York and have spent most of my religious journey in evangelical churches—the “priesthood of all believers” formed the ground floor of my spiritual journey. So I have never been able to relate with or stomach much pomp and circumstance and fancy sounding titles separating clergy from ordinary folks like me sitting in the pews.

But life is funny, how things have a way of coming full circle in the strangest of ways... While the pope today is eschewing many of the royal trappings of his office and is walking around and talking a lot like a Protestant, all these young guys starting church plants across my city, Boston, and across the country are using an imperial-sounding leadership schema (which doesn't sound at all Protestant to me) which is encouraging young men to type themselves as one of three Old Testament “offices”: *prophet, priest, or king*. As three church planting voices describe:



“If you're a leader in the church, here's a helpful chart to think through strengths and inclinations using the grid of prophet-priest-king.” ~ Justin Taylor, [“Triperspectival Leadership: Prophets, Priests, Kings”](#), The Gospel Coalition

“We like to talk about basically three categories of gifts or abilities or ways that people are hardwired. We talk about prophets, priests, and kings...”

~ Mark Driscoll, Acts 29 Church Planting Network (from [a scan of his writing it is clear that what he means is “men”](#))

“Is there a test that will tell me if I’m more of a prophet, a priest, or a king? I’ve gotten this question a lot lately, and to my knowledge, no such assessment exists.”

~ James Munson, with Acts 29 and author of Prophet/Priest/King church planting leadership materials including “Triperspectivalism: Prophet, Priest, King - Leadership Teams Built Around Jesus

So it was developed, a whole set of handy dandy tools to help church planters type themselves into one of these three Old Testament “offices”--prophet, priest, or king. This is the second article of a five-part series looking at Boston’s church planting subculture, with a particular focus on the gender impact of all these new

GET THE MEN

Mark Driscoll » Complementarian Church Leadership

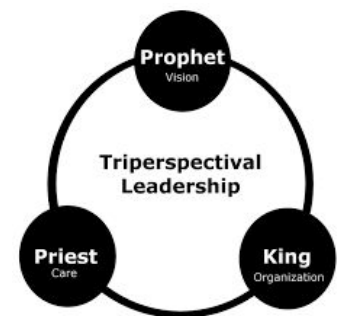


This is a series on 11 Leadership Lessons from 12 Disciples, based on the recent sermon Jesus Calls the Twelve, on Luke 6:12-16.

churches starting across Boston and surrounding New England region. In the first article released a few weeks ago, [A “Band of Brothers”: The Very Young, Very Male Face of Boston’s Church Planting Movement](#), I described a patriarchal shift that I see happening across the evangelical landscape here in Boston as multiple external church planting networks recruit young men from other states--who self-identify as a “band of brothers”--to move here to plant churches rooted in a church growth/replication strategy focused on “getting the men”, a phrase popularized by church planting “king” Mark Driscoll, founder and ex-pastor in the Acts 29 church planting network.

drill down into a popular new church planting leadership typology hidden within the church planting subculture called “[triperspectivalism](#)” which uses a royal/priestly motif to categorize male leadership. There is some theological and stylistic variance across church planting networks--thankfully there are some which embrace women as co-leaders of the church and which are not espousing this “get the men” macho church culture--but the large majority of the church plants in Boston that have started over the past 10-15 years have an explicitly all-male leadership structure which *defines spiritual leadership as intrinsically male* based on a belief in the eternal subordination of females to males in both the family and the church.

In this article, we will



New Church Planting Vernacular

Although this term “triperspectivalism” (I finally have learned how to spell it!) may sound foreign, debating whether one is a “prophet, priest, or king” has become a popular new parlance across much of the church planting subculture. As church planter Luke Cirillo describes in a 2015 article in Christianity Today, “[Pastors, We are Not Kings](#)”:

“I remember the first time I heard the idea. I was out with some friends at a coffee shop in Portland. We were surrounded by old burlap coffee sacks from places like Ethiopia, sitting on worn leather couches and discussing, as we often did, church ministry. One of my friends was explaining that every person fits into one of three broad categories for ministry: prophet, priest, or king. From pastor to lay person to barista, all people

(whether they knew it or not) can identify their ministerial role through one of those lenses.”

