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BY WOMEN FOR WOMEN

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*The purpose of The Council on Biblical Manhood
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because these teachings are essential for obedience to
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LEARNED AND HOLY

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Doubtless the question will arise concerning our “By Women for Women” issue of the journal: “Is it for women *only*?” After all, if Scripture prohibits women from teaching men (1 Tim 2:11–15), certainly that includes a journal article that has some exegetical and/or theological content. Are we being consistent here? Perhaps The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood should only send this issue to its female readership. Women are allowed to read nowadays, right? The purpose of this editorial, then, is to assist us in determining how it is that men benefit from the valuable contributions of women in Christian scholarship.

Learned and Holy: An Ancient Practice

In his insightful article, “Women in the History of the Church: Learned and Holy, but Not Pastors,” William Weinrich observes an ancient practice that helps to explain how it is that the church, including men, has been richly blessed by the varied ministries of women throughout her history.¹ We might summarize this ancient practice with the phrase “learned and holy.” Taken from the *Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua* of Gennadius of Marseilles (c. A.D. 480), Weinrich’s subtitle reminds us that considerations for the service of women in the church have not been determined by intellect or sanctity. Rather, clear apostolic injunctions and the example of Jesus himself

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have been determinative. Thus, it has been the consistent practice throughout church history—until recent times—that, however learned and holy particular women in the church were, the pastoral office of the church has been reserved for men.²

The pastoral office, however, is not the only way one can make a lasting contribution to the body of Christ. It is true that throughout church history most Christian writing and scholarship has come from men, but this may not be as objectionable as some today would like to make it. After all, the vocation of wife and mother is more foundational and necessary than the vocation of Christian scholar. Still, history is filled with women who have made significant intellectual contributions. Learned and holy women of the past have demonstrated well, in Weinrich's terms, their faithful "service of mind and pen."³ The literary and intellectual legacy of Marcella and Paula (4th C), Proba (4th C), Eudoxia (5th C), Lioba (8th C), Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), Charlotte Elliot (1789–1871), Sarah Adams (1805–1848), Frances R. Havergal (1836–1879), Fanny J. Crosby (1820–1915), and Dorothy L. Sayers (1893–1957) ought to be, in a very real sense, an inspiration to women today.

Learned and Holy: A Present Day Example

I am reminded of Eta Linnemann—one particularly "learned and holy" woman. A brilliant student of Rudolf Bultmann and Ernst Fuchs, as well as Friedrich Gogarten and Gerhard Ebeling, she had "the best professors which historical-critical theology could offer."⁴ And yet she was troubled for many years. Even with her intellectual accomplishments—two doctorates and an esteemed

teaching position—she was sure that she was still seen as inferior to men. In her words,

In my preconversion life, I bitterly fought for women's equality in "spiritual office." The thorn of embitterment was ever driven into me anew by my so-called "brothers in ministry," especially by those who were my mental inferiors and possessed no other merit than the privilege of wearing trousers on the basis of their physical constitution.⁵

This way of thinking all changed, however, on November 5, 1977, when at the age of fifty-one she trusted Christ, ending her rebellion against being a woman. Linnemann describes her conversion to Christ as being "*renewed by His grace*," the product of which was a sense of fulfillment and contentment according to God's good design for her as a woman.⁶

Her new life was also marked by a new path of Christian scholarship. Within a month of her decision to follow Christ she "repented" of her "perverse theological teaching" and eventually wrote *Historical Criticism of the Bible*, which, as Robert Yarbrough describes it, was her post-conversion blast against German higher criticism.⁷ That particular book, as to be expected, received extremely mixed reviews. And yet there is no question as to the significance of her scholarly endeavors. Since that time Linnemann has made numerous contributions to the field of NT studies from her unambiguously evangelical perspective. For this evangelicals can be grateful—especially evangelical men.⁸

Learned and Holy: Allowing the Ancient Practice to Inform Christian Scholarship Today

The question that often comes from both complementarians and egalitarians is this: “If women cannot teach men or exercise authority over men, *what can they do in the church?*” I will not attempt to address here what I believe to be the inherent chauvinism as well as the inadequate conception of life in the church that such a question assumes (it is actually a great insult to women that any and every other thing they are uniquely fit by God to do and instructed by God to do is somehow less important than teaching men). Instead, I suggest a model for assessing the ministry of women that harmonizes with the ancient practice of the “learned and holy” women of the past. The context here is Christian scholarship, but these ideas should not be limited to such a context.

This model, developed by John Piper, helps evaluate the appropriateness of women influencing men in the home, the church, and in society.⁹ The question is not whether or not women will influence men. They will and they should. The question is exactly how can women influence men in ways that are fitting, according to the God-given order that exists between man and woman? Instead of attempting to answer this case-by-case, Piper suggests a set of criteria to help think through whether a particular vocation can uphold God’s design for mature masculinity and femininity. He says,

Here is one possible set of criteria. All acts of influence and guidance can be described along these two continuums:

Personal-----Non-personal
Directive-----Non-directive

To the degree that a woman’s influence over man is personal and directive it will generally offend a man’s good, God-given sense of responsibility and leadership, and thus controvert God’s created order. A woman may design the traffic pattern of a city’s streets and thus exert a kind of influence over all male drivers. But this influence will be non-personal and therefore not necessarily an offense against God’s order.¹⁰

Piper is on to something here. When I apply this set of criteria to the vocation of Christian scholarship, I conclude that it is fitting for women to seek to influence men through the means of written scholarship. Writing to a general audience is on the non-personal end of this continuum. A woman may write a thoughtful, critical, and even theological assessment of modern feminism from which I can learn much as a man (e.g., Mary Kassian’s *The Feminist Mistake*, Crossway). Yet this communication comes to me in a non-personal way. Were it to come otherwise, her effort to influence me would likely contradict the natural order and strain whatever existing relationship there may be.

Written scholarship is also non-directive. There is no inherent authority in the book I read that has been written by, say, Eta Linnemann or Rebecca Jones. The influence the author is giving is not out of an authoritative office. Additionally, she is not directly ordering me to do this and that. Piper explains the idea of non-directive influence this way: “[It] proceeds with petition and persuasion instead of directives. A beautiful example of non-directive leadership is when Abigail talked David out of killing Nabal (1 Sam 25:23–35).

She exerted great influence over David and changed the course of his life; but she did it with amazing restraint and submissiveness and discretion.”¹¹ When a Christian woman produces scholarly writing she hopes to persuade all who are willing to read what she has written and to learn from her in the process.

So we return to the question with which we began, is this issue for women *only*? Scripture is clear that authoritative teaching in the church belongs, by God’s design, to men. It is equally clear that women contribute to the church in many and varied ways. One of these ways is scholarly writing, like that of Linnemann, a brilliant lady who is also submissive to the teaching of Scripture. Written scholarship tends toward non-personal, non-directive influence. It is, thus, an influence women may exercise while upholding the God-given order that exists between men and women. We must conclude, therefore, it is fitting that our male readership also benefit from these articles, writings of learned and holy women of today who follow by disposition, by motivation, and by virtue the ancient pattern. ■

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Robert W. Yarbrough, “Eta Linnemann: Friend or Foe of Scholarship?” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 8, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 167.

⁸ I am thinking here of the encouragement Dr. Linnemann was to the faculty at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC, when in 1992 she visited our campus and told her story.

⁹ John Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined according to the Bible,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 50–52.

¹⁰ Ibid., 51.

¹¹ Ibid., 51–52.

¹ William Weinrich, “Women in the History of the Church: Learned and Holy, but Not Pastors,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 263–79.

² Russell D. Moore has called my attention to some very helpful research that confirms “the myth of the female pastor.” In reality, there is good reason why throughout the history of the church the pastoral office has been reserved for men. See “The Myth of the Female Pastor,” available at <http://www.gender-news.com/other.php?id=217>.

³ Weinrich, “Women in the History of the Church,” 266.

⁴ Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (trans. Robert W. Yarbrough; Baker, 1990), 17.

⁵ Eta Linnemann, “God Cares for Women,” in *The Women’s Study Bible* (ed. Dorothy Kelley Patterson; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), xix.

WOMEN AGAINST PUBLIC BLASPHEMY

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My husband and I recently visited South Africa for a five-week speaking tour. As our host drove us to a meeting, he became quite agitated by the constant traffic jams in the clogged streets of Johannesburg. At yet another snag, he exclaimed, "Now what!" But soon he was all smiles. "Look! It's Christians demonstrating against public profanity!"

Christians naturally cringe when our LORD's name is defamed. But there is more to blasphemy than swear words in the media. The apostle Paul offers us strange advice about countering blasphemy. He specifically tells women how to help. Paul tells the young pastor Titus that

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working

at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be *reviled* [*blasphēmētai*—"blasphemed"] (Titus 2:3-5).¹

Elsewhere, Paul gives a similar instruction to slaves: "Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be *reviled* [*blasphēmētai*]" (1 Tim 6:1). Conversely, slaves who respectfully submit to their masters "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior" (Titus 2:10).

The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* is often translated as "revile," "speak evil of" or "slander." Most English translations use "blaspheme" only when God's name or character is in question. In the above texts, "blasphemy" seems more appropriate for two reasons: (1) Paul uses this verb, as well as the related noun and adjective, throughout his first letter to Timothy to speak of blasphemy in its strongest sense:

- In 1:13, he refers to his own violent resistance to the gospel (“though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent”).
- In 1:20 he speaks of Hymenaeus and Alexander’s damnable resistance to the gospel (“among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme”).
- In 6:3–5, he describes the false teachers, whose message produces evil consequences (“If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our LORD Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander [*blasphēmia*], evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth”).
- In Acts 26:11, Paul describes the torture he applied to Christians (“And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them *blaspheme*, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”)²

(2) The second reason is that in these two passages (Titus 2:3–5; 1 Tim 6:1) Paul designates *what* is being blas-

phemed: God’s *word*, God’s *name*, and the *teaching*. To speak against these three things is surely blasphemy in the strongest sense of our English word.

Today, Christians (even leaders and pastors) consider the role of men and women to be a secondary issue, but Paul ties a woman’s decisions about home-making to the very heart of gospel witness.³ Did Paul get carried away? Can he simply mean that Christians should not upset the status quo? Surely not, as Paul was hardly one to worry about status quo! His words are strong and his meaning clear: our lack of submission to his teaching about women opens the gospel to blasphemy. Why does Paul feel so strongly about this, when he leaves other issues, like meat consumption and feast days, to the exercise of our conscience?

In “the New South Africa,” post-apartheid laws have brought together a huge variety of culturally diverse peoples. Christians are trying to lead the way by breaking down cultural barriers in the church. How does a Christian Afrikaner with a background in strict Dutch Reformed traditions worship with a Christian Zulu, who has been exposed to animistic spirituality, fortune-tellers and animal sacrifice? Paul, the world traveler, was familiar with such problems in his time, especially as the church tried to bring together Jew and Gentile. Jews were raised on the Law of Moses, while Gentiles were steeped in pagan spirituality. Paul learned to be “all things to all men” and encouraged cultural flexibility in many things: “Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col 2:16–17).

Paul denounces false teachers who command Christians not to “touch” or

“taste” certain things, since all is good and comes from God’s gracious hand.⁴ He resists the Judaizers, insisting that circumcision not be imposed on Gentile believers, and defends eating food sacrificed to idols, since an idol has no power.⁵

Let us think briefly about blasphemy in these three ways: (1) against the word, (2) against the name, and (3) against the teaching of God as it relates specifically to Paul’s teaching on women.

God’s *Word* Blasphemed

Because of Paul’s keen respect for cultural variety and his strong defense of the personal conscience, we need to pay special attention when, in his apostolic authority, he formally sets down specific rules for living in God’s church. We might expect Paul to say, “Women, let no one pass judgment on you about how you dress or what role you choose to play in your family and church, for these are a shadow, but the substance is Christ.” But Paul does not say that. He dictates principles for dress, jewelry, home management, gossip, the age of remarriage for widows, alcohol consumption, hairdos, and activities in the church. Paul seems rather to harp on the subject of women. His constant commands cannot be dismissed as culturally determined.

For Paul, these issues are determined not by culture but by the Word of God. I have taken some liberty in separating the “Word of God” from “the teaching,” because in general Paul seems to refer to the foundational Old Testament revelation in speaking of God’s Word,⁶ while his term “teaching” refers more directly to the doctrinal and practical instructions Paul has given to the churches with apostolic authority and is now “the deposit” left to its future

pastors.

The Word of God in the Old Testament is the Word that created and structured the world. The creative Word of God spoke the world into existence, differentiating animals from humans, dark from light, men from women, and, above all, God from his creation (see Rom 1:25). Within those creation structures, the roles of men and women are clearly delineated. God created Adam first, then Eve—taken from his body, his equal, his companion, his helper. Creational authority structures as determined by God’s Word in Genesis are a cornerstone in Paul’s discussion of women and their role. In his discussion of women in worship (1 Corinthians 11), Paul argues his case from creation principles: “For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” (vv. 8–9). In the same passage, he appeals to the authority structures in the universe: “That is why a wife ought to have [a symbol of]⁷ authority on her head, because of the angels” (v. 10).⁸ Again, he calls attention to the natural order of things: “Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering” (vv. 14–15). When commanding women not to teach or hold authority over men in the church, Paul appeals yet again to the original creation order: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Tim 2:12–13).

In 1 Cor 14:34–35, where Paul commands women to be “silent in the churches,” he says, “They are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, *as the Law also says.*” Though this specific command nowhere appears in this form

in the Old Testament, Paul draws his conclusion from creational principles and from his assumptions about Old Testament revelation. After specifying how this principle is to be worked out, he asks the Corinthians, “Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? . . . What I am writing you is *the LORD’s command*” (1 Cor 14:36–37 NIV).

In Ephesians, as well, Paul goes back to the text Jesus used when dealing with divorce.⁹ Paul discusses the submission/headship/love principles of marriage and concludes with a quote from Gen 2:24: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Eph 5:31). Paul grounds his practical commands about women on the Word of God as expressed in the Old Testament and derived from the creative Word that brought men and women into existence. To argue that Paul’s instructions are culturally irrelevant in our time is to refuse God’s clear creation Word of authority. Our deep-seated sexual differences are not, as our society would like us to believe, determined by our whims or desires, but come from the mind of God.

Women, Paul insists, are to pour themselves into their calling as wives and mothers. They are to raise children, feed the poor, love their husbands, care for the sick, exercise hospitality, refrain from gossip, show mercy to many, and “wash the feet of the saints.” God has designed women for these activities from the very beginning. These commands are not popular in twenty-first century America, but that does not matter. If we do not obey them, we deny the authority of the Word, thus eliciting blasphemy from unbelievers and from the evil authorities in the heavenly realms, who observe our inconsistent lives.

God’s *Name* Blasphemed

Paul’s statement in 1 Tim 6:1, about the relationship of a servant to his master, is parallel in some ways to Titus 2:3–5 (as well as to 1 Tim 5:14). In both texts, refusal of submission causes the *name* of God to be blasphemed: “Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled [blasphemed]” (1 Tim 6:1). The third commandment forbids us to take the name of God “in vain.” Taking God’s name in vain is not limited to speaking certain syllables frivolously. God’s *name* means his person—including his character, his reputation, his revelation, and his acts in history.

Christians are baptized into the *name* of God, and thus represent that name, corporately and individually. When God lays his name upon us, we are his children and represent the family name. While living in France, we occasionally disciplined one of our children for a particularly serious infraction by keeping that child home from school. On our “excuse” note, we would write that the child was not well behaved enough to represent the family name that day. Needless to say, the teachers thought we were peculiar parents! As Christians, our behavior conforms not to our old, irreverent and idolatrous style, but to our new identity in Christ.

Why is God’s name blasphemed when slaves are ornery with their masters? Because God’s created authority structures reflect his ultimate authority over us and over the whole universe. As countercultural and anti-democratic as a rebirth of authority sounds, the Bible is clear. Authority is given by God himself—even the authority of a slavemaster. The goal of the church is to obey Christ in all things, and in so doing, we are

to respect the authorities under which God has placed us.¹⁰ Jesus tells Pilate, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11). The one who wields authority answers to God for the way he wields it, and the one under authority answers to God for his behavior under that authority.

