

WISDOM FOR WOMEN ON FINDING  
YOUR VOICE, PURSUING GOD'S CALLING,  
AND LEADING WITH COURAGE



Lead Like  
the  
Real You

AMY ORR-EWING

“Amy Orr-Ewing has given a tremendous gift to every woman who has longed for a mentor. In these pages, you will find letters that come with love and wisdom. You will know that you are not alone and that the God who made you has called you to lead. I pray this book provokes the rise of a new generation of female leaders in all spheres of life—for the glory of God and for the good of the world.”

—Glenn Packiam, lead pastor, Rockharbor Church; author, *The Resilient Pastor*; coauthor, *The Intentional Year*

“Amy’s book is a pearl of wisdom, soaked with the honest, practical realities of a life spent pursuing Jesus. She speaks as a lover of truth, in kind authority, with bold freedom. I want to read and reread this book and give a copy to every young leader I know. I’m grateful that Amy lives all that she has written in these pages, modeling the authentic intimacy of one who has spent her life saying ‘yes’ to Jesus. Her example invites me to follow Jesus more bravely and beautifully.”

—Canon Sarah Yardley, mission lead, Creation Fest UK

“Amy Orr-Ewing has written another book that every female Christ follower must read. In each of her letters we find invaluable, practical information about leading—from fighting anxiety when speaking to navigating work and calling. Amy does not shy away from the more controversial questions, such as whether women should teach in the church. I needed to read every page in this book. Thank you, Amy.”

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“Amy’s letter-writing style provides women with digestible key lessons for leading in the church, in the family, and in the workplace—or in all three. After beginning with gentle letters of encouragement, she leads readers to the hardest and perhaps most important lessons: how to respond to others, care for them, and heal when a Christian organization’s leadership has been harmful, deceitful, and abusive. The wisest of men will seek out this book as well.”

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—Ilaria Chan, chairwoman, Tech for Good Institute

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*Why Trust the Bible? Answers to Ten Tough Questions*

# Lead Like the Real You

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In loving memory of my oma,  
Elisabeth Kopsch  
(1913-96),  
a woman whose love and courage shaped my life

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# Preface

What do I wish I, as a leader, could have known without learning the hard way? That is the burning question that lies at the heart of this book.

*Lead Like the Real You* is aimed at women who want to grow in leadership wherever God has placed them. Christian women in churches, ministries, and other professional spaces often lack mentors and do not have forerunners in leadership they can look to because so few have gone ahead of them. I hope the pages that follow address this need by way of deeply personal and practical letters aimed at helping Christian women grow in faith and leadership within their context.

The themes addressed in this book are varied and include learning to use your voice, work and calling, facing chauvinism in Christian spaces, pursuing leadership success, addressing abuse and injustice, finding hope in dark times, and navigating friendship—among others. I write with a desire to combine deep connection to Scripture with a grasp of the cultural moment in which we live.

For the past three decades, I have been leading in the church, in theology, and in presenting the Christian faith; traveling the world

as a speaker and raising up teams. I have faced opposition for being a woman, navigated an abuse crisis with a celebrity Christian leader, grappled with the big apologetic questions of the day, and ministered to many people who long for mentorship and encouragement in the practical challenges that life throws our way. I have found that wisdom and resilience in leadership and life are virtues we need to fight for; they don't come about by accident. We also need support to grow, and that can be difficult to access.

I have had the opportunity to work with leaders in political, commercial, academic, creative, and church-based settings in nearly forty countries. I have met outstanding women who have inspired me with their tenacity, courage, creativity, and resilience. But the genuine challenges and questions facing women who lead also resonate with me. Our need for companionship on this journey is real. And so I began to write letters of encouragement and advice to Jo—a young leader I first came across as she was graduating university, a woman who reminded me very much of myself at that age. These letters became something more. They were written to Jo and her generation, but as I began to reflect on my own life, I saw they were also written with compassion and hope for the young woman I once was.

Leadership can be a painful and lonely road. I pray that as you read each letter that follows you will know that many women of my age and stage are rooting for you. I hope that as you read of my own personal experiences and struggles you will draw strength, wisdom, and courage for your journey.

PART 1



# *Learning to Use Your Voice*

## Proclamation

*Dear Jo,*

I am sitting in a café in London near St. Mary Woolnoth, where John Newton spent the last years of his life preaching. From here he influenced William Wilberforce, Charles Simeon, Hannah More, and many others. I am writing today because I want to share with you something that I think is really important for your growth as a leader and for this rising generation of Christians. It's the power of words and, for the Christian specifically, the power of proclamation.