While the word “people” is occasionally used in this prophet/priest/king leadership schema, if you google “church planting” “prophet priest king” “leadership” and peruse what you find, you will quickly see a lot of young guys talking this prophet/priest/king typology and if you take just a little time to read what they are saying you will see that *there are no “queens” in this taxonomy!*

For good reasons, church plants here in Boston don’t exactly use this imperial terminology in everyday church life, but nonetheless it is in many of the church plants’ founding DNA as it is a leadership construct that appears across church planting white papers, conferences, blogs, and theological/organizational resources. If you are new to this new church speak, you might be thinking *What century are we in? Is this for real?* We may still be enamored by the British royal family and all, and a lot of us got into the song Royal, but didn’t we leave monarchy in another century? And as Protestants, didn’t we a few centuries ago shift away from a theology that viewed some people as a priestly caste with a divine-right to rule? What about the “priesthood of all believers”?

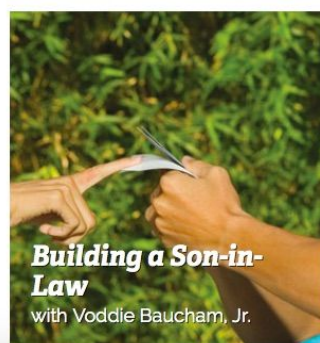
Picture a bunch of young guys from all these hip, avant garde sounding churches here in Boston--Reality, Mosaic, New City, Remix, River, Seven Mile, The Intersection, Connexion--sitting at a Starbucks debating whether they are a prophet, priest, or a king... I’m no psychologist, but this doesn’t strike me as a picture of psychological or spiritual maturity.

Is this Mormonism?

If any of these knee-jerk reactions when through your mind as you began this article, you are not alone! I first stumbled upon this “band of brothers” “prophet-priest-king” leadership construct when looking for materials for a

WHAT HE MUST BE

Pastor Voddie Baucham talks with Dennis Rainey about the characteristics a young man must have to show that he’s ready to be married. Dennis Rainey also talks about the qualifications of a married man, which includes being a priest, prophet, provider and pastor of his family.

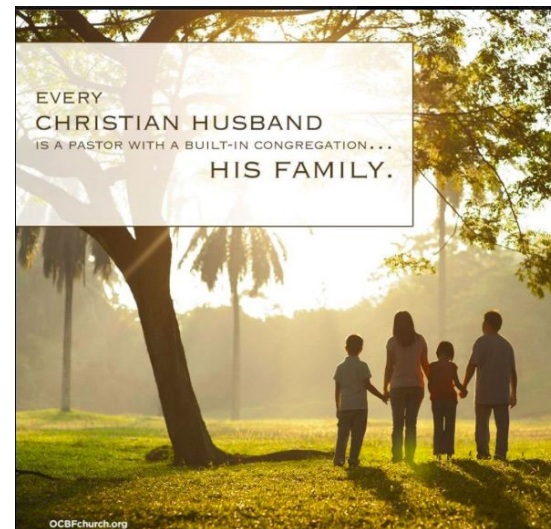


mother-daughter weekend with my then 11-year old daughter and was stunned to find many Christian para-church ministries that have been part of my own religious journey--like Cru's Family Life Today featured here--advocating this *male-is-prophet/priest/king* gender construct [even in parenting curriculum for girls and boys](#). Needless to say, I said no thank you to all these lovely resources advocating girls not develop independence and wait to be led by a patriarch. I'll stick with the American Girl curriculum and raise my daughter to be an empowered human to grow into her own native God-given agency.

When I was describing all this to a friend, he poignantly asked "Are you sure they're not Mormons?" He was sort of joking but there are in fact many parallels between the Mormon practice of anointing young boys at age 11 into the Aaronic priesthood and this church planting subculture which is grooming young guys barely out of seminary to type themselves as a prophet, priest, or king. In both religious ponds, this young male priesthood keeps spiritually mature, adult women at the margins of church life.

It seems to be a new evangelical script that many organizations and networks are cross-pollinating and adapting into leadership tools and strategies, particularly in the church planting subculture which is geared toward millennials, so much so that these three "offices" have become akin to a Myers-Brigg personality test.

This imperial leadership construct is not readily seen on most church plants' homepages, but is in fact a cross-cutting core theme across many of the organizations and networks that make up the vast church planting ecosystem here in Boston. Scattered throughout this article are images and links to how different church planting networks, bootcamps, and leadership resources are popularizing this imperial leadership typology.