In Paul’s day, slaves made up nearly 40 percent of the population. Many members of Paul’s churches were doubtless involved in slavery either as slaves or masters (see Paul’s letter to Philemon). Paul is not commending slavery as a necessary creational structure, for he encourages slaves to acquire their freedom, whereas he never encourages wives to get free from marriage or children to escape the authority of parents. Christians see their work relations as a part of their gospel witness, as they pour themselves out in self-sacrificial love, serving even evil masters as if serving the perfect master, Jesus.¹¹ In so doing they honor the name and reputation of God. Their behavior aligns itself with their confession, showing self-sacrificial love, humility, and the joy of serving others. In this, they are like their Savior who submitted himself to his father’s will.

We do not represent God’s name only as individuals. The family unit itself represents God’s fatherhood. In Eph 3:14–15, Paul says, “I bow my knees before the *Father* [*patera*], from whom every *family* [*patria*] in heaven and on earth is named.” God has designed an integral relationship between his “Fatherhood” and our human “fatherhoods” (families). If English followed the pattern of the Greek, we would call a family a “fatherdom,” something like a “kingdom.” The name of God the Father is incorporated into the structure and identity of our human families. The radical feminists are

right in saying that if we want to topple “fatherdom” (what they would call “patriarchy”), we must first topple the ultimate Father (patriarch). An authoritative, kind, and merciful father in a Christian home reflects the fatherhood of God and thus beautifies (“adorns”) the Father’s name, rather than opening it to blasphemy.¹² I love to watch my son-in-law with his children. A most tender-hearted father, David nonetheless inspires an amazing awe in his children. If little fifteen-month old Emma is not going off to sleep, he has only to enter her bedroom, and she lies down without a sound! But she will cuddle up in the crook of her daddy’s arm whenever she gets the chance. We surely have such immense discipline problems in our schools because we have denied this loving authority to fathers.

The name of God is also carried by the larger family, the church, which is the “fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Eph 1:23 NIV). The people of God and the name of God are integrally related. In the book of Revelation, the final glorious city, the bride of Christ, is identified with the church of all time and also with the name of God: “[The beast] opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, *blaspheming* his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven” (Rev 13:6). Do you see the equation here? To breathe out blasphemies against God, the evil one blasphemes the church. Because we are his temple, his dwelling (“living stones,” as the apostle Peter puts it), God’s *name* is blasphemed when we his *people* are blasphemed. The Old Testament taught us this already, since God sees his own name blasphemed when Israel’s enemies mock her.¹³

Paul is arguing that because we bear God’s name, those who “revile” or “slander” us are actually “blaspheming,” be-

cause they are speaking not only against us but against God himself. If we want to avoid God's name being blasphemed in this way, we need to glorify that name ("adorn the gospel") by behaving in a way consistent with the gospel we profess. Paul tells the church how to honor God's name. Pastors, elders, and deacons must lead godly lives.¹⁴ Men must rule their own households with firmness and gentleness, instructing their wives and children in the gospel and not treating them harshly. Children must submit to their parents as to the LORD. Women must submit to and love their husbands, love their children, cease to gossip, work energetically in their homes, give themselves to works of mercy and seek to serve other Christians in every possible way. In the church, they must not teach men or exercise authority over them.

Our families and our marriages are the visible picture on earth of the beauty of God's family, of his name. It is for this reason, too, that we cannot consider these to be secondary issues. Whether we like it or not, the Christian family and the Christian church must be structured as Paul tells us, so that the name of God is not blasphemed.

The Teaching Blasphemed

Paul tells us in the same command to slaves that their behavior will keep "the teaching" from being blasphemed. Generally speaking, when Paul uses the term "teaching," he is referring to his own apostolic doctrine. Many people draw the conclusion that Paul's teaching can be dismissed as culturally slanted, to be taken with a grain of salt. But Paul's words have as much weight as Christ's words and Old Testament revelation.¹⁵

Paul commends the Corinthians for "holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you" (1 Cor 11:2 NIV).

He drives home his instructions about women with a blanket warning: "If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God" (1 Cor 11:16). (Notice that all the churches, no matter what their social context, are to have the same practice.) In another passage, exhorting women to be silent when church disciplinary issues are at stake, he concludes his argument with similarly absolute words: "Was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are *a command of the LORD*. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized" (1 Cor 14:36–38). There is ample evidence that Paul considered his apostolic authority to be equal to the very words of Christ.

In addition to understanding the inspired nature of Paul's authority, we must grasp his purpose in writing the epistles of First and Second Timothy and Titus. He is consciously establishing working structures for the church, with a view to his own death. He instructs his successors to codify practices that will protect Christians from falling into the "snare of the devil."¹⁶ These young pastors are to "insist" on such practices and "rebuke" false teachers "sharply." Titus "must teach" the older women to take the younger wives in hand. He is to "teach" slaves to be in submission. Paul says to Titus, "These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you" (Titus 2:15 NIV). Timothy, too, is to "command certain men not to teach false doctrine" (1 Tim 1:3 NIV). "If I am delayed," Paul says, "you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation

of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15 NIV). Timothy is to “command and teach these things” and not to let anyone look down on him because he is young (1 Tim 4:11–12). “Command, rebuke, insist,” Paul repeats. With this drumbeat in our ears, can we still say that the roles of men and women are a “secondary” issue?

Yet we must consider the particular aspects of Paul’s teaching that come under attack due to a slave’s disobedience, a woman’s laziness, a deacon’s drunkenness.

Paul’s Teaching about the Goodness of Creation

We have already discussed the creational roots to Paul’s thinking about women. False teachers are threatening the church both in Ephesus and (apparently) in Crete. They forbid marriage and the consumption of certain foods. Paul counters such arguments with creational reasoning: everything is good; nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. Paul passionately pleads with Timothy¹⁷ to preach the truth, rather than “the teaching of demons” spread by these false teachers. True holiness means living in the body—with all its functions, including the sexual functions.¹⁸ Eating, marrying, giving birth, working for a master, caring for an elderly widow—this is the stuff holiness is made of, not the “godless chatter” and “false knowledge” that enemies of the church are proposing, whether such knowledge is from legalistic Judaizers or mystical pagans (1 Tim 6:20).

The anti-creational arguments of the false teachers sound spiritual, but drag Christians away from presenting themselves as living sacrifices, faithful to their creational calling until they stand in the last day to answer for the things “done in the body.” This is what true

holiness consists of until Jesus comes again. All the rest is at best fluff and at worst heresy. Paul cares about the nitty-gritty of life. Though Ephesians begins in the heavenlies with Christ, it ends with the Christian soldier on the front lines.¹⁹ What battle rages in the middle of the book? How to maintain unity in the church; how to submit to husbands, parents, and bosses; how to conquer lying and stealing.

Christian women are all called to serve God *as women*. Our world (and sometimes our church) tells us that we have better things to do with our time. Linda Hirshman, on ABC’s “Good Morning, America!” scolded women for dropping out of the corporate scene to stay home with their children. According to Hirshman, they are “letting down the team.”²⁰

Allow me a short aside. Within the church, similar arguments tell women to “use all their gifts.” My oldest daughter just had her fifth child. In a rare moment of quiet, she and I began to muse about what career we would have chosen had we not been wives and mothers. We each decided on “pediatrician” and agreed that each of us had ample gifts for it. “In another life,” laughed my daughter.

It is impossible to use all our gifts because God is so liberal in his distribution. There is not one person on this earth who has used all his gifts. Every time you make a choice, you eliminate the use of certain gifts. Today, I could exercise musical gifts by practicing the piano, or the gift of encouragement by calling ten people, or the gift of determination to weed my garden. But I chose to write this article. That is the first problem with gifts. You will drive yourself crazy if you try to use all your gifts in this life. You will have to wait for heaven.

Secondly, we use our gifts within

the calling God has given us. In a certain sense, even Jesus refrained from using all his gifts when he was on earth, because his Father (in authority over him) had a particular *way* in which his Son was to use those gifts. The devil tried to get Jesus to use his gifts in the wrong way, but our Savior stuck stubbornly to the written word and to God's plan for his life. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and longed to rescue, comfort, and shepherd his people. But he refrained from using his gift of power to oust the Roman oppressor because he had a greater enemy to conquer: death and the devil. He refrained from using his gift of authority to command angels to take him off the cross. Instead, he bore blasphemy, suffering, abandonment, and death. Our Savior said, "Not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42), and "he learned obedience through what he suffered" (Heb 5:8). In a sense, Jesus was also saying, "Not my gifts, but your calling." If Jesus was not free to choose the most obvious and "satisfying" way to use his gifts, but submitted to the will of his Father, how can we be so arrogant as to dictate the terms for the use of our gifts, when our Father has made it clear to us women where he wants us to serve? The normal womanly way to exercise our gifts is to get married, love our husbands and our children, fill our lives with works of mercy, service, and self-sacrifice. (This always involves some suffering.) This is the way of the "name," the way of the "word" and the way of Paul's "teaching."

I can hear the protests: "But I'm longing to be married. It's not my fault if I'm not!" "I have a horrible husband; how do you expect *me* to live out these instructions?" "Are you saying women should never work?" "Do you mean we should accept the stereotype of 'women barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen?'"

Of course, I am not saying a woman

should never work outside the home.²¹ Jesus himself received the help of independently wealthy women, and we go through stages in which work might be appropriate. I am not saying that all women should only cook and bake in the church (though I do not see why women should be kept from doing so). Of course, you are not less of a woman if you are single. (Paul implies that you have an even greater honor—to serve your LORD without distraction.) But Paul makes the normal pattern clear. The New Testament church does not supersede creational structures for men and women, but fills those structures with the post-Pentecost power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

Catherine Clark Kroeger argues that women need to feel "called" to be mothers or they should not have children.²² She seems to place mothering (last?) on a long list of possible career choices. Of course, her argument could only be made in a post-contraception society. Seeing motherhood this way is an easy cop-out for women who do not want to bother bearing and raising children. They are not "called" to be mothers.²³

God has called women to be wives and mothers—to serve him and his church in this physical, creational way. But bearing children is a spiritual act of worship as well. Paul ties marriage, family, and childbirth not only to creation structures, but to the salvation message.

Teaching about Salvation

In 1 Timothy, Paul declares that a woman should not teach or have authority over a man. This is not because he respects women less, but because the gospel message is intimately tied to women accepting their calling to love their husbands, to be in submission to them, and to carry on in their God-given task of bearing and mothering children.

This does not mean a woman is only a “womb.” God looks on the heart, not on the womb! But God asks women to be a “living sacrifice,” which includes her womb, whether he chooses to open that womb or not. God looks on the heart and loves each woman for who she is—a beautiful reflection of the image of God.

Women as women are intimately involved in the salvation story. God enters the world via the womb of a woman. Mary says to the angel who announced her unique pregnancy, “I am the servant of the LORD; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Christian women can still answer God with those same words. No woman can now anticipate the privilege of mothering the Messiah, yet we mother him as we mother the children he gives us. We participate in the salvation project as we continue to obey the creation mandate to fill the earth.²⁴

It is surely this overall sense that we must take from the difficult passage in 1 Tim 2:15: “Yet she will be saved through [the childbirth]—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.” I favor the interpretation that sees “the childbirth” as referring to the birth of Christ.²⁵ But without insisting on such a reading, we can still say that, in the context of the letter, Paul desires women to take their mothering seriously and to live out their salvation by quietly getting on with their (often unsung) service in the church and in the home. We “adorn” the gospel in our obedience to God’s will for us as women, just as a servant “adorns” the gospel in his role of service. As Paul says to the Colossians, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the LORD, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the

LORD as a reward. It is the LORD Christ you are serving” (Col 3:23–24 NIV). As women serve their husbands, families and churches, they serve Christ.

Even the imperfect Christian home shows the beauty both of God’s creation and his salvation order. Women who are “busy at home” are busy doing the work of evangelism, for our homes shine forth the glory of the gospel to all who enter it. If you invite people to your table, you are, in a sense, sharing the table of the LORD. If you care for a lonely widow, you are showing the world God’s mercy and kindness. If you pay attention to your neighbor’s children, you are obeying Christ’s command to let the little ones come to him. Even as you wipe your child’s sore knee, you are bandaging Christ’s wounds, for he himself says, “If you do it for the least of these my children, you do it to me.”

The Christian home is a gospel witness that testifies not only to a watching world but also to those authorities who rebelled against God’s order. The wicked “principalities and powers” are watching God’s people to see if God’s love and mercy is really as grand as it claims to be. Our marriages are God’s chosen illustration of Christ’s love for his church. As we make godly decisions in the privacy of our own homes, we are a part of God’s people, “proving out the wisdom of God” before our neighbors and the principalities and powers (Eph 3:10).

Do you see why Paul does not make male-female relationships a matter of individual conscience? There is much yet to understand about the connection between our behavior as separate sexes and God’s gospel, but we do not have to understand *everything* before we obey. Women offer their bodies in spiritual service to Christ by marrying, serving our husbands as constant and trustworthy helpers, and gladly accepting the place

God has given us, whether single or married, widowed or childless. In so doing, we will gain a reward from our Creator and Savior, who pours out glory and love on our heads.

Do you want to shut down blasphemy and adorn the gospel of Christ in our culture? Rather than demonstrating in the streets, follow God's commands:

Be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. . . . Teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be [blasphemed] (Titus 2:3–5). ■

¹ Unless noted, Scriptures quotations are from the English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

² Paul does use *blasphēmō* and *blasphēmia* to refer to slander against human beings, but often implies that such slander is an affront to God. In Eph 4:31, Paul puts “blasphemy” in a list of behavior that “grieve[s] the Spirit of God”; in Rom 3:8, the “blasphemy” is against Paul’s message; in Rom 14:16 (with the parallel passage of 1 Cor 10:30) Paul uses the term in the context of God’s final judgment; in Col 3:8, blasphemy is in a list of idolatrous, pre-Christian behaviors.

³ This sense is also present in 1 Tim 5:14, where Paul again tells women to get married, have children and look after their homes, so that they “give the adversary no occasion for slander” (Greek, *loidorias*, to curse). His immediate reference to turning away after Satan shows the strength of his statement, giving it the equivalent meaning to “blaspheme.”

⁴ See Col 2:21; 1 Tim 4:1–6.

⁵ However, Paul carefully protects the tender conscience of someone who cannot yet understand this principle.

⁶ See especially 1 Tim 4:4–5: “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.” It is obvious here that the original creative Word of God, which brought all things into existence, is confirmed by the Old Testament word of God that declares them “very good”

(Gen 1:31: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”).

⁷ These words are not present in the Greek.

⁸ In my non-scholarly opinion, this reference to angels ties into Paul’s overarching notions of authority. The angels need to observe and understand the submission of the woman to the authority under which God has placed her, as a confirmation of and testimony to God’s ultimate authority. The fallen angels failed in exactly this area, refusing to accept the authority of God.

⁹ See Matt 19:5; Mark 10:7–8.

¹⁰ Though we are sometimes called to “obey God rather than men” (see Acts 5:29).

¹¹ This is the attitude Peter also asks of women married to unbelieving husbands in 1 Peter 3.

¹² Any hint of cruelty or violence is abhorrent to God—see Mal 2:12–16, which shows the husband’s responsibility to fidelity and kindness. Divorce is seen as a result of the husband’s hard heart.

¹³ 2 Kgs 19:21–22: “This is the word that the LORD has spoken concerning him: ‘She despises you, she scorns you—the virgin daughter of Zion; she wags her head behind you—the daughter of Jerusalem. Whom have you mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes to the heights? Against the Holy One of Israel!’”

¹⁴ For specifics, see 1 Timothy 3.

¹⁵ 2 Pet 3:15–16.

¹⁶ See 1 Tim 3:6,7; 2 Tim 2:26.

¹⁷ 1 Timothy 4.

¹⁸ For a thorough discussion of the relation of sexuality and spirituality, see Peter Jones, *The God of Sex: How Spirituality Determines Sexuality* (Colorado Springs: Cook, 2006).

¹⁹ See Eph 1:3ff; 6:13ff.

²⁰ See R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Are Stay at Home Moms ‘Letting Down the Team?’” [accessed 11 July 2006]. Online: http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2006-02-24.

