

Script – Season 1 – Project Violet Podcasts

Episode 4 – From all women to this woman

Season Intro

	Music
Jane	Hello, I'm Jane Day, Centenary Development Enabler for Baptists Together
Helen	And I'm Helen Cameron, Research Fellow at the Centre for Baptist Studies at Regent's Park College Oxford. Together we are the co-leaders of Project Violet.
Jane	Welcome to Season 1 of the Project Violet podcast. Project Violet is a research project investigating women's experiences in ministry whilst developing women ministers. We are trying to understand better the theological, missional and structural obstacles women ministers face and identify ways forward.
Helen	In this first season, we plan to introduce you to the history of women's ministry in the Baptist movement and look at some of the language used to discuss women's experiences.
Jane	We've been working together on Project Violet since May 2021 and have become even more aware of the different layers that make up Baptist life.
Helen	I've learned so much in all the listening we have done to women ministers. I think there are three layers that the project has ended up focusing on: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The everyday language and behaviour we use in church life.2. The accepted ways of doing things.3. What we believe about the church and the role of ministers.
Jane	We hope that listening to these five episodes will prepare you for when the findings of the project are released in May 2024.

Segment 1

	Music
Jane	This is the third of four episodes where we are going to learn about the everyday language and behaviour used in church life. Last time we looked at how a shift of behaviour from criticizing someone's work to offering constructive feedback can help avoid sexist language.
Helen	In this episode we want to look at words that are used to show that not all women are the same. At one level that seems such an obvious thing to say but in asking for changes that fully include women in ministry, it is important not to lose sight of the diversity of women's experiences.
Jane	The technical word that is used to describe this is intersectionality – in other words many people stand at the intersection of more than one identity. Race, ability, and age for example, all affect the way in which we experience being a

	woman or man. Different forms of inequality can operate together and make each other worse.
Helen	I like the word equity, which means to treat everyone fairly, you don't necessarily treat everyone the same. Is there a bible passage we can use to root our discussion?
Jane	<p>Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman feels like a starting point. John 4: 4-26</p> <p>A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me some water to drink." (For his disciples had gone off into the town to buy supplies.) So the Samaritan woman said to him "How can you—a Jew—ask me, a Samaritan woman, for water to drink?" (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you had known the gift of God and who it is who said to you, 'Give me some water to drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said to him, "you have no bucket and the well is deep; where then do you get this living water? Surely you're not greater than our ancestor Jacob, are you? For he gave us this well and drank from it himself, along with his sons and his livestock."</p> <p>Jesus replied, "Everyone who drinks some of this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks some of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again, but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." He said to her, "Go call your husband and come back here." The woman replied, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "Right you are when you said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the man you are living with now is not your husband. This you said truthfully!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you people say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not know. We worship what we know because salvation is from the Jews. But a time is coming—and now is here—when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers. God is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (the one called Christ); "whenever he comes, he</p>

	will tell us everything.” Jesus said to her, “I, the one speaking to you, am he.”
Helen	So why have you chosen this story?
Jane	In Jesus’s conversation with this unnamed woman he discusses her gender, her marital status, her ethnicity and then they have a theological conversation about the differences between them. Jesus doesn’t ignore the differences between himself and the woman but names them and engages with them.
Helen	Yes, all that is important, but I also feel this is one of the most negatively judged women in the New Testament. Every commentary I have studied describes this woman as immoral because she had had five husbands and was living with a man she was not married to. My eyes were opened when I read an article by Solomon Ademiluka, a Nigerian biblical scholar, who points out that at this time women were unable to seek a divorce and in some cultures that is still true. He also points out that it was common then for women to be widowed and remarry. He also suggests that this woman might have been involved in a Levitical marriage where she was expected to marry successive brothers-in-law. Widows could end up living in the households of extended family members. This really made me think of the written accounts from women ministers where they are often subject to assumptions about their suitability for ministry because of their marital status.
Jane	I think it would be good to define some of the terms we have been using. Marital status is definitely relevant to the way in which women ministers are treated whether they are single, divorced, widowed or married.
Helen	Black and Brown women ministers are subject to stereotypes relating to both their race and their gender. The technical term for this is misogynoir – misogyny combined with racism.
Jane	I like that there is a word to describe that combination. I don’t think that is true for women with a disability or a chronic health condition. They have to deal with ableism – assumptions about what is ‘normal’ as well as sexism.
Helen	There are a lot of references in the written reflections to ageism both from women being seen as ‘too old’ and ‘too young’. There is a pattern of women becoming ministers at a later age than men. This means that younger women stand out as unusual and that older women are sometimes dismissed as having insufficient ministerial experience.
Jane	A final definition must be the relationship between being a woman and having caring responsibilities, whether for children, a spouse or older relatives. Women are asked questions about how they will combine caring and ministry when men are not asked the same questions. The term ‘double shift’ is used to describe women who hold down a job and do caring work.
Helen	We’ve covered a lot of ground there. Thinking back to the bible passage what we can say is that despite the conversation taking place across differences of gender, race, and marital status and irrespective of our moral evaluation of the