What Does it Look Like To Be A Prophet, Priest, or king?

Here are a just a few here which are featured prominently in church planting resources and blogs which will give you a window into the leadership self-perception of many of the young men leading Boston's church plants and the history of the recent popularization of this construct within the church planting subculture.

“**Triperspectivalism is word that sounds much more complicated than it actually is. My own introduction to the concept was through a talk given by Mark Driscoll (which is available [here](#)) at the CCEF national conference a few years back. The context of that lecture was triperspectivalism's application to church leadership roles. This way of looking at things allows leaders to pinpoint the different types of people in the church. From this vantage point, some people have a love for the message of the church, some for the people of the church, and some for the tasks and mission of the church. Ideally, these groups of people should work in tandem with one another to achieve a balanced approach to ministry. In terms of a short assessment, [this post](#) by Jamie Munson is good place to start to see whether you are more of a prophet (message oriented), priest (people oriented), or king (task oriented). You can see though that as we grow in our Christ-likeness we would grow in all three of these areas. An effective minister of the Word needs to be message, people, and method oriented. Neglecting one or more aspects leads to issues. For instance, pastors who are big on message, but ignore people**

WHICH ARE YOU?

PROPHET

Church leadership focused on the **message**

ATTRIBUTES / FOCUS

- Leads through communication
- Visionary
- Preacher
- Visible
- Larger audience
- Air war

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

- Teaching
- Knowledge
- Preaching

PRONE TO SIN

- Harsh
- Cold
- Self-righteous w/ knowledge

PRIEST

Church leadership focused on the **people**

ATTRIBUTES / FOCUS

- Leads through relationships
- Care and shepherding
- Smaller audiences (one-on-one)
- Ground war

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

- Encouragement
- Mercy
- Relationships

PRONE TO SIN

- Tolerance of sin
- Lack of truth
- Self-righteous w/ compassion or love

KING

Church leadership focused on the **tasks**

ATTRIBUTES / FOCUS

- Leads through strategy
- Vision implementer
- Often behind the scenes
- Systems builder
- Resource manager
- Logistics

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

- Leadership
- Administration

PRONE TO SIN

- Rigid
- Rules (Methodolatry)
- Self-righteous w/ policy

and methods are the pastors that come off like walking Bible dictionaries. Pastors who are big on people but soft on message and methods will seem shallow and fluffy. Pastors who are big on methods may treat people as means to an end. None of these is a place you want to find your

church.” ~ Nate Clairborne, [Triperspectivalism: More Than Church Leadership Analysis](#), chart above from [Resurgence](#)

In a 2015 article [Exploring A Husband's Role as Prophet, Priest, and King](#)

Exploring a Husband's Role as a Prophet, Priest and King



Are you the prophet, priest, and king of your home?

and King in Charisma Magazine, a popular theologically reformed church planting resource, Patrick Murray, Founder/ CEO, Man in the

Mirror gives us a window into how church planters apply this “classic threefold office of prophet, priest, and

king” not just in the church but also the home : **“Some men think Christ is Jesus' last name. Of course, Christ is not a name but a title for Jesus that means "Messiah" or "anointed one." Jesus loved the church—His family—as its Christ, or anointed one. Since husbands are to love their wives in the same way as the anointed one loves His family, they need to know exactly what Jesus was anointed to do. In the New Testament, as we shall see, husbands become anointed ones. In theology, Christ occupies the classic threefold office of prophet, priest and king. Let's explore how this relates to you...**

A husband is to be the family prophet. He represents God to his wife (and, by extension, his family—the fruit of their union). When his wife reacts emotionally, he calms her with God's wisdom. He proclaims the gospel of faith to his family. He provides biblical instruction and training to his wife and children without becoming legalistic. He prepares family devotions and encourages private devotions. He is the arbiter of family values. He insists on regular church attendance. He is a messenger from God to his family....