It has become fashionable in some circles to quote the famous words attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.” But we see throughout the New Testament and from early church history onward that words have always been indispensable. Words are powerful. We need the ministry of proclamation—we need to hear the Word of God preached with fire. And whether or not you are called to evangelize or even to speak in public, you are called to *proclaim*.

It has never been more urgent to redress the disillusionment with preaching. Abuses of the gift have meant that we have grown weary and suspicious. But I am praying for a displacing of this ennui

with a resurgent hunger for the fire and light of Christ coming to us through the preached Word. “Proclamation,” said D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, is “theology coming through a man who is on fire.”<sup>1</sup> I think he should have included women, but the point stands.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor and theologian killed by Hitler’s regime, speaks of the living encounter with Jesus through preaching. It is “not a medium of expression for something else, something that lies behind it, but rather it is Christ himself, walking through his congregation as the Word.”<sup>2</sup> That is something to hunger for and to experience regularly—Christ the living Word walking through his congregation. Don’t give up on proclamation, both hearing it and doing it.

There are more speeches in the book of Acts than in many other historical books of the era, such as the writings of Thucydides and Heroditus. According to one scholar, this is because Luke, the author of Acts, “is chronicling a historical movement that was carried forward, in the main, by evangelistic preaching. This distinguished his work from that of other historians who are more interested in the macro historical events involving wars, political manoeuvres and the like.”<sup>3</sup> The early Christians knew that the power of God was closely connected to proclamation.

The Acts of the Apostles records the *process* by which the message of Jesus advances through the whole world. Core elements of this are proclamation of the gospel, miraculous signs, and care for the poor.

Proclamation of the truth matters. Don’t lose heart over this. Don’t let the charlatans, celebrities, or profiteers rob you of enjoying this gift, whether you serve by using it or receive by regularly listening to it. In my own life and leadership, both disciplines of serving and listening have proven crucial. I am called to step up

and proclaim truth with courage and boldness in a context where many have no faith, with hope in the face of despair where it is easy to lose heart. I also know that I need to listen to the preached Word as a regular disciple, that this is an integral part of how I grow as a Christian in the community of faith.

May you find strength and courage as you consistently proclaim the Word or listen to the Word proclaimed. Rediscover the joy of proclamation.

*With love,  
Amy*

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LETTER 2

## Speaking in Public

*Dear Jo,*

As I prepare to speak to women working in European Union policymaking, I feel prompted to write to you about handling nerves. If you have ever spoken in public or gone through intense examination, you will be familiar with the feeling of dread followed by adrenaline pumping through your body. This is something you are going to need to learn to manage in a healthy way. I have found a few things really help.

First, be prepared. As a woman speaker, whether in a ministry, academic, or corporate setting, I have found preparation to be crucial to offering an original, meaningful, and thoroughly



thought-through message. Prepare excellent content that you feel needs to be shared, but also think about how people learn and grasp things best. A coherent structure matters, but humor and memorable illustrations are also essential.

Practice giving your message. Studies show that people decide very quickly, in the first thirty seconds of a speech, whether they like the speaker, are prepared to trust what is being said, and will engage with the presentation.<sup>1</sup> So during those crucial opening lines when you need to connect with your listeners, you are at your most vulnerable. I suggest memorizing your opening lines. Think about your body language. Start with a confident, open body stance with eyes up and a friendly facial expression. People find this reassuring, and it also helps your voice settle.

Second, in the immediate build-up to speaking, when the dread and fear are rumbling, go outside if you can. Walk or run and pray. Take in the natural surroundings and name your physical sensations to God. God has made you in a body. Breathe in and out deeply and slowly. As you speak and own your feelings, invite God into them. Doing so helps you remember that you are not alone in your calling. It also means you aren't denying, repressing, or avoiding reality.

Third, in the few moments before starting, let the adrenaline come. Don't fight it or fear it. God has created you to be able to speak publicly. He is calling you to speak in this moment for your job or to proclaim his Word in a ministry context. Invite the Holy Spirit to fill and empower you. Go for it. If you get the opportunity to speak in a gospel context, "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2).

Fourth, after you have finished speaking, you may have an on-going surge of energy. You may feel elated. This is often followed

by a bit of a crash. Be ready for both. Give both to God. Find a healthy pattern with food that works for you. Personally, I can't eat at all before speaking or immediately afterward. But at some point, I need food, especially if I've prayed for a lot of people and I need to drive home. Pay attention to that physical need.

You matter to God. He cares for you. In whatever context you are speaking publicly, you can grow. But I want to share for a moment about preaching in particular. God calls people to be preachers—not machines. And he calls women as well as men. Let him tend to you before, during, and after preaching.