²¹ A wife with no children or with older children might be able to hold down a full-time job and still give herself to her marriage and her church. However, it is easy, even with the best intentions, for a husband and wife to slip into separate lives.

²² Catherine Clark Kroeger, “Faith Feminism, and Family,” *E-Quality* (Spring 2006) [accessed 11 July 2006]. Online: <http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/E-Journal/2006/06spring/06springkroeger.html>: “A woman who chooses to raise a family must have a sense of mission. The woman of Proverbs 31 was respected because of the way she had chosen to organize her life. We need to be emphatic that there are many meaningful activities in which a woman can engage. If a woman chooses to be a mother, she must first understand herself as a child of God, made in God’s image, redeemed by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is not God’s purpose that she be shackled by the tyranny of her household, but that within her family she find expression of her

faith.”

²³ Take, for example, the sad response of one young woman in a counseling situation: “But I don’t have the gift of mercy!”

²⁴ By the way, do not let the zero population growth mentality daunt you. First of all, if you have ever flown over the U.S.A., you will know that the earth is not yet full. Secondly, the LORD will know when the earth is full and will bring history to its culmination in his good time.

²⁵ The definite article (here, “the” childbirth) can sometimes be used to indicate either an example *par excellence* (e.g. “Did you see the game?” —“the” big game), or in reference to a unique event or person (we would say “the president”—there is only one president of our country). Since Paul elsewhere argues an entire theological concept on the basis of a singular vs. a plural form of the word “seed” (Gal 3:16), he may well have intentionally inserted the definite article in this sentence (*the* childbirth—the unique childbirth that brings salvation). Such an interpretation explains both his reference to salvation, and his reference to Eve, who lived in hope of the promise given to her that her “seed” (singular) would conquer the devil and provide salvation for mankind. On this passage, see also George Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 140–49.

THE WOMANLINESS OF DEBORAH: COMPLEMENTARIAN PRINCIPLES FROM JUDGES 4–5¹

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Introduction

According to the popular view, God called Deborah to be one of the judges of Israel, to lead men in war, and thus to deliver the nation from oppression. Deborah's leading is considered normal and precedent-setting. If one says that women should not teach men or be ordained, the answer comes back, "Oh, but what about Deborah!" For example, in *Why Not Women?*, a book co-authored with David Joel Hamilton, Loren Cunningham writes, "All we need to do to refute this idea—that leadership is male—is to find one woman in the Bible who was a gifted leader. Just one woman, obviously gifted, anointed, and called by God to lead. But as we look at Scripture, we find not one but several, in both the Old and New Testaments. . . . Deborah was both a leader and a prophet. She was the head of state, just as Samuel and other prophets were in the days before Israel had a king."²

What about Deborah? Does the text teach that Deborah is the leader

of the nation and its military deliverer? Does Deborah provide an historical precedent that overturns the principle of male leadership in the home and nation? Is Deborah a judge, a head of state, and thereby a poster girl for egalitarianism? Or has she been misrepresented?

Judges 4–5 is a complicated and unusual passage. However, close examination of it will reveal that Deborah is not a military leader, a head of state, or an advocate for egalitarian principles. She is a great Israelite, a prophetess, the most noble person in the book of Judges, and a womanly woman. She is a strong woman in a day of weak men. Deborah's glory is that she uses her strength to strengthen men so that God is glorified and the nation is freed.

The book of Judges takes place between the founding of the nation under Moses and Joshua and the rise of the kings. With God as Israel's only king and governmental bureaucracy at a minimum, this should have been a time of great freedom and prosperity. However, because

of idolatry, it was instead a dark time of oppression, civil and religious chaos, as “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6).

The book of Judges traces the following cycle six and a half times:

- (1) The people turn away from the LORD to idols;
- (2) God chastens them with oppressors;
- (3) The people repent and call out to God for salvation; and
- (4) God raises up a deliverer who militarily defeats the oppressors, restoring freedom for a time. These deliverers are called judges.

The Prose Account of Judges 4

Judges 4–5 relates the third cycle of the six and a half cycles presented in the book. Verses 1–3 of chapter 4 cover the first three parts of the cycle:

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died. And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years.³

Usually at this point in the cycle, God raises up or calls a military deliverer to save the people. This is perfectly in accord with the definition of a judge

given in the introduction of the book:

Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods.... Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge (Judges 2:16,18).

According to Judges 2:16, 18, a judge was a person whom God raised up to deliver the people militarily from oppressors—judges saved out of the hand of those who plundered them; they saved from the hand of their enemies. Second, Judges 2:16 mentions that the Israelites *did not listen* to their judges. Clearly this indicates that the judges did have some teaching or exhorting function. However, in this definition and in the presentation of the actual judges in the book, the military deliverer aspect is overwhelmingly the emphasis.⁴

Who is Deborah?

Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment (Judges 4:4–5).

When we come to Judges 4:4–5, we are presented with a variation in the

cycle. We are not presented with the call or rise of a warrior. Rather, a woman is introduced and a state of affairs is described. Deborah is the only significant character in the book of Judges whose call is not described⁵ and who is not said “to arise,” the formulaic description of a deliverer-judge, as with Othniel (3:9), Ehud (3:15), Gideon (6:14), Tola (10:1), and Jair (10:3).

Deborah was a Prophetess

The first thing the text tells us about Deborah is that she is a prophetess. A prophet is one who receives and communicates words directly from and for God (Exod 4:15–16; 7:1). There were true and false prophets (e.g., 1 Kgs 22), faithful and unfaithful prophets (Num 24:12–13; 31:16; 1 Kgs 13), and lifelong and temporary prophets (Num 11:24). Being a prophet does not tell us a lot about a person’s role or even his character. Some prophets appear, deliver a message, and are not heard from again. Others are towering figures. Except in a few cases, like Moses and Samuel, they are not the rulers of the nation. Most often prophets came to the king with messages from God of warning, guidance, or judgment. Even David, who was a prophet, received this kind of ministry from Nathan and Gad.⁶ Whatever the particulars, in the Old Testament a prophet of Yahweh spoke God’s words as his agent and mouthpiece.

Prophetesses are extremely rare in Scripture. There are 470 occurrences of the words *prophet/prophets* in the Bible and only nine occurrences of *prophetess/prophetesses*. Of these nine, two are false prophetesses. This leaves only Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Isaiah’s wife⁷ as legitimate Old Testament prophetesses. The New Testament prophetesses function in a different era and may do so with a different kind of prophetic gift and so

are not included here.⁸

That Deborah is a prophetess means God sometimes speaks through her. By itself, this information does not tell us anything about her role in the nation or even about her character. God chooses whom he will, and usually we do not know why. Isaiah tells us that the rule of women is a sign of degeneracy, not liberation (Isa 3:12). Certainly the time of the judges is a dark time in Israel’s history. Those who seek to extrapolate doctrine or practice from Deborah need to remember that Judges 4–5 is the historical report of a very rare circumstance in a far-from-ideal setting.⁹ These chapters are given for our edification, but should not be seen as precedents or used to overturn clear commands of Scripture.

Deborah was Married

She was the wife of Lappidoth. No details are given about Deborah’s husband or marriage. However, the fact that she is identified as a wife (4:4) and later identifies herself as a mother (5:7) who ministers from a particular place (4:5) warrants the understanding that Deborah’s ministry did not negate her responsibilities at home.

Deborah was Judging (Adjudicating)

Next we are told that Deborah *was judging Israel at that time*.¹⁰ The word *shaphat* (“to judge”) is a broad and general word that can mean “judge,” “adjudicate,” “decide,” “govern,” “deliver,” “pronounce judgment,” or “execute judgment.” Fortunately, contextual information helps us to understand what Deborah was doing.

Clearly Deborah is not providing military deliverance under her palm tree. While the text is not specific, it is most likely that she is rendering verdicts in lawsuits, and/or giving divine guidance.

First Samuel 9:6–10 provides an example of this practice. The future king, Saul, seeks a prophet or “seer” when he loses his donkeys. In 1 Sam 9:6, Saul says to this servant, “Behold, there is a man of God in this city, and he is a man who is held in honor; all that he says comes true. So now let us go there. Perhaps he can tell us the way we should go.” Three things are said about the seer (prophet) that Saul seeks: (1) he is known to be a man of God; (2) he is held in honor; and (3) all that he says comes true.

Undoubtedly the same could be said for Deborah. She is not merely wise or insightful; she is actually a prophetess—she speaks the words of God. Second, Deborah is a woman of integrity, loyal to God and dependable. Whether she dealt with issues such as: “Should I marry Sue or Jane?” or “Pete stole my pig; make him give it back,” the text simply does not say. Whatever the details, we know that her judging provided adjudication or guidance counseling, not military deliverance from oppressors. In this sense, she is “judging,” but she is not a “judge” as the role is presented in the book of Judges.

The question arises, where are the elders and priests whom God had appointed to judge the people (Exod 29:9; Num 11:16–25)? The only priest mentioned in the book of Judges is apostate (Judges 17–18). The elders after Joshua’s time are corrupt or foolish (Judges 2:7, 10; 8:14–16; 21). Likely, the people resorted to Deborah because she had both the word of God and personal integrity, a rare combination in those days.

Deborah was under Her Palm Tree

One detail about Deborah’s style of ministry is mentioned. She stayed put, under her palm tree, and the people came to her. Years later, Samuel also judged at

Ramah (1 Sam 7:15–17). Unlike Deborah, he walked a circuit. Deborah’s habit was to minister at home. This is a detail; nevertheless, home-based work is classically feminine.

The Deliverer—Judge Barak

Call and Command

She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, “Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, ‘Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun. And I [the LORD] will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I [the LORD] will give him into your hand?’” (Judges 4:6–7).

Whatever the nature of Deborah’s judging ministry, something provokes her to summon Barak (v. 6). From the context, we know the following: (1) The northern tribes were suffering a harsh oppression (4:2–3; 5:6–7); and (2) they had cried to the LORD for help (4:3).

Whether God initiated the message to Deborah to commission Barak in response to the people’s cries to him, or whether the people petitioned Deborah and she sought the LORD for his word, we do not know. What we do know is that God’s prophetic word is to call and command Barak to engage the enemy general, with a sure promise of victory.

Again, demonstrating her preference for ministering from home, Deborah sends for Barak. His coming a distance

of some seventy-five miles indicates his respect for the LORD and for his propheticess. Deborah's words to Barak make at least three things clear: (1) She does not speak from her own wisdom or because of her popularity with the people. She speaks on the authority of the word of God alone; (2) Barak is and has been the military leader of the tribes—"go gather *your* men"; and (3) Barak is here called to be the deliverer-judge as described in Judges 2:16, 18.

Deborah frames her message to Barak as a question: "Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you?" (4:6) It is a question and yet it demands an affirmative answer, putting the greatest possible emphasis on the fact that it is Yahweh who has commanded, and it is he who will win the battle. What more could any general ask? God not only tells him what to do and where to go, but what the outcome will be—certain victory. Nevertheless, instead of marching off speedily to execute the will of the LORD, Barak issues his own condition to Deborah and thereby to God.

Condition and Accommodation

Barak is the commander of the army; the people have cried out for salvation, and yet no deliverer has arisen. It is likely that God has previously commanded Barak to go forth,¹¹ but he has refused to go. If this is the case, Deborah is repeating a command Barak has already heard, but refuses to obey. (God often sent prophets to warn and command errant leaders.¹²) Whatever has happened in the past, Barak's counter-condition in the next verse is very clear: "Barak said to her, 'If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go'" (4:8).

We do not know why Barak does not obey the LORD straightaway. Perhaps

he thinks the people do not trust him as much as they trust Deborah; perhaps he fears they will not answer his muster. Perhaps he trusts Deborah's physical presence as an assurance of God's help more than God's own promise. Whatever the reason, Barak's issuing a condition to God is not a good or admirable thing (as some have tried to make it¹³). Both Deborah and God are displeased with this response from Barak as we see by their responses to him.

Condition and Judgment

And she said, "I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. And Barak called out Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh. And 10,000 men went up at his heels, and Deborah went up with him (Judges 4:9–10).

Willing to accommodate Barak's weakness, Deborah agrees to go; but she is not pleased or honored. Apparently, she would prefer for Barak to go do his job and leave her under her palm tree to do hers. She sees the demand that she go to the battle as unnecessary. God sees it as shameful, and pronounces through Deborah a divine judgment against Barak the warrior. It was the duty of ancient commanders to meet their enemies of equal rank and standing. That Barak's opposing commander, Sisera, will be vanquished by a woman will be a shame to both Barak and Sisera (Judges 9:52–57).

Upon first reading, some might

imagine that Deborah is the woman who will slay Sisera, but God has another woman in mind. Verse 11 is included at this point to prepare the way for Jael's appearance later in the chapter: "Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaananim, which is near Kedesh."

The Battle: Deborah Exhorts; Barak Goes Forth; God Triumphs

When Sisera was told that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the men who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon. And Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him. And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot. And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left (Judges 4:12–16).

After Barak and Deborah return to the north, Barak calls out the troops and goes to Mount Tabor as commanded.

However, when God draws Sisera out as he promised, Barak is again slow to act. Deborah commands Barak with the same sort of language that she used in their first encounter. She exhorts him to act, using once again the form of a rhetorical question to emphasize that God himself is the one who goes forth to destroy the enemy, "Does not the LORD go out before you?" Thus encouraged, Barak goes forth, the men follow him,¹⁴ and God routs Sisera's army.

A Surprise Ending for Sisera

But Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. And Jael came out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord; turn aside to me; do not be afraid." So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. And he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." So she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him. And he said to her, "Stand at the opening of the tent, and if any man comes and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say, 'No.'" But Jael the wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand. Then she went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple until it went down into the ground while he was lying fast asleep from weariness. So he died (Judges 4:17–21).

Hospitality with a Hammer

The Kenites were descendants of Moses' brother-in-law Hobab, who had acted as a guide for Israel in the wilderness (Num 10:29–32). Later they settled among the tribe of Judah in the south. Heber, Jael's husband, moves away from his relatives to the north, where he is on good terms with Jabin the Canaanite king. It is probably for this reason, that Sisera trusts Jael's invitation and enters her tent for sanctuary. At first Jael is the perfect hostess, inviting the exhausted general into her tent and serving him lavishly. In response, Sisera commands her to stand guard and protect him from pursuing Israelites. When Sisera is asleep, however, Jael kills him with the skill and common implements of a bedouin wife. She drives a tent peg through his temple with a hammer. Thus the Canaanite general comes to a surprising and ignominious end, exactly in accord with God's prediction through Deborah.

Barak Pursues What He Cannot Attain

And behold, as Barak was pursuing Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, "Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking." So he went in to her tent, and there lay Sisera dead, with the tent peg in his temple (Judges 4:22).

Just as Barak did not obey God's command to go to battle without condition, neither does he accept God's limitation on his glory. After the battle, Barak pursues the fleeing Sisera, apparently determined to seek what God has expressly forbidden him, the glory of slaying Sisera. Barak probably assumed that the woman prophesied was Debo-

rah. When Deborah did not go to the battle, Barak may have thought he could triumph after all. But God's possibilities and resources are limitless. Barak did not know that God had another woman living right in Sisera's path of retreat who would be more than able and willing to kill this wicked man.

So on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel. And the hand of the people of Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they destroyed Jabin king of Canaan (Judges 4:23–24).

The Poetic Account of Judges 5

The cycle of Deborah and Barak is unique in Judges in that it is presented twice, once in the prose account of chapter 4, and a second time in the dramatic and poetic account of chapter 5. Probably in obedience to God's command to awake and sing in v. 12, Deborah writes this vivid account of the events as only an eyewitness could. It is considered one of the oldest and finest examples of Hebrew poetry. While Barak sings this song with Deborah, she is its author, as is indicated by her first person references in vv. 7 and 13.

Why Deborah Sings

Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day: "That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the LORD! Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the LORD I will sing; I will make melody to

the LORD, the God of Israel. LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. The mountains quaked before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel" (Judges 5:1–5).

Deborah Praises God for Two Things

First, she praises him that God's people moved out in obedience to fight for him—officers led and men followed. Second, she praises God as the ultimate warrior who brought his people from Sinai and who triumphs over the Canaanites with supernatural power.

The Oppression and the Beginning of Its End

"In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways. The villagers ceased in Israel; they ceased to be until I arose; I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel. When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates. Was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel?" (Judges 5:6–8).