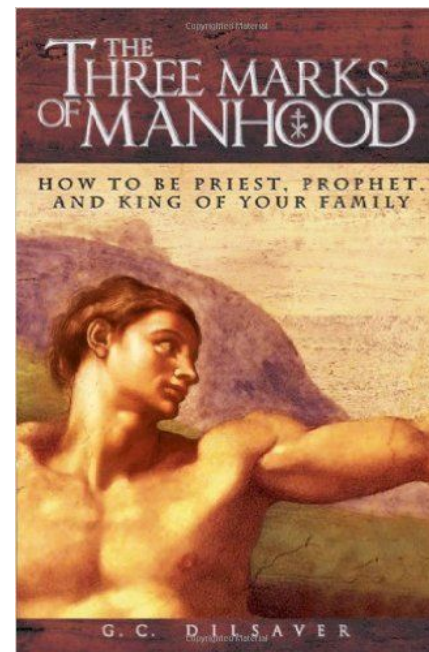
A husband is to be the family priest. He represents his wife and children to God. He spends time in prayer each day remembering the needs and concerns of his wife. He prays for the salvation of his children. Like Job, he asks the Lord to forgive the sins of his children. He sets the spiritual temperature in the home. He sacrifices his life for theirs. He is a mediator to God for his family.

A husband is to be the family king. He provides for the needs of his family. He works diligently to earn enough for food and shelter. He administers discipline with fairness. He quickly forgives and overlooks offenses. He acts in a manner worthy of receiving honor. He treats his wife with consideration and respect. He is careful not to be harsh with her. He is a provider for his family.

Husbands are to be the anointed spiritual leaders of their wives. God has anointed you to lead your wife as her prophet, priest and king.”

There a whole crop of “be a real man” books out in the church planting and men’s movement market these days. Books like the one here by Dr. Dilsaver which “promotes a new and untainted patriarchy” to encourage men to “realize their identity to the fullest--empowering them to resist the encroachment of secular culture.” This identity, as you see in in the cover is as “prophet, priest, and king” of the family, which holds absolute and “ultimate authority. The Gospel Coalition (TGC) is like the hub of wheel of most of the patriarchal church planting networks providing lots of advice about how men should step up into leadership and women step aside to learn submission. Here is a chart the 2010 article [Triperspectival Leadership: Prophet, Priests, Kings](#) on TGC blog.

“If you’re a leader in the church, here’s a helpful chart to think through strengths and inclinations using the grid of prophet-priest-king... Timmy Brister has pulled together a nice list of resources related to [Triperspectival Leadership and Church Planting.](#)”



Last one. In this description in [Building a Model Covenant Community through Church-Planting](#) you see how the “get the men” *band of brothers* male discipleship motif described in my last post and the imperial

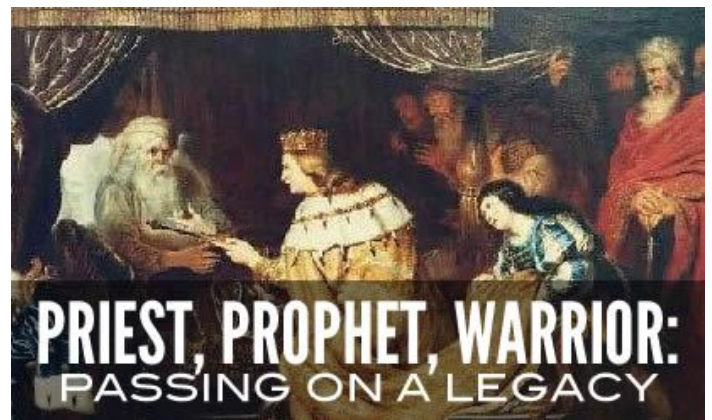
prophet/priest/king motif tie together in the church planting narrative and self-identity as a leadership team fulfilling Jesus’ example. Jesus did in fact have female disciples and hardly is an image of machismo but let me not get off on a tangent... Interestingly, some of the church planting and men’s ministry resources interchange the word “shepherd” in lieu of “king” and in some cases “warrior” to sound less royal and more macho.



“Jesus models how a pastor can invest his life in twelve men and build a solid covenant

community. Great church-builders follow this example by reflecting Christ's character as prophet, priest, and king. The prophet casts a vision from the pulpit that encourages church members to meet their deep spiritual needs through close relationships with Christ and one another. The priest provides pastoral care to the men with whom he has close prayer and accountability relationships. The king administers programs and coordinates activities that meet the needs of the sheep in the congregation.