Don't use a preaching gift for gratification, seeking praise and adulation from people, or the rush of a performance and a responsive crowd. That path leads to manipulation and an unhealthy performance orientation. Equally, be careful not to get burned out or beaten up through carrying this gift. It is a weight to carry, and the exertion of doing it well can be crushing if too many demands are placed on the psyche and body of one person. I would also caution you to guard against carrying a responsibility to “deliver” a certain outcome; the hopes and expectations of those organizing an event or bringing others to hear you is a burden that is God's to carry, not yours. Prepare diligently and give the burden of the rest of it to Jesus in prayer.

I have preached in nearly forty countries over more than twenty-five years; I pray I will be able to keep going until I die. I pray the same for you—this precious gift of proclamation is so needed in our generation. There is a famine of the Word of the Lord. But the gift is also precarious—it can be dangerous in the wrong hands, used for harm, control, manipulation, and self-aggrandizement. So be careful, be humble, be intentional, and be kind. Let the Lord

tend to you, and be wise in the way you steward the gift. I hope you keep going.

*With love,  
Amy*

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LETTER 3

## Owning Our Embodied Voices

*Dear Jo,*

For many years, part of my work has involved theological training in various contexts, raising up evangelists and speakers all over the world, many of whom are women. What a privilege! Far more than with male speakers, one of the questions asked by women is “What does my voice sound like?”

Studies show that sounds in the higher register are more likely to annoy or irritate listeners than sounds in the lower register.<sup>1</sup> When we are nervous, our voices often go higher in pitch and we speak more rapidly. In the crucial opening sentences of a sermon or speech, these tendencies can make it more difficult for us to connect with listeners.

A few deep breaths, a conscious effort to keep nerves under control and to slow down our pace, and some practice holding your voice at its natural register without letting it go higher are helpful. But time and again it has struck me that so few women have had the training and support that could help them find their

voice. At least this one barrier to women speakers connecting well can certainly be overcome with practical help.

A woman who is confident and secure in her God-given voice is a powerful thing to behold. And her voice is embodied, not theoretical. Her voice is designed to be heard by others. But it will often be heard alongside her image, which is seen either in person or on screen. When we speak, our words are heard, but our bodies are also communicating nonverbally. Posture, stance, mannerisms, and facial expressions matter. Without becoming overly self-conscious, watch a video of yourself speaking and then practice controlling the distracting ticks or mannerisms you notice. Ask a trusted friend for honest feedback. Think about how your body is speaking and what you are hoping to communicate. Good starting points are confidence in God, safety for the listener, commitment to the message, and integrity of life and heart.

Unfortunately for women, clothes also matter. I don't know any men who speak and expect to receive comments about their clothing. I don't know any women who speak and don't expect to receive comments about what they wore. I have found that I need specific speaking outfits that do not distract (patterns can cause issues for cameras), don't show sweat, are comfortable to move in, don't crease on the way, and are modest by reasonable standards. The outfit I wear needs to show respect for the organizers and the listeners. I need to be neither underdressed in corporate, political, or some conference settings nor overdressed in youth, church planting, or other conference settings. I always take heeled shoes along with me, as most lecterns are too high for me without them.

Finding the right thing to wear can feel like a mission, so once you have found it you may wear it over and over again. A warning

from personal experience is that I did this too much with one blazer, showing up at an event on Capitol Hill wearing the same blazer I had worn at the White House ten years earlier. Then I wore the same blazer eight years later to an event in Parliament. My husband found the photographs. On the upside, I reminded him how worried I had been to spend \$120 on the blazer at the time.

Parallel to the challenges of owning our embodied voices is the pressure to compete or compare ourselves with other women. Don't do that. Jesus has given you your voice with its unique tone and all the twists and turns of your life's journey that make it unique. Resist the temptation to adopt someone else's voice. There is no one "feminine" voice. The Scriptures introduce us to different kinds of godly women, whether young or old, who used their voices. Deborah was called to national, political, and spiritual leadership with a voice that matched. Lydia, a successful businesswoman, used her voice to become a house church leader in Philippi. Miriam led God's people in song and dance. Ruth used her voice to overcome intense poverty and suffering and build relationships that would influence the birth line of the Messiah. Phoebe led the Roman church, exercising extraordinary influence over many, including Paul himself.

Your voice is precious, unique, embodied. Find it, steward it, and use it.

*With very much love,  
Amy*

## Don't Hold Back

*Dear Jo,*

I am writing to you from the theology faculty library at the University of Oxford. Silence is mandatory here, so all you can hear is the creak of the odd chair and the tapping of fingers on keyboards. The silence has me asking what happens when women stay quiet—not just in the library but in leadership settings too.

Have you noticed that whenever your influence grows—you take on a new position, start a new ministry, or gain readers and followers online—something internal holds you back from speaking up? Are you aware of that voice in your head holding you back, questioning your ability and perhaps even your right to be in the room?