Deborah describes the oppressive conditions created by the Canaanites. Travel, commerce, and village life had ceased. People stayed home or crept about in fear of assault, rape, and theft. And yet, the root cause of the problem was not the Canaanites; it was the Isra-

elites themselves who had *chosen new gods*. Without God, they were prostrate and disarmed before their technologically superior foes.

This was the situation until, "I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel." While God is clearly the deliverer of his people, this short verse reveals Deborah as the human hinge of the story. When oppression and slavery seemed the immovable state of affairs, Deborah arose as a mother. Through her, deliverance is given birth; "the noble remnant comes forth" (v. 13).

Deborah is best understood as one of the significant biblical women who "open the door" on great historical developments. Women sometimes initiate great events; but, as we shall see, men must walk through the doors women open in order to complete and execute what the women have begun. This is not a contradiction of the basic gender pattern in which men initiate and women respond; but rather represents an example of the "interdependence" principle laid out by Paul in 1 Cor 11:8–12.¹⁵ Scriptural examples of this pattern of women initiating great events and men completing them are:

- The midwives reject Pharaoh's command;
Moses is born and grows up to crush Egypt.
- Rahab opens the door of Canaan to Israelite spies;
Joshua comes through to conquer the land.
- Hannah opens her life to God in a corrupt day;
Samuel comes forth to establish the kingdom.
- Ruth insists on coming to Bethlehem;
God, through Boaz, plants

the Messianic line.

- Mary opens her spirit and body to God's call; Christ comes through her to save the world.
- Deborah exhorts and supports Barak in battle; Barak and his men defeat the Canaanites.

How do we know that these actions are gender “counterpoint” and not a deliberate overturning of patriarchy? Deborah identifies herself as a mother, not a revolutionary title for a woman. Is she referring to the fact that she is a biological mother, or is she implying a motherly attitude and posture to the whole nation? Both are completely warranted from context. She describes her motivation, not as a judge or even as a prophetess, but rather as a mother, one concerned for the life and well-being of God's children.

Praising Men and God

My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless the LORD (Judges 5:9)

In v. 9, Deborah's “heart goes out”—she is full of admiration for and pride in the Israelite men who came forth to lead Israel. An officer corps answered the muster of Barak, enrolled, and took charge of the enlisted volunteers. For these commanders, without whom no army would exist, Deborah praises God. Had not these men followed God, Deborah's initiating would have availed nothing.

“Tell of it, you who ride on

white donkeys, you who sit on rich carpets and you who walk by the way. To the sound of musicians at the watering places, there they repeat the righteous triumphs of the LORD, the righteous triumphs of his villagers in Israel. Then down to the gates marched the people of the LORD” (Judges 5:10–11).

Judges 5:3 is a call to the defeated Canaanite kings (vassals of Jabin who served under Sisera), to worship the true God. Judges 5:10 is apparently a second such call to the Canaanite enemies, this time to the wealthy merchants who prospered through Jabin's oppression. These men are also commanded to tell of the triumphs of God and Israel.

Gender-Specific Commands

“Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, break out in a song! Arise, Barak, lead away your captives, O son of Abinoam” (Judges 5:12).

Deborah's song presents a staccato series of scenes, full of energy and rich imagery, but often with little context. Verse 12 may represent a summary of God's overall commands to Deborah and Barak for the whole operation—Deborah, you prophesy; Barak, you go to war. More specifically these directions fit the situation after God routed Sisera. Deborah is to sing—lead the response of praise for the victorious warriors. (For other examples, see Miriam, Exod 15:1–18, 20–21, and the women of David's day, 1 Sam 18:6–7.) Barak is to finish what remains of the military operation by leading away the captives. In either case, these

commands are classically gender-specific: Deborah is to respond with praise; Barak is to go and do.

The Roll Call of Honor and Shame

“Then down marched the remnant of the noble; the people of the LORD marched down for me against the mighty. From Ephraim their root they marched down into the valley, following you, Benjamin, with your kinsmen; from Machir marched down the commanders, and from Zebulun those who bear the lieutenant’s staff; the princes of Issachar came with Deborah, and Issachar faithful to Barak; into the valley they rushed at his heels. Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Why did you sit still among the sheepfolds, to hear the whistling for the flocks? Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan; and Dan, why did he stay with the ships? Asher sat still at the coast of the sea, staying by his landings. Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the death; Naphtali, too, on the heights of the field” (Judges 5:13–18).

The Faithful and Unfaithful Tribes

In v. 13, Deborah returns to her introductory theme—praise for God’s people rising up to follow him in holy war. In the verses that follow, she identifies by name the tribes that answered God’s call

and are thus worthy of praise—Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir (alternate name for Manasseh), Zebulun, and Issachar. On the other hand, Reuben, Gilead, and Dan are singled out for shame. They heard the call of God, but tarried with the daily affairs of flocks and fleets. Deborah, as a true glory-of-man woman (1 Cor 11:7), gives herself whole heartedly, not only to the praise of God but also to the praise of worthy men. Following the patterns of wisdom, she is a full-orbed woman of wisdom, speaking life-giving counsel and praising the righteous (Prov 4:7–9; 8:13–21), while scorning and rejecting the dishonorable (Prov 1:24–33). In v. 18, the highest praise is awarded Zebulun and Naphtali. These tribes not only answered God’s call, they risked their very lives in the fiercest part of the battle.

God Who Wins the Battle

“The kings came, they fought; then fought the kings of Canaan, at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; they got no spoils of silver. From heaven the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera. The torrent Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. March on, my soul, with might! Then loud beat the horses’ hoofs with the galloping, galloping of his steeds” (Judges 5:19–22).

In vv. 19–22, Deborah moves from outlining the faithful and unfaithful deeds of men to describe that which actually turns the battle—the work of God and angels. Sisera’s nine hundred chariots were effective in the plain of the Esdraelon Valley where this battle was

fought. However, just as Sisera comes forth in his might, God supernaturally sends a torrential downpour to cause the usually tiny Kishon river to turn into a flood. The chariots are caught in a quagmire, the horses break loose in a frenzy, and Sisera's troops are left in rout. Almost certainly the stars fighting from heaven is a reference to the angelic forces who battled demons in order to fulfill God's command to send this unusual rain storm. The similarity between the victory at the Red Sea and this victory is apparent. God is the almighty God of nature. The strongest weapons of man are no match for him. The Canaanite god Baal, supposedly the god of rain and lightning, is shown to be as impotent as his servants.

The Strongest Curse

"Curse Meroz, says the angel of the LORD, curse its inhabitants thoroughly, because they did not come to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the might" (Judges 5:23).

Deborah has been writing her song in the words of God under the inspiration of his Spirit, but now in v. 23 she quotes the LORD directly. The angel of the LORD is the Ultimate Warrior who has brought the Israelites from Sinai, through Sier, and into the land under Joshua (Exod 23:20–33). Now he, the preincarnate Christ, utters a curse on the town of Meroz. Apparently Meroz was a town in or about the Esdraelon Valley; it is unknown and unfound, a reasonable expectation given this curse. Meroz's curse is more severe than the shame put upon the other slackers. Perhaps the men of Meroz were near the line

of retreat and had special opportunity to help with the pursuit and slaughter of the enemy, but they did not. The LORD curses them thoroughly because they did not *help him*. As we have seen, God does not need men. He will sovereignly win the battle whatever the details. However, God desires to work with, in, and through his people. Their response to his commands does not determine the outcome of the battle; it determines the outcome of their own lives. Judges 4–5 presents a microcosm of all history. All of the ages encompass a holy war between God and his servants and Satan and his servants. In the end, the record will be clear—who came to serve, who did not, who served with highest distinction, and who were cowards of greatest ignominy.

Jael, the Blessed Bedouin

"Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, of tent-dwelling women most blessed. He asked water and she gave him milk; she brought him curds in a noble's bowl. She sent her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen's mallet; she struck Sisera; she crushed his head; she shattered and pierced his temple. Between her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; between her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell—dead" (Judges 5:24–27).

What a contrast between Meroz and Jael! Israelites who had every opportunity and reason to serve God did not, and thus receive the harshest curse. Jael, a non-Israelite with apparently no opportunity or capacity, becomes the

heroine of the battle! Truly God uses the weaker things of this world to overcome the mighty.

Who was Jael? Why did she do what she did? She was of the Kenites, descendants of Moses' in-laws, friends of the Jews. But she was not a Jew. In addition, her husband Heber had moved away from the Judahites in the south to live by choice in a land of Canaanite oppression. Heber and Jabin are on friendly terms; but as becomes clear, Jael and Sisera are not. Jael bears strong resemblance to Rahab in Joshua 2. Rahab was a non-Jew, who lived in the midst of Canaanites; indeed she was one. She, like they, had significant knowledge of the God of Israel; his mighty deeds had been shaking the nations for decades (Josh 2:8–13). But unlike the other Canaanites, Rahab chose to repent of her idolatry and seek the mercy of Yahweh. Jael lived among Canaanites, but she is a loyal worshipper of Yahweh. When her opportunity comes to strike a literal blow for God and freedom, she does it without hesitation.

The phrase *most blessed of women* brings to mind Mary, the mother of Christ, though it seems hard to imagine two women more different than Jael and Mary. There is a difference of magnitude. Jael is the most blessed of *tent-dwelling women*. She is here honored as the greatest bedouin woman to ever live. Mary, on the other hand, is the greatest woman of all generations. However, Jael and Mary share a similarity that is the foundation of their greatness. Both are on the LORD's side, utterly committed to him. Both love him first with heart, mind, and soul. Both are willing to do whatever he needs or wants done—be it slaying a wicked general or bringing the Son of God into the world, they are both the “handmaids of the LORD.”

A Defeated Champion in the Combat of Mothers

“[T]he mother of Sisera wailed through the lattice: ‘Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?’ Her wisest princesses answer, indeed, she answers herself, ‘Have they not found and divided the spoil?—A womb or two for every man; spoil of dyed materials for Sisera, spoil of dyed materials embroidered, two pieces of dyed work embroidered for the neck as spoil?’” (Judges 5:28–30).

In the last scene of Deborah's song, we move from the tent of Jael to the house of Sisera's mother, where this well-to-do woman impatiently waits the return of her son from the battle. Not considering defeat as a possibility, she and her attendants speculate about what is keeping the general. Their answer—rape and pillage. Deborah could not have portrayed the Canaanite culture more effectively than this!¹⁶ When the “cultivated” matrons of a people deliberately and enthusiastically rear sons for the military, economic, and sexual oppression of their neighbors, then you know you are dealing with a corrupt society.

Deborah is a modest and humble woman. She does not dwell on herself or her role in events. However, by closing her song with Sisera's mother, she casts herself without words as the victorious champion of mothers in the battle between light and dark, good and evil, between Yahweh and those who hate him. Deborah's God has triumphed over Baal; her technologically inferior culture

has defeated the corruption of Canaan; her man Barak will come back from the battle to enter the roll call of faith (Heb 11:32-34), while the tyrant Sisera lies dead with a tent peg through his head. Many Israelite men have been faithful, while the hosts of Sisera have been swept away by flood and sword. Deborah has reason to rejoice. Her God has brought great triumph, and she has been the mother of it.

“So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might.” And the land had rest for forty years (Judges 5:31).

Complementarian Principles from Judges 4-5

Having reviewed the text of Judges 4-5, let us return to our original question. Does the cycle of Deborah and Barak support egalitarianism? Does Deborah's ministry refute the whole principle of male leadership as some suggest?

The Womanliness of Deborah

Deborah is not an example or justification for women's usurpation of men's offices or roles. Rather, as a strong woman, she deploys her strength by disciplining its use in womanly ways in order to strengthen men and glorify God.

Deborah is Not a Judge

She is not a judge in the sense that the book of Judges defines a judge; she is not a military deliverer.¹⁷ Rather she is a prophetess, and as a prophetess, she commands and exhorts Barak with God's own words and authority.

Deborah Accommodates and Cooperates

She works with Barak in ministry. She goes with him to the muster and shares with him the song she writes. She does not see Barak as a sensitive man who is opening equal opportunity for women on the battlefield. Barak's weakness irritates her; nevertheless she works for his success.

Deborah is a Wife and Mother

She stays at her palm tree and lets people come to her to receive her ministry. Her womanliness encompasses and informs her ministry; her ministry does not obliterate her womanliness. Her competitor is not Barak, or even Jabin or Sisera; by implication she presents Sisera's mother as the champion she bests.

She Does Not Lead or Fight in the Battle

War is the work of men. Nowhere in the Bible are women mustered for battle. To be killed by a woman was dishonorable (Judges 9:52-54). Women have always played a significant role in war as spies, informants, and as anchors on the domestic front (Num 32:1-27, esp. vv. 26-27; Joshua 2; 2 Sam 17:17-20). On rare occasions, they kill. But, according to the Bible, it is not normative, desirable, or glorious for women to go to battle with men.

She Arises as a Mother, Not As a Judge or Warrior

Because she uses her prophetic gift in the context of integrity and womanliness, Deborah becomes a powerful wisdom figure for the nation. Her strength is used to motivate men, and when they act, she is the first to praise them. When they are lazy or cowardly, she is the first to scorn them. What women want in society is usually what they get. Sisera's

mother approved of rape and theft; Deborah wanted freedom and the glory of God.

Deborah is Commanded to Sing, Not Take Captives

Her song emphasizes praise to God for the victory and for the men who fought willingly. Deborah is a great “glory of man” woman. Of the thirty-one verses in her song, seven explicitly praise the righteous and courageous men who came forth to fight (vv. 2, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18).

If Deborah Had Been Egalitarian

The final test for determining whether a woman is complementarian or egalitarian is to look at the results of her life and work. Complementarian women want to strengthen men as leaders, providers, and protectors. Egalitarian women want to replace men in these roles. The most convincing evidence that Deborah was a womanly woman, “complementarian” in belief and practice, is to look at the results of her life. If Deborah had been egalitarian, her goal would have been to take Barak’s job, not exhort him to do it. Her goal would have been to arise as a deliverer, not as a mother. She would have exploited Barak’s invitation to the battlefield, not reproved it. She would have battled for equal opportunity for Israelite women in the combat arms, not praised a homemaker. She would have filled her hymn with her own achievements, not those of men at arms. Her goal would have been to have her name in Hebrews 11, not Barak’s. In short, her goal would have been to replace the men, not make them strong.

Deborah is a Woman Who Opened the Door

Her exhorting and going forth as a

companion to Barak is the catalyst that rouses the faithful remnant of the nation. The result is victory and glory for God, honor for the men who served willingly, shame for slackers, and great renown for two women who stood in the gap in extraordinary ways. A great lady of wisdom, she exhorts, reproves, condemns, and praises in the pattern of Wisdom herself. She is a life-giving mother and a “glory of man” to men who are the glory of God. Her purpose is to exalt men into their proper roles and then praise them generously for it.

What Barak Did

Barak is a weak man who does the will of God when paired with a righteous and wise woman. He does the job of deliverer-judge, makes the roll call of faith, but suffers a loss of glory because of his lack of zeal and obedience. For clarification, let us review the deeds of Barak for good and ill. On the negative side, Barak knew his job as commander but did nothing to save the people in their bondage. When Deborah commands him, he hesitates, demanding that she go with him. On the day of the battle, Deborah again must “push him out the door” with command and exhortation. Finally, Barak, unwilling to pursue when commanded, then pursues when forbidden. He attempts to pursue Sisera, even though God has said he will not slay him.

On the positive side, Barak does go when Deborah says go and when she accompanies him. He does call out the men, go to Mt. Tabor, and lead 10,000 men down the mountain. He does behold God rout Sisera before him, and he does pursue the Canaanite chariots and army.

One of the clearest statements that Barak, not Deborah, is the judge of this

cycle is his listing with the other judges in 1 Sam 12:11 and Heb 11:32–34:

And what more shall I say?
For time would fail me to
tell of Gideon, Barak, Sam-
son, Jephthah, of David
and Samuel and the proph-
ets—who through faith con-
quered kingdoms, enforced
justice, obtained promises,
stopped the mouths of li-
ons, quenched the power of
fire, escaped the edge of the
sword, were made strong out
of weakness, became mighty
in war, put foreign armies to
flight (Heb 11:32–34).