The pastor fulfills all of his roles by helping believers under his care understand God's purpose for themselves and for the church. Such pursuit of a divinely-guided purpose or mission inspires men and women while helping the pastor integrate his three roles. In successful churches, the pastor typically serves as a prophet during the Sunday sermon then serves as a priest to a dozen men who receive pastoral care during the week. In his prophetic role, the pastor may also follow the model of Luke 10:1 and inspire 72 men to go out into the community. Ideally, the lead teaching and preaching pastor should unite with 12+ elders and 72+ deacons who can assist with the functions of the king and priest so that administration demands do not overwhelm the lead pastor. While serving as prophets, priests, and kings, pastors must remember the paramount importance of discipleship. T.M. Moore, the highly regarded theologian and author, reminds pastors that their first calling is to make disciples.”



A New Spin on An Old Paradigm: King Me

While many evangelicals have in fact moved away from all-male leadership structures and a chain-of-command patriarchal family structure to a more level playing field for men and women to share in decision-making and spiritual authority, the church planters have developed a new spin on a very old paradigm: women step aside, men, step up!, you are God’s anointed “prophets, priests, and kings” of both the church and the family (and some say society) and we need YOU young men to move from your home state to come to the “spiritual wasteland” that is Boston/New England to start a “real” Christian church where men lead and women play a support role without titles in the background. And it isn’t only in the church planting networks.



These overlap with many other ministries including family, college, youth ministry, counseling, leadership development, etc which are reclaiming from “soft complementarianism” (a term evangelicals use to hold equality together with male authority) this more unadulterated patriarchal posture which, as this post which just came across my facebook feed depicts, views the father as the pastor/king and the wife and the children as a husband’s disciples/subjects.

(If this sounds inflammatory, please follow the trail of links in my last article and this one as well to hear firsthand from the church planters themselves.)

Of the nine main networks that are planting churches here in Boston, all but two have at the center of their church growth/replication strategy—and their definition of what it means to be a “real” Christian church—an emphasis on male discipleship as their primary church planting vehicle and the and cultivating defined gender roles of male leadership and female submission as central to preserving “gospel culture” in the church and the home. As stated in point four of one of the founding vision statements of one of the seven church planting networks coming here to Boston, Sovereign Grace, in “Our Seven Shared Values”,

“COMPLEMENTARIAN LEADERSHIP IN THE HOME AND IN THE CHURCH

We believe it was God’s glorious plan to create men and women in His image, giving them equal dignity and value in His sight, while appointing differing and complementary roles for them within the home and the church (Genesis 1:26–28; Ephesians 5:22–33; 1 Timothy 2:8–15). Because these roles give different expressions to God’s image in humanity, they should be valued and pursued in joy and faith. As the redeemed community of God, the church has a unique opportunity and responsibility to celebrate this complementarity, to contend for it against cultural hostility, and to protect it from sinful distortions.”

They don’t state exactly what this “complementarity” means but, like many evangelicals now who use the term “complementarian”, the word “complementary” is not used in an equal, mutual way but rather in separate and distinct gender-based “roles” which deem spiritual authority as categorically male and supportive, “submissive” roles as categorically female. So needless to say, as shown throughout Sovereign Grace’s recruitment materials (and in the image below) church planting and leading is deemed to be only open to men as is spelled out as one of the core distinctives of Sovereign Grace’s global church planting network:

“Through the gift ministries, all members of the Church are to be nurtured and equipped for the work of ministry. Women play a vital role in the life of the church, but in keeping with God’s created design they are not permitted “to teach or to exercise authority over a man” (1 Timothy 2:12 ESV). Leadership in the church is male.”

Another church planting network called 9Marks which has been sending young men to start churches in Boston, has as its ninth “mark” a very categorical exclusion of women from leadership:

“The Bible teaches that each local church should be led by a plurality of godly, qualified men called elders.”

If the archetype of the male leader in the 90's brand of evangelical complementarianism was the “servant leader”, the new leadership archetype of the church planters is unvarnished patriarchy: women step aside, men reclaim your rightful place as modern-day prophets, priests, and kings of the church and the family.

I wish this was sensationalized hype

but in fact you will see that “The” Gospel Coalition that surrounds and unites most of these church planting networks and resources is not a broad coalition of Christians but rather is, at its core, a new men’s movement that is rebranding patriarchy into a hip, new leadership type-ing tool along the lines of the Myers-Brigg Personality Test which sees men as the “anointed ones” of the New Testament covenant with a mandate to take on the Old Testament “offices” of prophet, priest, and king. As you delve into these different church planting leadership development/discipleship tools, you will quickly see that “King” is not exactly interpreted in gender-neutral terms!