	woman, Jesus chose to reveal to her that he was the Messiah and sent her to witness to her neighbours. A challenge she accepted.
Jane	I feel it is time for another scenario. There is a proper emphasis on representation in Baptist churches and so when people are invited to take on responsibilities it is a careful and prayerful process. But this is a moment when these intersections can mean that stereotypes surface.
Helen	Let's listen in on a deacon's meeting. A reminder that this is a constructed scenario based upon the issues women ministers raised in their written reflections – as they say in the movies – any resemblance to real people whether living or dead is entirely unintended.

Scenario A: At the deacon's meeting

	Music
Helen	We've called this scenario, At the deacons' meeting. All the deacons are there including Thomas the church secretary, Richard, the treasurer and Harry. Ruth the minister is moderating the meeting.
Ruth	So the main item on our agenda is bringing on board two new deacons. I'd like to start by reflecting on the people who have started attending church meetings on a regular basis over the last year.
Thomas	Yes, it's been nice to see some younger parents attend and contribute their views on our children's ministry. Perhaps one of the dads could make it to a monthly deacons meeting, it could be too much for a young mum.
Richard	Well, I know you're all for this diversity stuff, Ruth, but new people need time to adjust to our way of doing things.
Harry	Perhaps inviting new people onto the diaconate will help us change a bit.
Ruth	I'd like us to consider Jane who's got so involved in the church now as a result of attending our well-being cafe. I think we could take her disability into account and make the necessary adjustments.
Thomas	Oh yes, Jane's really lovely.
Richard	I think you're making things too complicated, Ruth, that sort of thing could get quite pricey.
Harry	Well, I'm worried we're not going to agree this evening. Maybe now we've got some ideas on the table we should go away and pray about them and come back to this next month.
Ruth	Yes, I think it would be good for us to take time to really think and pray about this. Let's move on with our agenda and come back to this next month.

Interview: Ruth's reactions

	Music
Helen	<i>Ruth decides to reflect on her experience with Jane.</i>
Jane	You said in your email that you wanted to reflect on the Deacons' meeting. Can you tell me what happened?
Ruth	I'm close to giving up. It seems that no matter what I say about inclusion or how I preach and teach about it, the same attitudes keep coming up.
Jane	Can you give me an example?
Ruth	I feel like a cracked record but I asked for suggestions for possible deacons and Thomas leaps in and suggests a dad with young children because his wife couldn't possibly come out in the evenings. Why is he assuming that caring is just the mother's responsibility? It feels as if he is making decisions for this couple.
Jane	Okay, you've made that point about Thomas before, it sounds as if his stereotypes are deep rooted.
Ruth	Well to be fair, at least he is trying to be constructive. Richard just objects to new people because they might want to change something. We've been blessed with some new people getting involved in the church, if we don't involve them, why should they stay? We can't treat them as spectators.
Jane	What was the substance of Richard's objection?
Ruth	It is confusing. I thought it was women he objects to, but we discussed one woman with a disability, and he objected to her on the grounds that it might cost money to make our meetings accessible to her.
Jane	It sounds as if you feel quite isolated.
Ruth	Yes I do feel that. Even Harry leapt in as I was about to challenge Richard and tried to get over the difficult atmosphere by moving the conversation on. I know he was trying to be helpful but I don't need rescuing.
Jane	Are there any positives you can take from the meeting?
Ruth	I'm struggling now Jane, I really am. Am I the right minister for this church if this pattern of behaviour just keeps repeating itself?