Whether it's speaking in a leadership meeting, asking a question, or contributing thoughts in a public forum, many women struggle much more than men do to find and use their voice and influence.

This is not just in our heads. Despite all our advances in equality, evidence suggests that women are less likely than men to speak up in professional and educational settings. At university, women are two and a half times less likely than men to ask a question in an academic department seminar. And this is true at every stage of our academic careers. Even senior women ask fewer questions in public settings than men, and women are far less likely to speak up if the first person to ask a question is a man.<sup>1</sup>

Given these facts regarding academic and professional settings, it's not a surprise that we face the same reality in ministry. I recall trying to explain this a few years ago to a national church leader in the

United Kingdom. He has long been egalitarian, and we have worked together at conferences and on projects. He found it unfathomable that I felt any reluctance to speak up or ask a question. His perception of my confident persona in various leadership settings did not compute with what he now heard me saying. It felt like a hugely vulnerable step to share my experience with him. And if competent, accomplished, and experienced women leaders feel this hesitancy, it is likely that some of the emerging female leaders we seek to raise up feel it all the more. We are responsible for creating contexts in which women are safe to speak up and free to contribute their insights.

A number of years ago, the late queen Elizabeth II hosted a reception at Buckingham Palace for women who had made a significant contribution to public life. People from various career paths—fashion designers, athletes, scientists, judges, politicians, musicians, authors, charity entrepreneurs, and academics—attended.

A writer who was there wrote an article about the event. It struck this writer that, in a palace reception room filled with leaders in their field, who were invited by the queen, every person the writer quoted began the conversation saying, “Well, I don’t know why I am here . . .” This may just be classic British self-deprecation, but the writer felt it would be inconceivable that a male in an equivalent gathering would have uttered that phrase.

Common thoughts occurring to women in positions of influence when they are about to use their voices include:

Don’t be too pushy.

Who am I to say this?

Others here have something more important to contribute than I do. I should let them.

Am I absolutely certain I have my facts right?

It takes real courage to press through the onslaught of self-doubt and speak up. But when you do, two things happen. First, you contribute, fulfilling the purpose for which you are there in the first place. Second, you model something for other women, showing them it is safe for them to fully play their part.

Almost three decades into my working life, I find I still need to work at this. When I am at an academic conference where I know my qualifications and work experience are equal to those of my peers, I still worry about making a point lest I don't have my facts quite right or my thoughts completely distilled. I still need to exercise courage and overcome my fear. At gatherings with leaders who are friends and peers in ministry, I know the organizers want me to share what I think. But a reluctance bubbles up, as there are many nuances at play. I am conscious of the need to have my content clear and correct, but I am also navigating the dynamics of difference. I am aware that I will be speaking as a woman, with all that entails. I must avoid being too pushy or seeming to want to attract the wrong kind of attention. I must show that I am competent in the subject matter without flaunting my learning or experience. So many dynamics are involved in avoiding the negative gender stereotypes associated with the space I am in. All this is a lot to weigh before making a spontaneous statement.

I write this to you because when I was younger I thought these feelings would pass when I became established in my field and could count myself more qualified and more experienced. But they have not completely gone away. So you may as well begin today. Choose today to stop second-guessing yourself and enter fully the opportunities you have. Doing so is not unfeminine or pushy. Jesus commended women who involved themselves, who stepped up and showed up, like the woman with the flow of blood



who reached out and grabbed his garment in faith so that power went out from him and healed her (Luke 8:43–48), or the Gentile woman who persisted in asking Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter (Mark 7:25–30). When Mary took up a position previously reserved for men and sat at the feet of Jesus to be taught, her sister, Martha, objected and asked that she be put back to work in a stereotypically feminine domestic role. But Jesus commended Mary, saying that she has “chosen what is better, and it *will not be taken away from her*” (Luke 10:42, emphasis added).

If you feel something is holding you back from speaking up and you find yourself questioning your ability and perhaps even your right to be in the room, you are not alone. But maybe it’s time to remember Jesus’s encouragement to women. Jesus, whose crucifixion and resurrection were witnessed primarily by women. Jesus, whose ministry was financially supported by women and who called women his disciples. Jesus, who entrusted one of the greatest doctrinal statements of the New Testament to a woman when he told Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25), ensuring that subsequent generations get to read it in the Bible. Jesus, who inspired a woman to be the first evangelist in John’s Gospel when he met her at a well in Samaria. Jesus forthrightly and intentionally called, inspired, and anointed women to play specific key roles of *public* witness.

So when the impulse to hold back and second-guess yourself strikes, why not ask Jesus for the courage to break through and for his help in finding and stewarding your voice in all he has called you to? Don’t stay quiet; trust him and speak up.

*With very much love,  
Amy*