Certainly Barak well fits the de-
scription, “were made strong out of weak-
ness, became mighty in war, put foreign
armies to flight.”

Standing In, Not Taking Over

(1) *Women taking men’s roles is an abnormality, not a freedom.* Women were never anointed to be kings, priests, war-
rior judges, apostles, or elders. On rare
occasions they were prophetesses. There
is no precedent in Deborah for matriar-
chy or women’s ordination.

To use the rare and exceptional
woman as a fulcrum for overturning
the gender standards of Scripture and
nature is as pervasive today as it is aber-
rant. Because a woman is gifted, smart,
competent, or visionary is not an excuse
for giving her the offices and duties of
a man. To do so is a final judgment on
men and a displacement of the woman
that will prevent her from deploying her
strengths in their natural and most effec-
tive framework. By her words, Deborah
considered it more desirable to arise as
a mother than as a judge or even as a

prophetess.

It is a curse on a people when
women and children rule over them,
not because women and children are
inherently evil, but because it represents
a breakdown of God’s created order
whereby men lead and protect, while
women help and nurture for the glory of
God and the benefit of all.

(2) *In the case of dead or absent men,
God allows women to stand in for—but
not take over—male roles and duties.*
Zelophehad’s daughters provide a clear
case study of the “no men” problem. Zelo-
phehad had no sons, so God said that his
daughters might inherit his land (Num
27:1–11). In this case, God approves the
idea of women standing in the gap where
there are no men to provide the natural
male leadership. However, in Numbers
36, we see that stand-ins can quickly
create a problem. The tribal elders come
back to Moses and point out that if the
women marry outside their tribe, then the
lands of Zelophehad will be transferred
to another tribe, thus diminishing the
God-appointed heritage of their tribe.
In reply, God says the women may marry
whomever they please, but the men must
be from their tribe in order to assure that
the tribal inheritances be preserved.

Stand-ins must have limitations;
otherwise stand-ins become take-overs,
and the fabric of society is destroyed.
Today our society is in tatters from take-
overs, rooted more in gender confusion
and rebellion than in any other cause.
Some women do need to work outside
the home. However, when feminist doc-
trine establishes that all women should
work outside the home for their own
self-respect and independence, women
become take-overs in the workplace. Men
are displaced in their primary role as pro-
viders, and children are deprived of their
primary caregiver. Working women have

taken over from far too many men; divorce has taken over from life-long monogamy; and alternate forms of childcare have taken over from motherhood. Men are weakened and displaced; women are exhausted and frustrated; and children are neglected and abused. We have taken the principle of Numbers 27, added sin to it in many cases, and completely neglected the truth of Numbers 36. A great deal of the genius of Deborah is that she did stand in, but she limited herself even as she did so. Therefore, God was glorified, and men, women, and children were strengthened by her life and ministry, not weakened.

Strengthening or Enabling Weak Men?

Accommodating Weak Men

Accommodating weak men, or a man who is weak at the moment, is not an exact science, but rather an art form requiring much wisdom. When women coddle and cover for weak men too much, they exacerbate their weakness. However, as in the case of Deborah, sometimes exhortation or encouragement, coupled with going the second mile in support will enable an otherwise passive man to do his duty. How far do you go? When does helping a weak man strengthen him? When does it only enable him to be more irresponsible, thus augmenting sin?

Deborah chose to go to the battle and to tell Barak when to go; she did not fight the battle for him; they shared the victory together (they sang her song together). Yet she refused to give him the glory as the champion he was not. He is only mentioned once in the song of victory and that in praise of Issachar, not Barak (v. 15).

Factors to Consider

When trying to discern the difference in strengthening men and enabling them to be weak, consider:

Motive: Deborah clearly had the glory of God and the good of his people foremost in her mind; her life was not about exalting or advancing herself.

Method: Deborah did her ministry in “the style” of a woman; she stayed home. When telling Barak the word of the LORD she puts it in a form to emphasize the authority of God, not her own. In recording events she put much more emphasis on what God and the men did, than on what she did.

Short-term result: Deborah had encouragement along the way. After she agreed to go with Barak, he actually went! He mustered the troops. After she told him to go fight, he went and fought.

Long-term result: Is a woman a stand-in for absent or weak men, or is she a take-over? What is the long-term effect of her work? What does she seek to perpetuate? Deborah does not found a school of prophets nor does Jael start a paramilitary academy for girls. Godly women use every means at their disposal to get men to do their jobs, not to take their jobs.

Office and Gifts Are Appointed; Glory is Earned

Complementarianism upholds God's appointed offices and roles. This does not mean that incompetence is called competence, that failure is honored as success, or that disobedience is honored with glory. God is not mocked; justice is justice. Glory will finally go to those who earn it. Men must actually be men, or they will not be glorified. The question is, will we actually be women? Glory, divine approval, and usefulness to the kingdom belong to the faithful, whether they are men, women, or children, in a tent, under a palm, or at the head of the troops.

Conclusion

The most honorable character in the book of Judges, Deborah, becomes the catalyst and impetus for great good. Because of her, God is glorified as the deliverer-judge. Many men rise up and fight bravely. Jael is honored as an extraordinary believer and servant of God. Barak does his job, is honored for his faith, although his glory is diminished. Canaanite evil is defeated, and the northern tribes gain peace for forty years. For all the millennia since, saints have been edified by this great story of faith and Deborah's war hymn glorifying God and those who came to fight for him.

Deborah did all this as a womanly woman. She was not a military leader, a head of state, or an advocate for egalitarian principles. Deborah was a wife, a mother, a prophetess, a singer, a patriot, and a great lover of God. Deborah was strong and she was a prophetess. What really makes her remarkable was that she used her strengths and prophetic gift in their most effective framework—the created channels of her own womanliness.



¹ Previously published in 2003 by the International Council for Gender Studies, Inc., P.O. Box 702, Waxahachie, TX 75168, www.fiveaspects.org. Used with permission.

² Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton with Janice Rogers, *Why Not Women?* (Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 2000), 52.

³ Unless noted, Scriptures quotations are from the English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

⁴ I could find no clear example of one of the judges of Israel teaching the people or addressing them except to muster them for war (e.g., 7:24). The one passage that could be called preaching or teaching is uttered by a prophet, not a judge (6:7–10).

⁵ Unfortunately, even the excellent and conservative commentary in *The Woman's Study Bible*, calls Deborah "A Distinguished Judge," and speaks of her as "elevated to high political power," extrapolating "God's call" from Judges 4:4 (*The Woman's Study Bible* [ed. Dorothy Kelley Patterson; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995], 389, 392).

⁶ See 2 Sam 7:3–17 for the difference between Nathan speaking for himself to David, and as the mouthpiece of God.

⁷ Even this reference may be a way of referring to Isaiah's wife as "Mrs. Prophet," rather than a reference to her own function as God's spokesman.

⁸ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, ed., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 70. Piper and Grudem explain the difference between Old and New Testament prophecy this way:

Prophecy in the worship of the early church was not the kind of authoritative, infallible revelation we associate with the written prophecies of the Old Testament. It was a report in human words based on a spontaneous, personal revelation of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 14:30) for the purpose of edification, encouragement, consolation, conviction, and guidance (1 Cor. 14:3, 24–25; Acts 21:4; 16:6–10). It was not necessarily free from a mixture of human error, and thus needed assessment (1 Thess. 5:19–20; 1 Cor. 14:29) on the basis of the apostolic (Biblical) teaching.

For further information, see Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982); and Wayne Grudem, "Prophecy—Yes, But Teaching—No: Paul's Consistent Advocacy of Women's Participation Without Governing Authority," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no. 1 (1987): 11–23.

⁹ The priesthood must have been no better in Deborah's time than in the time of Samuel under Eli and his sons. As Daniel Block puts it, "The silence of the priesthood in the book of Judges is deafening." ("Deborah Among the Judges: The Perspective of

the Hebrew Historian,” in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Near Eastern Context* [ed. A. R. Millard, James K. Hoffmeier, and David W. Baker; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994], 252).

¹⁰ The NIV translation of Judges 4:4—“Deborah was leading Israel at this time”—unfortunately and unnecessarily renders an egalitarian interpretation.

¹¹ The divine warrant for the extermination of the Canaanites was given in Moses’ day (Deut 7:1–5); yet because of Israel’s failure to obey completely, the Canaanites remained among them as a snare (Judges 2:1–4).

¹² Examples of prophets counseling kings: Samuel to Saul (1 Sam 13:8–14); Nathan to David (1 Sam 12:1–15); and Jeremiah to Zedekiah (Jer 37:1–10).

¹³ Daniel Block argues that Barak is righteous, and that “the request to be accompanied by the prophet is a plea for the presence of God” (Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* [New American Commentary; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999], 199).

¹⁴ Sarah Sumner writes, “Deborah is commended for leading ten thousand men into a battle against King Jabin and his army” (Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003], 109). Leading the army into battle is what Barak did, not what Deborah did.

¹⁵ Described in my *Five Aspects of Woman* (Waxahachie, TX: ICGS, 2002), 249–50, 258; and in my “Prayer Challenge to Five Aspects Women, 2001.” For more information, see: www.fiveaspects.org.

It would be easy to develop a complete presentation of the “five aspects of woman” using Deborah. She ruled her domain at the palm tree in a way that reached the whole nation; she helped Barak become the leader he needed to be; she gave life as a mother to her country; she exhorted, reproved, and praised the wise and the foolish as a true lady of wisdom; and she exulted in glorifying honorable men and the God who led them.

¹⁶ Sisera’s mother refers to the Israelite women, who supposedly will be raped, with a crude and demeaning term.

¹⁷ Daniel I. Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 193–94) poses an impressive series of questions challenging the idea that Deborah is presented as a savior or deliverer:

- Why is she not introduced as one whom Yahweh had raised up?
- Why is there no reference to her inspiration and empowerment by Yahweh’s spirit?
- Why does she need Barak to accomplish the deliverance?
- Why is the verb *yasa*, “to save,” never applied to her?
- Why does she say, “The Lord will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman,” instead of “into my hands?”
- Why does the author observe that “she went up with Barak,” (4:10) but avoid placing her at the head of the troops?

• Why does Deborah announce to Barak, “This day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands,” (4:14) rather than into “my hands?”

• Why is she absent from the description of the actual battle (4:15–17), and why does she never meet Jabin or Sisera?

• Why did the poet prefer the title “mother in Israel” (5:7) over “savior of Israel?”

• Why does the poet avoid the root *qum*, “to rise,” let alone referring to Yahweh as the causative subject, when he speaks of Deborah’s rise? (The word translated “arose” in 5:7 is what Block calls “an awkward variant,” not the typical verb [226].).

WOMEN'S MINISTRY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH: A COVENANTAL AND COMPLEMENTARIAN APPROACH¹

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Mary, a college woman in our church, met with fourth- and fifth-grade girls during the summer, discipling them in principles of biblical womanhood. After their first session, ten-year old Rachel said, "I've thought a lot about being a Christian, but I never thought about being a Christian woman."

Our increasingly pagan culture encourages us not to think about distinctions such as male and female. This is why the women's ministry in our church extended our reach to fourth- and fifth-grade girls. By partnering with our Youth Ministry, we began discipling teen girls. Then, by partnering with our Children's Ministry, we are helping Mary disciple pre-teen girls.² This is as it should be—one generation telling the next generation the glorious deeds of God, including the fact that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27).³

Androgyny was not, is not, and will not be God's way. An androgynous

approach to ministry in the church is not a biblical approach. It was not good for Adam to be alone in the garden, and a genderless approach to ministry in God's church is not good. God did not give his benediction of "It is very good" until man and woman stood side by side, equal but different.

The crisis of womanhood is too critical for the church to be passive. Scores of evangelical women are functional feminists because the world's paradigm for womanhood is the only one they have heard. The church should lead the way in equipping God's people to think biblically about all of life, including a biblical perspective of gender roles and relationships.

The Dangerous Silence of the Church

The church must boldly articulate a robustly positive perspective of womanhood and of woman's role in the church. The church must also equip godly older women to disciple younger women to think and live according to this perspec-

tive. If a local church remains silent on this issue, women will be unequipped to fulfill their covenantal calling.

It is insufficient for churches that hold to male headship simply to compile a list of things that are *permissible* for women to do. We must go to the Scriptures and determine what is *needful* for women to do. Gender-aloneness was “not good” in the garden and the same is true in the church.

There is no time for a culture of inertia in the church. Feminism is the only paradigm for womanhood that many women and girls have ever considered. It takes a radical paradigm shift to understand the essentials of biblical womanhood. It takes grace-animated obedience to God’s Word to live biblical womanhood. Women’s ministries are the apparatus the church can utilize to educate and equip women to stand tall and brave in the war for womanhood.

The role of women in God’s church is a vital and volatile question in every age, but the increased visibility of this topic in our time demands that the church develop a theology of, and a functioning model for, women’s ministry in the local church. Even among evangelicals who hold to male headship, there is widespread difference in practice regarding women’s ministry.

- In some churches the women’s ministry is event, task, or personality driven. An inherent danger is that any ministry that is not biblically informed will eventually become competitive and divisive.
- Some churches do not have a women’s ministry because of a concern or even experience that if women are

organized they will make demands and seek power. In this vacuum of isolation and underutilization of women there is the potential for frustration and anger-birthing leadership to erupt among the women, and the very thing the church attempts to avoid becomes a reality.

- Some churches assert that women can do anything that unordained men can do. Some proponents of this approach say that since women are mainstreamed into the total ministry of the church, a women’s ministry is irrelevant or redundant. The vulnerability of this position is that it denies the uniqueness of woman’s design and role and leaves men and women susceptible to egalitarianism. Without a biblical apologetic of womanhood, and a mechanism for women to be disciplined by godly women, the church will imbibe the world’s apologetic and this distortion will create confusion and conflict among men and women.

A common weakness of these approaches is a failure to affirm and celebrate the *value* of God’s creation design and redemptive calling of women and the *necessity* for woman’s design and calling to be employed in the life and work of the church. Many approaches to women’s ministry are expedient and pragmatic responses to culture rather than thoughtful and intentional applications of Scripture. A biblical apologetic for women’s ministry in the local church will include:

- A Biblical Apologetic for Womanhood
- A Biblical Approach to Women's Ministry
- A Biblical Strategy

A Biblical Apologetic for Womanhood

Biblical womanhood and worldly womanhood are radically different, just as many things about the Christian life are counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. Without a biblical apologetic for womanhood, individual women and women's ministries will lose their way.

The following is a summary of the apologetic that is developed in the *Biblical Foundations for Womanhood* materials.⁴ This apologetic is based on woman's creation design as a helper and her redemptive calling to be a life-giver.

The triune God is a covenant-making, covenant-keeping God, so when he created man and woman in his own image, the covenantal imprint was stamped upon them. Biblical manhood and womanhood are a reflection of the nature of God. The personal and relational character of God requires that his image-bearers be personal, relational beings, thus he said, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen 2:8). The equality and diversity of the Trinity are reflected in gender equality and distinctiveness. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are "the same in substance, equal in power and glory" (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. 6) but each Person of the Trinity has a different role. God continued, "I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:8). The man and woman were created equally in God's image but designed for different functions. Even headship and submission are a reflection of the Trinity. "I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her

husband, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor 11:3). Headship and submission are not a result of the curse; headship and submission have always existed in the very nature of God.

Complementarians must not capitulate. We are not anachronistic throwbacks. We must be in the vanguard of a movement to reclaim the wonder and splendor of gender distinctiveness because this is a reflection of the wonder and splendor of God's plan and purpose. A biblical understanding of woman's helper design is essential.

The Hebrew word translated helper, *ezer*, is frequently used to refer to God as our helper.

These passages give insight into the function of an *ezer*:

- Exodus 18:4: "[Moses named his son] Eliezer, for he said, 'My father's God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.'"
- Psalm 10:14: "But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless."
- Psalm 20:2: "May he send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion."
- Psalm 33:20: "We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield."
- Psalm 70:5: "Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay."
- Psalm 72:12–14: "For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who

have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.

• Psalm 86:17: “You, O LORD, have helped me and comforted me.”