Segment 2

	Music
Helen	So Jane, how do you feel about that scenario and your conversation with Ruth?
Jane	I find these kinds of conversations really painful where a woman minister feels undermined because of repeated patterns of behaviour that don't respond to

	what she is trying to do. She feels she is being explicit about inclusion, but she is not being heard.
Helen	What do you think about the examples she gave?
Jane	In a secular workplace, these behaviours would be unacceptable, and people would be called to account and yet people often don't see the same standards applying to church life.
Helen	In most work places a manager or employee can turn to the HR department for support in holding people to account in relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies. It sounds as if Ruth feels she lacks allies in her situation.
Jane	Yes, she is clearly feeling isolated, and I think confused. The stereotypes she has experienced have related to her gender but now she is confused about whether Richard's objections to Jane as a new deacon are because she's a woman or because she's disabled. Neither are acceptable but she is trying to respond to the intersection between gender and ability.
Helen	I would like to know what Jane's experience of the church has been – has she experienced prejudice but then been left to work out what it is about her that has provoked it?
Jane	I'm frustrated about the way Harry leapt in and tried to move the conversation on without dealing with the stereotypes. It feels as if he is trying to be supportive but not wanting to help Ruth confront the stereotypes.
Helen	I agree. It wouldn't take a big change in his behaviour to open up the conversation the deacons need to have about diversity rather than close it down.

Scenario B: At the deacon's meeting

	Music
Helen	Let's run our scenario again and see what might be different: Take 2 – At the deacons' meeting.
Ruth	Well, the main item on our agenda this evening is inviting two new people onto the diaconate. I'd like us to start by reflecting on the people who have started attending church meetings regularly over the last year.
Thomas	It has been nice to see younger parents attend and contribute to our discussions about the children's ministry. Perhaps we could approach one couple together and see whether they're interested in one of them coming on board.
Harry	The perspective of young parents will help us see the perspective of their generation.
Richard	Well, I know you're all for this diversity stuff, Ruth. But people need time to adjust to our way of doing things.

Harry	I think diversity is important because it reflects our mission in the local community. Why would people get involved in this church if all the deacons came from the same group? I think we should approach Zara she has been such a positive presence in our prayer meetings.
Ruth	I'd like to suggest Jane, who's coming to church regularly as a result of her involvement in the well-being cafe. It's been great to have her become a member. I think we could take her disability into account and make the necessary adjustments.
Richard	I think you might be making things too complicated there, Ruth. It could get pricey.
Thomas	No Richard, I think Jane is a good suggestion. None of us knows when we might be affected by disability. I've certainly reflected on this since my aunt had her stroke.
Ruth	Well, that's good. We've got four proposals on the table. Why don't we agree who will come with me to visit them and open up the conversation about what's involved in being a deacon. We can then pray about who we should invite. Right let's move on to our next item.

Outro

Helen	Thank you for listening to this episode of the Project Violet podcast. We invite you to reflect on this episode. Did you learn anything new or surprising? How were you left feeling?
Jane	The episode notes contain questions you could use in a small group to get a discussion going.
Helen	We invite you to subscribe to this podcast on the platform you are using, so you don't miss out on future episodes.
Jane	And don't forget to tell others about the Project Violet podcast. You can follow us on Facebook and X formerly Twitter and find out more on our website www.projectviolet.org.uk
	Music

Episode notes

Scripture passage: John 4: 4-26

Discussion Questions:

Did you learn anything new or surprising? How were you left feeling?

Definitions

Marital status

Misogynoir – black and brown women

Ableism

Ageism

Caring responsibilities – double shift

Scripture- John 4: 4-30 Samaritan woman

Ademiluka, S. O. (2023) "[Y]ou have had five husbands': Interpreting the Samaritan woman's marital experience (Jn 4:16-18) in the Nigerian context', *HTS Theological Studies*, 79, pp. 1-8.

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