[For more on the mis-directed theology behind this Prophet/Priest/King leadership construct being popularized by the church planting subculture](#)

Understanding this male discipleship construct that lies at the center of the church planting mindset is helpful in figuring out the puzzle of how in a relatively short period of time the tenor of the evangelical gender landscape could have shifted so dramatically to this more preeminent, categorically male church leadership structure. As we say in social change, this did not happen haphazardly but rather by an intentional process of [Organized Diffusion](#) that has brought many church planting networks together in an overlapping, loose affiliation.

Thankfully many voices are rising up and asking for God’s sake what is going on? [Where are all the women in this church planting movement?](#)

As for me, I am not keen on using royal or militaristic metaphors for church leadership in this day and age where warfare continues to wreak havoc on the human family and where the whole world (including corporations) has shifted to a more level social structure. But *if* we choose to use an imperial motif/title such as “king” to describe spiritual authority, then we must not ignore the “queens” sitting in our pews. And prophetesses and priestesses. *All of us* as human beings possess something sacred within that can be awakened to become these things. And more. Each a unique image of God, not a rank or role. Each here with a unique destiny that is ours alone to fulfill. Power together, not power over. Power to unleash all of our spiritual gifts for the *good of the whole*. All of us, no exceptions, born with *a crown of unfading glory* (1 Peter 5:1) and part of *a royal priesthood* (1 Peter 2:9).



My hope and prayer: [Reclaiming Shared “Dominion” & the Priesthood of All Believers from this Young Male Priesthood](#)

Church planters, WWJD¹?

One step forward, two steps backwards. We can accept this without being resigned to it. For the sake of our daughters and their daughters' daughters. For the sake of the wise, spiritual mature women leaders who have faithfully followed their sacred calling into ministry and who fill the pews of our churches. For the sake of more mutual, healthy gender relations everywhere. May all of us can do our part to create an environment in our churches and families where spiritual caste systems are a thing of the past and where *our sons and our daughters will prophesy...*

For the healing and good of the church (which is not a sacred fraternity)

For the healing and good of our world, our city, and the human family, all of which is made in the image of our Creator to exercise spiritual authority and "dominion" in our world.

For the unleashing of women's spiritual gifts in our world.

Let's de-brand and reclaim The Gospel—that "pearl of great price" that is timeless and true and truly universal—from all the popular labels, brands, leadership typing schemas, boot camps, and umbrellas that claim to speak for all of us.

Let's just be human together in the same human-yet-divine way as Christ, our exemplar, who *never* wrapped titles around himself and eschewed caste-like distinctions and rankings. He treated everyone as a king and a queen. He had people of lowly ranks as disciples, including women many of whom were in fact church planters. Thankfully Jesus never got the triperspectivalism memo!

But if Jesus had been into titles, who would he assign these to? Those who have already "crowned" themselves *prophet, priest, or king* at the head of the table? Or those tirelessly and humbly doing the spiritual work of the gospel at the margins with no title or seat at the table? If you look at the gospels, what you see is that Jesus rallied a band of brothers and sisters and awakened something in their souls that could see through all the ranks that elevated some as master and kings and others as their submissive subjects. What he awakened in them is the same Spirit of oneness that is available to all of us today.



“Your sons and your daughters will prophesy...

**Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.”**

~ Acts 2:17-18

**“There is neither Jew nor Gentile,
neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female,
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”**

~ Galatians 3:28

And neither are there prophets who have a corner on the market of speaking for God in our world.

¹ "What would Jesus do?"

And neither are there priests who unilaterally represent God. We are all priests in God's economy.

And neither are there spiritual kings and servile subjects. We are all kings and queens in God's economy with a shared "dominion" to serve as trustees of our beautiful yet broken world.

May we bravely separate the wheat from the chaff within our theology, justice from injustice, false titles and ranks from true spiritual gifting, the timeless from the time-bound, and let all that divides and "kings" some over others remain where it belongs...

a relic of the past.

May it be so.

Amen.

For more on Emily's work at the intersection of faith, gender, and human rights, see a recent article that appeared in the Stanford Social Innovation Review "[Belief-based Social Innovation: Gender Lens' Next Frontier](#)"