When the man and woman sinned, Woman lost her ability to be a true helper. At this point of hopelessness, God gave hope. He promised that the woman’s offspring would crush Satan’s head (Gen 3:15). Adam affirmed and celebrated his belief in this promise by renaming her: “The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living” (Gen 3:20). Eve means life-giver. Because of her rebellion the woman became a life-taker, but because of the promise of life she became a life-giver. This is more than biological. Woman’s redemptive calling is to be a life-giver in every relationship and circumstance.

The following descriptions (see table below) clarify woman’s helper,

life-giving ministry. The *ezer* words are strong, compassionate, relational, life-giving words. Biblical womanhood is a covenantal concept. The helper design would be illogical in an autonomous vacuum. This design is nonsensical in a culture of self but is needful in a culture of covenant.

When a church has a biblical apologetic for womanhood, the foundational concepts of woman’s helper design and life-giving mission can permeate the women’s ministry. Whether that ministry is small and informal or large and well-organized, it can be perpetually and intentionally guided by three questions:

- Are we being helpers or hinderers?
- Are we being life-givers or life-takers?
- Are we equipping women to be helpers and life-givers?

A friend moved to a new city. Her family settled into a church where God’s Word was faithfully preached and she began attending a women’s Bible study,

	Helper Life-Giver	Hinderer/ Life-Taker
Exod 18:4	Defends	Attacks
Ps 10:14	Sees, cares for oppressed	Indifferent, unconcerned for oppressed
Ps 20:2	Supports	Weakens
Ps 33:20	Shields, protects	Leaves unprotected and defenseless
Ps 70:5	Delivers from distress	Causes distress
Ps 72:12–14	Rescues poor, weak, needy	Ignores poor, weak, needy
Ps 86:17	Comforts	Avoids, causes discomfort

but after several weeks she emailed me that she had a growing concern. “The church is great and the women’s ministry is active, but the more I get to know the women the more I realize that they think like feminists. There is a disconnect between their belief in Scripture and their application of Scripture to their lives as women. How can this be?” I asked where women were learning basic principles of biblical womanhood. Several weeks later she responded, “I’ve looked and listened and I cannot find any place where women are confronted with these truths.” Unfortunately this is a common problem.

Churches are filled with women who have only heard the world’s perspective of womanhood. Even in churches that are complementarian in theory, often women are egalitarian in practice. Many women’s ministries have stopped short of true discipleship that moves from knowledge to wisdom—the application of truth into life. They have helped women perfect some Bible study skills, but they have not disciplined them to know how to live as godly, chaste single women, or love their husbands, or care for the sick and oppressed, or support the male leadership of the church. They have not taught women all that Jesus commanded in his Word about their design and calling. Women desperately need an apprenticeship with mature Christian women who will train them in the craft of womanhood.

A Biblical Approach to Women’s Ministry: Covenantal and Complementarian

The starting point of a biblical approach to women’s ministry is not women—it is the church. When we are justified, we are adopted into “the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth” (1 Tim 3:15). Gratitude for our

adoption in Christ spills over in a love for the particular local church, the covenant family, where God has placed us to grow and to serve.

The covenants of the Bible give the framework to understand Scripture. God’s covenant of grace supplies the vital structure, the unifying thread, of his redemptive plan set forth in Scripture. The covenant of grace is the sovereignly initiated arrangement by which the triune God lives in saving favor and merciful relationship with his people. Because we are in union with him, we are united to his other children. So the covenant of grace defines our relationship to God and to one another. It orders a way of life that flows out of a promise of life. To realize this is to think and live covenantally.

A covenantal approach to women’s ministry recognizes that the women’s ministry is not an entity unto itself. It is a part of the whole. It should be a helping, life-giving ministry. It should be viewed as one component of the Christian education, or discipleship, ministry of the church.

A covenantal approach to a discipleship ministry is theology-driven. What we do, why we do it, and how we do it flows out of a systematic understanding of God’s Word. And yet in today’s specialized, individualized church culture, too often ministries are personality, program or market driven.

A personality-driven ministry revolves around the strength of a leader. The focus is on the leader. The outcome is often akin to hero worship rather than relationships that are covenantal in nature. It is not transferable. It will not work unless that particular personality is driving it. In a women’s ministry this model can easily become divisive if the leader disagrees with church leadership and women must choose sides.

A program-driven ministry revolves around *happenings*. The focus is on the program. In a women's ministry this model can quickly become performance driven rather than gospel driven. Often women begin to feel territorial about their programs. A *we-they* attitude sets in. Competition rather than complementarity is divisive.

A market-driven ministry revolves around the demands of the prospective consumer. The focus is on the participants. Requests for ministry are usually based on felt needs. The outcome results in meeting the needs of individuals and special interests groups. In a women's ministry this model often defines women by their needs and divides them into categories rather than teaching them the splendor of a community united around the common purpose of God's glory.

It is easy for models to become philosophies. It is not that anything is wrong with the personality, the program or meeting needs, but if there is no over-arching purpose the ministry lacks theological integrity.

A covenantal ministry involves an intentional decision to make consistent application of God's covenant of grace to what we do and how we do it. The focus is on God. Because it is not personality, program, or participant driven, it will outlive any specific personality, program, project, or need. It is not a structural model. It is a theology of ministry from which various structures may be built.

A biblical view of the church is fundamental to this approach. It recognizes the authority of the church, including male headship. It acknowledges the unity of the body and recognizes that the various parts do not exist in isolation. Each member and each ministry is a part of the whole. The church is to equip each member to use his/her gifts

for the common good.

Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift . . . and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God . . . speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (Eph 4:7-16).

Complementarianism gives the relational framework for men and women to live out their covenantal privileges and responsibilities. The complementarian position acknowledges that God created men and women equal in being but assigned different—yet equally valuable—functions in his kingdom and that this gender distinctiveness complements, or harmonizes, to fulfill his purpose. Complementarians believe that the Bible teaches that God has created men and women equal in their essential dignity and human personhood, but different and complementary in function—with male spiritual leadership in the home and the church as a part of God's design. This means that men and women are both image bearers of the living God. We are each fully human in all that entails. We are equals before the cross, brothers and

sisters in our LORD Jesus Christ. But God has made us different. He has given certain functions and roles to men and certain functions and roles to women that are distinct.

By contrast, egalitarianism cannot come to grips with the uniqueness of man created distinctly as male and female. It asserts that there is no legitimate difference of role and function between men and women in the home and church, at least not one that allows for unique male leadership. Egalitarianism devalues God's creation design and redemptive calling of women. It fails to do justice to the distinctions that exist between men and women. It wrongly equates role distinctions with inequality and claims distinctions result in discrimination.

I was speaking at a conference, and a college woman's question pierced my heart: "How can I possibly think biblically about womanhood when I am constantly told to be true to myself, to pursue my dreams, and to do what is best for me?" I trembled as I answered, "Become involved in the women's ministry of your church. Ask godly women to speak the truth of womanhood into your life. This is God's provision to equip you to think biblically about your womanhood." I trembled because I wondered if the church she attended was equipping women for the task.

A Biblical Strategy

J. Ligon Duncan writes, "We ought to have an intentional, deliberate approach to female discipleship because men and women are different, and these differences need to be recognized, taken into account and addressed in the course of Christian discipleship."⁵ Scripture gives the strategy for this gender-specific discipleship.

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled (Titus 2:3–5).

In recent years I have observed a troubling phenomenon. Many women of my generation have relinquished this high and holy calling of nurturing younger women. A seeming contradiction to this is the emphasis on mentoring programs in women's ministries. My initial excitement about this flurry of matching older and younger women was dampened when I began asking questions and usually there were no answers:

- What is the purpose of your program?
- What is the content of your program?
- How are mentors selected and trained?
- To whom are mentors accountable?

If these questions are not addressed we risk reducing the Titus mandate to moralistic fluff. Mentoring may be form without substance and little more than a buddy system.

To disconnect Titus 2:3–5 from an understanding of biblical discipleship will reduce this amazing concept to anemic relationships and legalistic behaviorism. We must not take such a minimalist approach to such a magnificent mission. This text is one part of Paul's strategy for

the discipleship, or Christian education, of a congregation. He challenges Titus, and the church in all ages, to guard the truth by equipping the people to show and tell truth to the next generation. This is not a new strategy. Throughout the Old Testament God's people were told the same thing.

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments (Ps 78:1–7).

Jesus confirmed and enlarged this strategy in his final commission to his church:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching

them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt 28:18–20).

Titus 2 shows how a local church is to disciple God's people. The chapter begins and ends with an emphasis on teaching: "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. . . . These, then, are the things you should teach" (Titus 2:1, 15 NIV).

It is significant that the strategy is given to the pastor. It begins with the pulpit ministry, and then instructions are given for the congregation. Embedded in this amazing chapter is this specific directive regarding women discipling women: "Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women" (vv. 3–4). Women who disciple women are to have a holy reverence for God that is reflected in their character and conduct. Godly women who have embraced the truth of God's creation design and redemptive calling are called to train other women to think and live according to biblical principles of womanhood. Functioning under ecclesiastical authority, they are to take the sound doctrine preached from the pulpit and help women apply it into life. This is the kind of life-on-life discipleship that guides and nurtures to maturity. It is a mothering ministry.

Titus 2 gives legitimacy and limitations to a women's ministry. There is an unmistakable mandate for women to train women, but the extent of this training is somewhat limited. There are many times and places in church life where men and women study and serve side by side, but a primary task of the women's

ministry is to train women in biblical principles and practices of womanhood. This does not mean that biblical womanhood is the only thing that women study, but it does mean that there should be a resolute commitment to weave these principles throughout the entire women's ministry.

There are costly challenges in Titus 2. Investing in the lives of others costs energy and time. It means taking relational risks. Why should we live so sacrificially?

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11–13, NIV).

Christ came and he is coming back. He appeared in grace as a babe and he will come in glory as the King because he loves us. Our love for Christ is unpredictable; his love for us is unchangeable. It is gospel love that propels our obedience.

Paul concludes this chapter with an electrifying reminder of our unity in Christ: "[Jesus] . . . gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (v. 14). This is not individualistic language. Some discipleship is age and gender specific, but no discipleship is separate from the whole. It all blends together into a harmonious, interrelated system of educating God's people to obey all that Jesus commanded. This is more

than good educational procedure; it is an expression of our redemption in Christ. We are his purified people. Covenant consciousness will protect us from the sin of being territorial about the portion of a ministry entrusted to us. Covenant consciousness will cause us to think about the common good rather than individual preference.

Biblical discipleship is not simply imparting facts or inculcating personal habits of Bible study, prayer, and evangelism, as helpful as those disciplines are. It is transmitting a way of thinking and living that unites all the parts into the glorious whole of glorifying God. It is passing on a legacy of biblical faith and life to the next generation. It is the impulse of our union with Christ. It is part and parcel of the covenant way. It is not optional. Women discipling women is one part of the strategy to equip God's people to think biblically and live covenantally.

A Biblical Example

The gospel of Luke tells about an unlikely combination of people who accompanied Jesus as he "went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:1):

And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means (vv. 2–3).

This was not a homogenous group of women. Their backgrounds were radically different. Their commonality was God's grace in their lives. They were covenant sisters. Apparently there was no tension between the disciples and the women. This is remarkable since the disciples were called to the position of apostleship and the women were the ones providing for them out of their own means. This beautiful example of complementarianism freed these women to be the helpers they were created and redeemed to be. And as they walked with Jesus, they grew in grace and love.

This explains how some of these same women could witness the horror of the crucifixion and not be immobilized by despair and grief. Early on Sunday morning, these redeemed helpers gathered to anoint his body. These women did not go alone. They went together. They acted covenantally.

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was

crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you (Mark 16:1–7).

Anointing the body was a sign of affection. The women were not oblivious to the obstacle in their way. They knew there was a stone that was too big for them to move, but they went anyway because they loved Jesus. And because they went, they experienced the reality of his resurrection.

The essence of a women's ministry in the church should be women uniting their hearts and hands to care for the body of Christ because we love him. Serving the body of Christ will always require more strength and grace than we possess. There will always be obstacles that are too big for us to remove. But when we go anyway, because we love Jesus, we will know the reality of our risen Savior removing those obstacles and shining the light of his countenance upon us. We will know the joy of his grace enabling us to minister beyond our own abilities. And we will give the legacy of biblical womanhood to the next generation. ■

¹ Adapted from *The Legacy of Biblical Womanhood and Women's Ministry in the Local Church*. Material from *The Legacy of Biblical Womanhood* by Susan Hunt and Barbara Thompson, copyright ©2003, pp. 197–199, edited by Susan Hunt. Material from *Women's Ministry in the Local Church* by J. Ligon Duncan and Susan Hunt, copyright ©2006, pp. 31–35 and 93–94, edited by Susan Hunt. Used by permission of Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL 60187. For more information, visit www.crossway.com.

² Resources to implement a covenantal and complementarian approach to women's ministry: *Biblical Foundations for Womanhood: A series of books on biblical womanhood*, including *Spiritual Mothering: The Titus 2 Model for Women Mentoring Women* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1992); *By Design: God's Distinctive Calling for Women* (Wheaton: Crossway,

1994); and *The Legacy of Biblical Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003). Each book in the series has a leader's guide for group study. These materials are designed to teach women biblical principles of womanhood.

Women's Ministry Training and Resource Guide: This includes a leader's guide for *Women's Ministry in the Local Church* and *Leadership for Women in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), as well as strategies and resources for women's ministry. These materials are designed to develop/strengthen a women's ministry and to train leadership for that ministry.

The books and study guides may be ordered from the CE&P Bookstore at: 1-800-283-1357 or www.cepbookstore.com. For information on women's ministry, visit www.pcanet.org/cep/wic. For information on a Titus 2 Discipleship ministry, visit www.MidwayPCA.org (go to ministries).

³ Unless noted, Scriptures quotations are from the English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

⁴ See note 2.

⁵ Duncan, *Women's Ministry in the Local Church*, 40.

MOTHERHOOD MATTERS

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I truly cannot remember a time when I didn't dream of becoming a mother. When I finally achieved that goal at the age of 27, I was not disappointed in the least. In fact, I believe that looking for the first time into the eyes of your baby, whom you know through birth or adoption, is one of the greatest experiences a woman can have on earth.

Let's remember that motherhood is God's idea. Only eighty verses into the Bible do we read that Eve said, "With the help of the LORD, I have brought forth a man" (Gen. 4:1). Think about what it must have been like for Eve. She could not consult the ever-popular volume *What To Expect When You're Expecting*. She had no mother or mother-in-law to consult. Ponder that! No one could tell her horror stories about labor. She only had Adam to confirm that she was getting quite pudgy around the middle. Finally, she gave birth to the first baby. What a moment that must have been!

Elsewhere in Scripture, we read fascinating tales of motherhood. In Genesis

21, Sarah dealt with the fact that there were Fertile Myrtles in seemingly every tent, but she remained barren. Even her husband's mistress, Hagar, bore a son, but Sarah kept on waiting. God rewarded her patience with the birth of Isaac when she was ninety years old.

Think about Hannah. Her heart ached with the passion to be a mom. She promised the LORD that she would give her child to God. He provided Samuel, and Hannah kept her promise. How hard must it have been to send him off as a toddler. First Samuel records that Hannah "made a little robe" for Samuel. He soon grew up to be a significant leader who anointed two kings while God blessed Hannah with many other children.

The amazing accounts of the pregnancies of Elizabeth and Mary in the New Testament stir the hearts of every believer but especially of women who have known the joy of motherhood.

Yes, motherhood is God's idea. No improvement is needed. He purpose-

fully created women to carry, give birth to, nurse, nurture, teach, and tenderly love our children in a way unique to our gender. Women tend to think with their hearts first and then with their heads, unlike men. Many an advertiser has picked up on the concept that women looking into a crib have warm, fuzzy feelings. Men look in the crib and start wondering how there will ever be enough money to send Junior to college!

Motherhood is an incredible calling and has been called the most honored, cherished, important job there is. The notion that motherhood is the preeminent force for change in the world is captured in the oft quoted William Ross poem with the line, “The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world.”

