

Women Who Say Yes to the Spark

A Story Series by Angie Thompson

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The Ministry of Presence: The Leadership Journey of Keri Bostwick

If you had wandered into a small church in Montana decades ago, you might have seen a young girl, accordion in hand, nervously playing *Kumbaya* for the congregation. The instrument sighed open and shut like lungs as her father—the pastor—fueled her courage with a steady refrain: “Yes. Amen. Thank you, Jesus!” It was a small moment, but one that hinted at the steady, courageous presence that would define Dr. Keri Bostwick’s life.

Fast forward to today, and that once-nervous girl now serves as the Provost of Oklahoma Wesleyan University—a role shaped by decades of teaching, mentoring, and guiding others toward clarity and confidence.

Before leading in higher education, she spent seventeen years teaching English in the Bartlesville Public School system, from seventh-grade classrooms to AP Literature seminars. Her influence now extends far beyond a single

room: she supports faculty, guides students, and helps shape the environment she once admired in her own teachers. And at the heart of it all is the same conviction she learned early—presence matters!

Early Threads of Influence

Keri’s parents modeled encouragement in both quiet and profound ways. Her father lifted spirits through storytelling and simple kindness; even the family’s mail carrier felt cared for during brief porch conversations. Her mother, a labor and delivery nurse, treated her work as a God-given assignment—steady, devoted, and deeply personal. Together, they embodied a leadership rooted not in authority but in showing up faithfully for others.

Teaching became Keri’s passion almost as soon as she could speak it aloud. As a preschooler, she imitated her



Keri Bostwick

teacher’s posture and presence. Later, literature became her landscape—the gray spaces of meaning, the power of a single word to shift perspective. In college, she embraced the idea that stories could reshape how people understood themselves and the world.

In her own classroom, transparency became a hallmark of her teaching. “When people

give me compliments,” she says, “I realize the good they see in me is really Jesus.” Over the years, former students wrote to her—sometimes long after leaving her class—to share that one lesson or phrase had stayed with them. Those moments revealed something she hadn’t fully recognized before: God was planting truths through her that would take root long after the bell rang.

Lessons from Detours and Difficult Places

Determination never protected Keri from challenges. Each step in leadership sharpened her convictions and revealed new layers of growth. In her early years, she often spoke quickly and defended strongly, especially when confronting injustice. Over time, she learned the discipline of listening first. “That Keri had to learn to be silent,” she reflects. “Only then did leadership feel like the work I was meant to steward.”

She encountered bias and dismissiveness along the way—but her greatest obstacle, she says, was herself. “I had to realize it isn’t about me. Only God can set things in order.”

Becoming provost only strengthened this realization. She invited her faculty to hold her accountable with a rare challenge: “Love me enough to tell me when I’m getting it wrong.”

The sudden loss of her father further deepened her belief in

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the quiet power of presence. His kindness left a legacy so deep that even the family’s mail carrier attended his funeral. It was a vivid reminder that everyday moments matter far more than we realize.

Leading with Purpose

For Keri, leadership isn’t about hierarchy—it’s about transformation. She has witnessed it in middle school classrooms and university hallways: real growth happens when people feel supported, challenged, and invited into the best of themselves.

“You’ve heard me say it before,” she notes. “We are all doing a good work.’ My role isn’t to be the center of attention—it’s to help people discover who they already are!”

Her love of literature shapes her leadership philosophy. Just as stories reveal truth gradually, leadership reveals potential when people feel safe enough to be honest and brave enough to grow. “When I share both my faith and my flaws,” she says, “it changes the dynamic. People realize they don’t have to be perfect to lead. They just have to be present.”

Faith, Friendship & Family

Faith anchors every part of

Keri’s life. Prayer and Scripture have steadied her through seasons of joy, grief, and uncertainty. Her mentors—women who walked ahead of her—have offered both challenge and grace, modeling the multi-generational relationships she now urges young leaders to pursue.

That same attentiveness shapes her home. As a mother, she hopes her children remember not perfection, but presence—late-night conversations, quiet prayers, and the simple gift of showing up. This rhythm traces back to her father, who read stories and Scripture aloud every night. “He believed you should do everything you can to be the best part of someone’s day,” she says. That belief runs through her leadership like a thread.

Wisdom & Mentorship — Passing It Forward

Keri’s leadership has always been about influence: how one life can breathe courage into another. Early in her career, she experienced this firsthand. On baked potato Thursdays at Central Middle School, Representative Earl Sears—then the principal—would quietly buy her lunch. “It was so simple,” she recalls, “but I

needed encouragement, and he knew it.” That gesture became a model for her own ministry of presence.

Now she encourages young women to seek mentors who offer truth, grace, and experience. “There’s a richness in walking alongside someone who has lived more life,” she says. “Their experience can steady you when you’re uncertain.”

Her advice is simple:

Find your people.

Lean into their wisdom.

Let their faithfulness give you courage.

Leadership isn’t about having all the answers—it’s about walking together.

A Legacy of Presence

From the little girl with the oversized accordion to the university provost guiding others with clarity and grace, Keri’s journey has been one

“My hope is that people remember not what I achieved, but how I encouraged them.”

long lesson in choosing presence over perfection.

She knows leadership carries hidden burdens—the quiet responsibilities no one sees. Yet in those moments, God has always met her with strength and companionship.

“My hope,” she says, “is that people remember not what I achieved, but how I encouraged them.”

Her legacy will live on through the students who found confidence, the colleagues who found strength, and the young leaders who found courage because she chose to be present.

“You don’t have to be perfect to

lead,” she says. “You just have to be present.”

And in a world that often tells women they are not enough, Keri offers a steady reminder:

We are known.

We are entrusted.

And we are capable of the work worth doing.



Keri with her parents



About Dr. Keri Bostwick

Dr. Keri Bostwick is a lifelong educator and the Provost of Oklahoma Wesleyan University, known for her “ministry of presence” and her gift for helping others grow with confidence and clarity. A former English teacher turned transformational leader, she brings faith, humility, and encouragement into every space she serves. Her work reflects a steady belief that people don’t need perfection from their leaders—they need presence.

About the Writer and Permissions

I’m Angie Thompson—a fundraising strategist, storyteller, and consultant who believes words and images can spark transformation. For over 40 years, I’ve partnered with nonprofits, small businesses, and purpose-driven individuals to help them move beyond generic messaging into clear, compelling communication that inspires action. My work as a writer, composer, and brand consultant has earned awards in film, television, and philanthropy, and continues to fuel my passion for stories that build connection and change lives.



Disclaimer

The narrative presented in this story is based on personal interviews and reflections of Keri Bostwick. The views and memories shared are her own and are included with permission. This feature is part of the Women with a Spark series and is intended to celebrate the subject’s influence and leadership.

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