Given these facts, why in 2006 is the importance of motherhood often downplayed, minimized, and even belittled? More seriously, we find ourselves in an era when we must argue against same-sex marriage. What about the national shame of abortion? Have we allowed ourselves to get used to that? Amy Richards is quoted in *The New York Times Magazine* last year as stating categorically that she did not want to give up her New York lifestyle just because she happened to be pregnant with twins.¹ She feared she would never leave her house because she would be so tied up caring for the children. She even admitted how distasteful it was for her to picture herself needing to shop in warehouse clubs for big tubs of mayonnaise. So, she felt justified in “selectively reducing” her pregnancy. The truth is, she chose to legally murder one of the babies. If that true story does not sicken us, what does? God’s utter graciousness is seen in that he allowed Amy to be the mother of the remaining twin.

With this state of affairs in 2006,

it is necessary for us to remind ourselves about the value and virtues of motherhood. Somewhere along the way, society lost the respect it once had for mothers. I am certain that our grandmothers and great-grandmothers didn’t face this problem. Too many moms today feel unappreciated by society as a whole. Perhaps it is due to the fact that moms don’t receive a report card or job evaluation sheet. Perhaps others cave to the pressure to believe that performing the “menial” tasks associated with motherhood is nothing more than what a daycare worker can do and makes no significant contribution to our world.

Thankfully, most moms don’t allow themselves to think that way for long. They save the precious handmade Mother’s Day cards. They savor the sweet, sticky kisses. They remember forever how their children’s sparkling eyes light up when they spot mom at the door of the church nursery, knowing that no one else will suffice. At the end of the day, motherhood matters because we are charged with the awesome task to train the next generation and, together with their fathers, arm them to be warriors for Christ. It is a daunting task that requires a great deal of energy, wisdom, and time. Sally Clarkson, in her book *The Mission of Motherhood*, says this, “It’s hard to accomplish with a divided heart, meaning we are focusing on so many things in life and motherhood is just one of those.”

Lest you fear that I am about to beat up on mothers who work outside the home, let me be clear in stating that there is no biblical mandate that requires women to be at home full-time. We know Leah, Dorcas, and Priscilla were employed in some form. It’s a personal decision and should not be made in haste. However, I am personally thankful every day for my husband who, like me, was

raised by a stay-at-home mom and saw the intrinsic value in that decision. He would take whatever steps were necessary for me to be at home. We discussed this thoroughly before we were even engaged to be married. Too many couples wait until they are expecting and in debt to deal with this issue. I know moms who cry all the way to work because they didn't decide on this issue before they said "I do."

I was glad to contribute to our income for the six years of our marriage prior to when we had children. But as my husband says publicly, he simply could not do the job he does if I were not at home doing the job I do as the home manager and mother. Therefore, the money he earns has always been our money, and there are no issues there. I could have remained "gainfully employed," and we would have had options open to most families. We firmly believe that the finest daycare, the sharpest nanny, or even my mom or his mom would not pass our qualifications for one reason: they are not *me*. Do we have an inflated opinion here? No, not at all. We believe there is no one on this earth who can love, nurture, and care for our children like I can. God made me the mother of Katie and Christopher. No one else has that distinction.

This used to be the norm but not anymore. I am quickly becoming a freak of nature. Some of you are freaks like me! Did you know that less than 25 percent of married households have the husband as the sole financial provider? That's just one out of four. June Cleaver and Carol Brady stereotypes are now oddities.

I understand that economics play a large role. Some simply cannot stay above poverty level in part due to the debt they have accrued along the way, unless there are two incomes. Others are student wives whose husbands will

be in school for a decade if there is not supplemental income. Others will readily admit that they want their kids to have the best of everything so they conclude that the additional income outweighs the benefit of having mom at home. Still others want the self-esteem boost that "finished projects" and accolades at work provide. The saddest cases, aside from single moms who must work, are when broken-hearted moms are given no choice. Their husbands refuse to get a second job or tighten the budget so mom can stay home.

Perhaps you have heard a radio advertisement on Christian radio that I hear much too often. The announcer says, "I have so much respect for working moms. They are the backbone of America." What in the world does that say about stay-at-home moms? Are we some kind of drag on the economy? When we hear even Christian companies espouse this mentality, it serves to either fire up or discourage stay-at-home moms. Some buy into it and start wondering if they are "wasting their God given abilities." It seems that "doing it all" is applauded and draws "oohs" and "aahs" from a group. To state otherwise seems so meaningless to some. They are afraid or even ashamed to state what they do and instead mumble under their breath, "I'm just a mom."

Let me try to summarize:

- If an employed mom's first thought in the morning and last thought at night is how best to climb the corporate ladder and make partner;
- if she had kids because they are cute, because everyone else had some, because she wants someone to visit her in the nursing home;
- if the books next to her bed

are titles like *Mother Infant Bonding: A Scientific Fiction* and *Mothers Who Work: Loving Ourselves without Sacrificing Ourselves*;

- if she struggles to think of the name of her child's teacher;
- and if she calls herself a *Christian*,

then I challenge her to get alone with God and honestly search Scripture because her picture of motherhood is radically different than what my Bible says.

- But if an employed mother,
- is employed part-time in a vocation she loves;
 - if she works a couple of shifts as a nurse or teacher, for example, while her children are in school, but motherhood takes priority and the kids know that her heart is at home;
 - if she leaves work at the office and realizes that she will be available to work full-time again all too soon;
 - if she doesn't give her family her leftovers but protects time at home;

then she should continually pray with her husband to be sure that this is God's plan so that there are no regrets later, and she should strive to be the best mom she can be!

It is clear that women are finding that they *can* do it all. They just can't do it all at the same time. Karen Hughes entered the venerable oval office one day and told the president, "I have to go home." She didn't mean that she needed the rest of the day off. She meant she

needed to go home and stay there for a season. What a bold but wise move for the sake of her son.

If you are an employed mom and don't want to be, hang in there and pray hard. Make sure you don't make your kids miserable, but tell them how you treasure every moment with them. Realize that this condition will hopefully be temporary. I challenge you to see what God is teaching you through this that you might not otherwise learn.

If you are a stay-at-home mom—live up to the title and don't make it an oxymoron! If you find yourself in the car, at a meeting, at a practice, at a game, at a lesson, at a performance, or at a church event so often that you seem rarely to be at home, there is a problem. Families thrive on routine, structure, and schedule. Family meals should not be an event and should not be centered around the drive through at the local restaurant. Just because you are not employed, don't fall into the pit of being so busy doing good things that you miss God's best things about being at home. This makes for a divided heart too. Set limits—and stick to them. *Time* magazine ran an amazing cover story in March of 2004. It sends a powerful message with the simple photo of a little guy holding on to his mom's hand and looking up to her pleadingly. We don't see her face, but she is heading to work. The title is "The Case for Staying Home."² Some of us stay-at-home moms need to take this photo to heart too if we are constantly dragging our kids from one event to another.

Be proud to be home with your kids. Don't be one who has a pity party and whines about boredom, not having friends or meaningful conversation. If those things are true, it's your fault. I would personally like to be bored for just one day to see what it feels like. Do you

know stay-at-home moms who are lazy, disorganized, and don't even get dressed until 2:00 p.m.? They have a great job that many would give their eyeteeth to have. They should do it with gusto! Many do just that and are so happy and fulfilled. God is honored in that.

It is also important to remind you of this: don't let anyone make you feel guilty for doing a full-time job full-time. Husbands should help kids understand that mommy's job is at home. They should be proud, never embarrassed, to be in the vast minority of kids who say, "My mom is a mom who stays at home with us," even though 75 percent of America's households cannot say that.

Motherhood is all about balance. These are complicated issues. No matter where you come down here, we all want to be, by God's grace, the best mom we can be. I don't know any mother who says, "I want to be a mediocre mom." How do we really strive for excellence? There are no surprises here, but I have several suggestions as I have reflected on this.

First, be a lover of God's word. This is not something to add to your to do list and hopefully check it off after a two-minute drill. It is also not quantified such that only an hour will suffice. It is all about consistency and openness to hearing God's instructions on a daily basis. Simply put, we won't be the mothers he intends if we are not serious students of his word. I heard about four ministers who were discussing the pros and cons of various Bible translations. One of the three was not saying much. Finally, one of the others asked him which one he preferred. He said, "My mother's translation." They asked which one she used. He explained, "She lived out Scripture every single day and it was the clearest translation I have ever seen." How awesome would it be if our children could

say that about us?

Second, we must be women of prayer. As Fern Nichols, founder of Moms in Touch International so aptly says, "If mothers aren't praying for their children, who is?" No one knows them quite like we do as we spend so much time with them each day. We must commit to pray specifically for their needs. Too many moms just pray in a panic, "O LORD, help him to behave!" We should instead be taking concerns, requests, and praises about our kids before the throne each day.

Third, we must remember that we are called to be godly wives first. It's easy to discuss the ins and outs of motherhood, but we can't overemphasize the importance of putting marriage above motherhood. Many times, children get the best of our time and attention in part because infants are so demanding and are anything but self-sufficient. Keep in mind that husbands are cute, cuddly, and needy in a completely different way! We must be aware that motherhood is an essential component of parenthood. It is not a solo job by God's design. The father's role is vital. Celebrate the differences between you. Many moms get frustrated when daddy walks in and the kids switch into their "Oh boy, here comes Mr. Fun mode." God has wired dads to relate differently to children than we do. Different does not mean superior or inferior! Parents must work together as a team and strive to present a united front. Kids should know from an early age that mom and dad love each other deeply. The security they gain from that knowledge is incalculable.

Fourth, we should be students of motherhood. I am not suggesting that we seek to earn a B.A. in Mothering Skills. However, many of us have degrees in things we don't use regularly, but we have

shelves full of books and aids for those areas. We need training in the trenches about issues facing us today as moms. Many expectant moms load up on all the latest prenatal books but once the baby is born, they quit reading. There are many wonderful resources out there for moms, by moms, who seek to be Titus 2 women to them. I challenge moms to make the time to read about their chosen profession. Some titles deal with specific problems, while others are generally encouraging and challenging. Stick with trusted authors and publishers and the recommendations of those you trust.

Fifth, make every day count! Take advantage of those teachable moments that sometimes take you by surprise. As Scripture teaches, the time is fleeting. If you have three children in diapers right now, the time may seem to be anything but fleeting. However, although it seemed like such a long wait for me to become a mother, I suddenly have just one more year before my oldest will go to college. I have so much more to teach her. No matter what your schooling choice is, your job as parents is to teach God's word from an early age. In addition, we must be deliberate about teaching neglected issues like manners and modesty—and doctrine! There are several excellent books available that assist parents in teaching the basics of Christian doctrine.

Children have an amazing ability to memorize. They can often run circles around adults in how quickly they can learn and recall memorized words. We taught our children a version of the Westminster Catechism. Its words are so carefully packed and full of meaning. One week in high school youth group, the question was asked, "What is sin?" Katie, my daughter, said nothing at first but soon the group nudged the theolo-

gian's daughter to give a good answer. Reluctantly, she replied, "Well, sin is any thought, word, or deed that breaks God's law by omission or commission." The youth group liked that response and may have assumed that theology and doctrine just seep by osmosis into one's brain when raised by a theologian. The truth is, she diligently learned and retained the catechism. What's vital here is that when a situation arises when there could be a gray area of judgment, this definition is fixed in her memory. We know that the world is increasing hostile to the gospel. If our children are not grounded in Scripture and what it means, they will be like reeds twisting in the wind.

Sixth, pace yourself! We certainly all have days when we feel completely overwhelmed and inadequate. To others, we may look like we have everything under control, but in reality, we feel like a failure and wonder if we are doing our job as we should. We must first assess a few things. Have I neglected time with the LORD? How much sleep have I had lately? Could hormonal changes be responsible here? If that doesn't provide an answer, we should ask ourselves, "How did I get to the place where I feel this way, and can I avoid being here again?" It is amazing how even one hour alone with no interruptions or responsibilities can sometimes help us regain perspective. Next, help those who are drowning. You may be in a groove right now and seem to be humming right along. Chances are, your neighbor is not. Be sensitive. Be the one to offer her an hour or two to let her regroup. Remember that you don't have to have gray hair to be a Titus 2 woman!

Lastly, resist the temptation to compare your personal motherhood philosophy with others, either in a superior or inferior way. It is irresponsible when

moms criticize those who chose to have one or two children when they could have “easily” had six or eight. Celebrate the fact that they obeyed God’s command to be fruitful and multiply. It is equally irresponsible to lament the fact that the Smiths are expecting again when they already have seven children. Unless the children they have are running around in the yard naked, it is really no one’s business to judge how full—or empty—another family’s quiver might be.

There seems to be dissention among Christian families regarding schooling choices. There are those who argue, based on Deut 6:7, that homeschooling is the only option. Some families exercise this option and do so in an excellent way that produces sharp, well-rounded children who cut out much of the busy work found in school. Others, who have been browbeaten into believing that homeschooling is the only way, are moms who not prepared to be teachers. They didn’t understand algebra when they took it themselves and are in no position to teach it now! Further, the home manager aspect of motherhood is cast aside as teaching can be all consuming, especially when teaching several kids. Preschool children are left in front of the DVD player and although they are in the home, don’t get the attention that their older siblings did.

Pricy private schools may provide great opportunities for academics and athletics but realize that some kids are starved to just spend time with parents. These kids may be bored or have special needs and would benefit from homeschooling but the parents have such a negative stereotype of that method that they refuse to try it. Still others opt for public schools in areas where they have not become completely corrupted in hopes of providing salt and light.

In any case, these are very personal choices that must be weighed carefully and reevaluated regularly. Instead of having the notion that one’s chosen method is best, we should all be on our knees to be sure that we are being obedient to what God would have us do in regard to education.

While avoiding feelings of superiority, we should be careful not to feel inferior. This sometimes happens when you don’t expect it, like in the grocery store. You run into a friend who is there with all of her kids. The mom is six weeks postpartum but looks like a model. The children are dressed in coordinating outfits and politely speak to you without interrupting. You were hoping not to run into anyone looking like you do, and you swore off taking your kids to the grocery store long ago. You walk away thinking, “Wow! She sure has it good. I wish my kids were that easy. They probably wish they had a pretty mom who doesn’t yell all the time too.” Realize that those well-behaved kids you just saw came out as selfish little sinners just like your kids did! What you see is the product of much hard work and biblically, consistently applied discipline.

Scripture teaches us that “foolishness is bound in the heart of a child” (Prov 22:15) and it is our job to “train up a child in the way in which he should go” (Prov 22:6). Some children seem to be more compliant, while some are more strong willed—but don’t compare! You have exactly the children God intends for you to have. They have exactly the mother he intends them to have. Hospitals rarely mix up babies, but God never does. That fact should bless you!

What about abusive or neglectful mothers? Sin is in the world, but God has a plan. Many times, that involves placing those children in the welcome

arms of adoptive parents. I smile every time I see adoptive families that we have been privileged to know. God knows the heart's desire of women who long to be moms. In his perfect timing, he often unites them with children who have been abandoned or need to be removed from birth mothers. Those adoptive moms are every bit as much the mother to their children as I am to mine. They become a loving, nurturing family. It is a beautiful picture of God's adoption of us, his children.

Don't let the mundane get you down. Right now in your home, there may be dishes piling up, pesky socks that don't match, a potty training set back, lunches to pack, and a long list of things to do. We start thinking that our job as mothers is little more than one menial job after another. Don't forget that today has also been full of monumental opportunities. Did you take advantage of them?

We face moral issues today as adults that our parents and grandparents did not face nor dream of facing. What will our kids be forced to deal with when they grow up? How will they possibly be ready to know how to respond? They will respond by building today upon what they learned yesterday. We have absolute truth found in God's word alone and as we impart that day by day, little by little, we are being used by God to equip the next generation. Isn't that awesome? Does that excite you? It should.

Motherhood matters because it's God's idea; because he wants us to train the leaders of tomorrow; and because he has lots to teach us as moms as we allow him to teach our children with excellence. When you hit the pillow tonight, take great joy in knowing that you can work on matching those socks eventually and finishing the project you started months ago. More importantly, God allowed you

to impact your children today as only you can, and tomorrow is another fresh opportunity to be an even better mom to the glory of God alone. May God raise up an army of believers who will change tomorrow's world. May our children be leaders in that army. ■

¹ See Amy Richards (as told to Amy Barrett), "When One is Enough" *The New York Times Magazine*, 18 July 2004, n.p. [accessed online 25 July 2006]. Online: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?sec=health&res=9B07EED6113BF93BA25754C0A9629C8B63>.

² Claudia Wallis, "The Case for Staying Home," *Time*, 22 March 2004, 51-59.

WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE A BETTER HALF: ENCOURAGING BIBLICAL ROLES AS A SINGLE WOMAN

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As a college-age feminist, I was taught that men were the problem. The perils of patriarchy were the reason for all the conflict and unresolved desires between men and women. Many of the students in the women's studies department of my university effectively solved this problem by circumventing men in every possible way, the final step being to embrace lesbianism.

But I had a problem with that, you see. I liked men. And I found it very hard to be a boy-crazy feminist in a "womyn's" world.

As a result, I skirted the edges of political activism and instead embraced a watered-down "you go, girl!" form of feminism displayed on the pages of women's magazines everywhere. Though I liked men, I believed the premise that there was not anything different between us, except for the obvious. We were, therefore, to embrace a cultural androgyny, albeit one equipped with different restrooms.

Then one day I heard the gospel

and God turned my world upside down, shaking out all my prior beliefs like so much loose change from my pockets. Nearly a decade out of college, I found myself in church, with a Bible of my own. I was a regenerated Christian in the midst of culture shock.

In God's timing (which I believe includes his divine sense of humor), I started attending a church just as it began an in-depth study of the book of Ephesians. The encouraging words found there about laying aside the old self, building up the body of Christ, and walking in a manner worthy of the gospel came to a shrieking halt by verses 22–24 of chapter 5: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the LORD. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."¹

Right. Surely these people didn't think those verses applied to today?! Shock of shocks, they did. But they

didn't stop there. They also believed verses 25–33 are applicable for today and they held men to this standard:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Now, given these parameters, submitting to one's loving husband didn't seem like such a bad deal after all. As I watched these doctrines lived out in the marriages before me, I came to understand the depth of God's wisdom in addressing his children's sin tendencies. I was used to being a contentious, controlling woman. After all, "uppity women unite" was a feminist theme. Master-

ing myself and my sinful tendencies in order to respect a husband was a new challenge for me. But I was eager to do it if I could attract a man like those in my church—men who took responsibility for their children's misbehavior, who scheduled date nights with their wives (romance *after* marriage!), who worshiped the LORD unabashedly, who took responsibility for meetings and agendas and didn't sink into a pool of passivity. Sign me up! I was ready to try this biblical womanhood thing.

A Noun, Not An Adjective

So I waited. Months slipped into years, but no husband came calling. Over time, I began to identify more with an adjective than a noun. I was a single woman. Singleness dominated my perspective. In fact, I just became a single. As in, "So what's going on with the singles these days?" Or, "Let's invite some of the singles over for dinner!" Or, "The singles are going on a retreat next weekend." Thus, the church became a collection of husbands, wives, and singles—the gender-neutral third wheels that messed up the seating arrangements wherever we went.

In the LORD's rich mercy, this perspective was radically altered when I was asked to work on a project mining the gracious truths of biblical femininity. As I studied, I realized that Scripture's emphasis was on being made a woman in the image of God. My marital status informed how that would be applied, but I was to be more preoccupied with my femininity than my singleness. The lingering whiffs of feminism's androgyny were thereby extinguished. I was not a female form outlined in dotted lines, waiting for one man to fill me in and therefore complete my femininity. I was feminine because that's how my God made me,

and there was something of his image that I was to reflect as a woman—even a single woman.

My guide was the Proverbs 31 woman. As a Hebrew acrostic taught by a wise mother to a young son, this was a picture of what an excellent, noble, virtuous woman looked like. This mother wanted her son to memorize these virtues so that when it came time for him to marry, he would find a single woman who had already been cultivating these qualities and who, therefore, would make an excellent wife. In the Proverbs 31 portrait, I found a well-rounded woman whose virtues could be applied to every season of life—a savvy businesswoman, a gracious hostess, a gourmet cook, a woman of wise words, a hard worker, a trusted wife, an encouraging mother.

But here's the catch. The Proverbs 31 woman was praised for focusing all her formidable virtues for the benefit of her intimate relationships—her husband, children, and household. Without those defining relationships, my attempts at expressing femininity were more scattershot. I'm not called by Scripture to submit to all men, just my non-existent husband. But along with all believers, I am also called to submit to and obey my parents (Eph 6:1–3). And my pastor (1 Peter 5:5). And my boss (Eph 6:5–8; 1 Pet 2:18). And my governing authorities (Rom 13:1; 1 Pet 2:13–17). I'm also called to intimacy within the body of Christ (Heb 10:24–25), where my femininity is supposed to make a contribution to God's purposes (Titus 2:1–14). But in a broader sense, the fact that I am a woman should flavor all my interactions. What that looks like requires Scripture-infused wisdom.

This is what we will explore in the rest of this article: how single women can cultivate femininity in non-roman-

tic relationships, while encouraging the men around us in their application of masculinity. While there is plenty of great material already written about biblical manhood and womanhood as it applies to marriage or leadership in the church, there is precious little for single adults who exist in the margins. My prayer is that I can make a small contribution for the benefit of my single sisters in Christ.

Be a Help

Because I became a believing Christian as an adult, there were many phrases, habits, and activities of other Christians that initially puzzled or amused me. For example, I had never heard of a wife referred to as a “helpmate.” It sounded like a line of camping gear or some kind of storage gadget for your car. But this phrase came from a Scripture reference. Genesis 2:18 reads, “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’” The footnote for “fit” in the ESV says this Hebrew concept could also be translated as “corresponding to.”

The Bible makes it clear in numerous passages that as Christians we are *all* here to serve. But there is a specific application found in Scripture for a wife to be a helper to her husband. Even before that gracious gift of a husband is provided, there are ways for the faint echoes of “helpmate” to be discernible in the lives of single women.

One opportunity is on the job. Whether with subordinates or superiors, we can emulate our Savior by being oriented to helping others—but this is especially important for our immediate bosses. When a friend of mine, Caryn, started a new job as an administrative assistant to several busy pastors, she was silently instructed in this as she watched

her veteran colleague, Melody:

“I saw that when Melody enters one of the pastors’ offices, her first question is about what she can do for them,” Caryn said. “But my default was to walk in to my boss with my agenda and all the things I need him to decide so that I can tackle my To Do List. I was not first concerned with how to help him, but how to feel better about my own productivity.”

This helper concept can extend to friendships, as well. We can express our femininity by encouraging single men to lead activities, while offering to assist them. I had a friend, now long married, who excelled at this as a single woman. She was quite good at organizing activities and opening her home for hospitalities, but she saw the long-range implications for allowing her social circle to default to her abilities. So when one of her male friends would call and inquire what the group’s plan was for the weekend, she would sweetly inquire, “I don’t know. What are you planning?” Then she would offer to assist him in anything he was willing to lead. Her encouragement of male leadership was invaluable to these single men and they were vocally appreciative of it. By not filling the gap in her own strength, she encouraged their leadership and cultivated her role as a counselor and helper. While there’s nothing wrong with occasionally taking the initiative to plan events and host parties, we are wiser single women if we take the long-term perspective about what we are sowing in our friendships.

The Importance of a Question

One of the best ways to serve men in any of our relationships—romantic, platonic, or professional—is to ask questions. I don’t mean statements that have perfunctory question marks at the end. I mean real inquiries for information or requests to consider another idea. This is not something that comes naturally for me. I have to work very, very hard at killing the pride that motivates me to make pronouncements rather than to ask questions as a helper. But the reason questions are so important is that they position us to serve and counsel to men, and therefore leave room for them to make decisions and lead.

Here are some questions that have been helpful for me to ask in various situations:

- In learning how to assist your boss: “I have been asked by another manager to take on this certain task. Before accepting, do you prefer that I run these outside requests by you or not?”
- When you disagree with a male colleague in a meeting: “I can understand why you would be drawn to this conclusion. But what would you think if we tried X as a solution, instead?”
- When you have a potential correction for a friend: “I may have observed something that could provide a helpful perspective for you. Would you want to talk about it? If so, could I first ask a few more questions to make sure I have put this in the right context?”

One of my friends coined the

phrase, “presumptive followership.” By this, he means the proactive approach women can take to encourage men to lead. For example, when a woman hosts friends at her home, she could ask one of the men to take responsibility for leading the group’s conversation or time of prayer. Or if a woman knows of someone in need, she could quietly ask one of the men if he might lead an effort to meet that need, and offer her assistance to him. It shouldn’t be done in a bossy manner, but in a way that assumes the best of the men and graciously sets a high standard and expectation for their behavior. When done with appreciation and true support, women can set the bar very high and men generally will gladly endeavor to meet it.

I hesitate to give too many more examples because I don’t want to appear to dictate practice over principles. It’s not so much how you do something as your aim in doing so and the motive behind it. I certainly wouldn’t want to leave any woman with the impression that *all* conversation has to be indirect and punctuated by question marks! In whatever relationship we have with them, men benefit from our insight, experience, and counsel. They enjoy our direct conversation, humor, and analysis. But when it’s time to make a decision, lead a group, or form a plan, the “presumptive followership” that we single women exercise will encourage the men around us in their current and/or future calling to lead a family or a church.

The Learning Curve for Leadership

All that being said, we need to remember that there is a learning curve for leadership, just as there is one for “followership.” Recently I was talking with a mother of only sons, and she remarked that it’s not easy for young men

to initiate relationships and to lead well in them. There is a learning curve for leadership—and it requires grace and faith from young women as these young men grow. Her husband spends lots of time talking to his sons about how to be clear and effective leaders when both are still single and relate to lots of women in general, but no one woman in particular.

“They want to lead well, but they are scared because they feel the women want fully-developed leadership when they’ve never done it before,” this mother commented. “To grow in this area, it takes humility. A guy has to learn to laugh at himself.”

First Peter 3:7 says, “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.” This must mean it is not easy for men to understand us and to live in such a way as to demonstrate that understanding—or else there would be no need for husbands to be commanded to do this.

“Likewise” is such an important little word in this passage. You have to go back a few verses to see what Peter is talking about. In chapter 2, verse 11, he writes,

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Then he goes on to write what this

honorable conduct looks like in various situations, from servants to wives to husbands. After issuing these commands, he sums it up in this way in chapter 3, verse 8, “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.”

Scripture calls men to live in an understanding (i.e., considerate, respectful) way with their wives. Scripture calls women to respect, honor, and submit to their husbands with joy. These are particular expressions of the virtues listed above for all Christians: unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, tender hearts, humble minds. So what does that mean for single adults? Well, I think we need to remember we’re all works-in-progress. A single man of twenty-three does not have the experience or capacity that a father and married man of fifty-three has, and it is unfair to compare them. In those thirty years came many relationships and responsibilities that have shaped the older man. Experience typically confers seasoning.

Thanks to this mother of sons, I am now more aware of how these virtues that Peter lists are sorely needed in *us women* as the men around us grow in initiating, leading, and communicating direction. And nowhere is this more necessary than when a man initiates a dating/courting relationship with us and we’re not excited about his offer. While women must trust God by waiting to be pursued, men must trust God by risking rejection in initiating pursuit. Knowing that, we should want to make this process as encouraging as possible for our brothers in Christ. I’m not suggesting that this means a woman must accept every initiative. But we should care enough for these men to put away

self-righteousness, arrogance, and selfishness in these interactions and instead put on humility and encouragement in our response to them.

Whenever a man initiates friendship or more with us, and that’s not our preference, we need to treat him graciously as a brother. If he’s trying to be a friend, we shouldn’t snub him. If he’s initiating something more and we aren’t in faith for it or can’t return the affection, we should exhibit humility by taking the time to consider and pray over his request, get counsel from others (just in case we don’t see things clearly), and decline him kindly. We should not look down on any man, but thank him for demonstrating trust in God by risking such a request. We should build him up and make it easy for him to step out once again, even if we are not giving him the answer he wants.

Let me be pragmatic here for a moment. You may not have any attraction to a particular man when he initiates a relationship with you—but it’s highly likely that one day he will connect with the woman who is to be his wife. Wouldn’t you want to be the kind of gracious woman who makes it easier for him to try again with someone else? And wouldn’t you want that from the last woman your future husband pursues? (Don’t lose me here in all the hypotheticals.) More importantly than this, don’t we all want to be the kind of women who please our Father because we are imitating his Son? Philippians 2:4–6 tells us,

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have

this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

The NIV says it this way, “your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”

When any man takes any initiative toward us, I would suggest we consider it an evidence of God’s grace before we view it any other way. In humility, we should think about how difficult it is for a man to risk rejection. We should care more for his interests in this situation than our own possible awkwardness, discomfort, or even disappointment. Humility dictates that we should be honored, not displeased, when any man expresses interest. Again, that doesn’t mean we need to accept. But we should not be angry nor belittle him for having made the effort. Let us be marked by a spirit of sisterly graciousness that wants to cheer on our brothers as they exercise their trust in God to fulfill the Prov 18:22 goal to find a good thing—a wife.

True Liberation

My feminist teachers once taught me that men were the problem. But the Bible taught me that sin is the real problem—and the only true liberation for women, as for men, comes through the cross of Christ. Therefore, as redeemed creatures made male and female in God’s image, we have been assigned roles in manifesting his glory to a lost world. Because the Bible assumes marriage is the norm for most adults, these assignments for men and women are most

often described in terms of marriage. In a generation greatly affected by the influence of feminism, we see the fallout in the high number of single adults in our churches. How the church can counter that fruitless influence is another verbose discussion of its own.

For now, for the benefit of my single sisters in Christ who must live with this hope deferred, I pray this overview provides reassurance that femininity is defined by our creator and so there are numerous ways we can exhibit that right now for his glory, even without the proverbial “better half.” ■

¹ Unless noted, Scriptures quotations are from the English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

FUTURE HOMEMAKERS¹

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As a young woman, I often lay in bed at night and wondered about my future. I stared hard into the darkness, as if God had put the answers there. I had a longing to do great things for God. I imagined myself as a missionary in another country, maybe even a nurse. (I assumed my tendency to faint at the sight of blood would not be a problem.) I had visions of speaking to crowds of women, leading many to the gospel.

What I didn't yet understand was that God's plan for me was greater than what my imagination could conjure up. It was also very different than what I thought.

How about you? What are your dreams and aspirations for your future? How do you answer the well-meaning adults who ask about your plans after high school?

It may surprise you to learn that God in the Bible has already given you a sneak peek into your future. As women, we are all appointed to be keepers of the home (Prov 31:10-31; 1 Tim 5:14; Titus

2:5). Someday you may be called to love a husband and bring up children and make a home for them. Or as a single woman, you may be entrusted with a home from which you extend hospitality and vital service to your church and community. While you may pursue many other God-honoring tasks or occupations throughout your lifetime, you are also called to be a homemaker.

This is our purpose in life, what John Angell James calls a "woman's mission"—to "affect society through the medium of family influence."² You see, being feminine isn't just who we are; it's also what we do. Our feminine identity comes with a unique task: to change the world by devoting ourselves to home life.

Now this does not mean that the Bible confines girls and women to their homes. The Proverbs 31 woman—the ideal homemaker—pursued endeavors outside of the home for the good of her family. And, of course, single women will have careers that require them to work beyond the home. But Scripture unapolo-

getically sets forth the high priority of the home for each and every woman.

Although this is our clear mission from God, not many young women aspire to be homemakers these days. While there are many other worthy careers they may consider, homemaking isn't usually on the list of desirable options.

However, it wasn't so long ago that women thought differently about homemaking. As author Danielle Crittenden points out, "Whether it's the pleasure of being a wife or of raising children or of making a home—[these] were, until the day before yesterday, considered the most natural things in the world."³ Today the most natural thing in the world is for girls to consider any career *except* that of homemaker. So what happened? When did homemaking fall off the radar screen for young women?

To make a very long story short, forty years ago a revolution known as the feminist movement set out to "liberate" our mothers' generation from being tied down to the home. And part and parcel of the feminist message was "a disdain of domesticity and a contempt for housewives."⁴

And there is perhaps no greater measurement of the success of feminism than the fact that our generation no longer considers homemaking a viable career. As my mom has written, "Feminist philosophy has become thoroughly integrated into the values of mainstream society—so much so, that it has been absorbed and applied by the majority of women, even many who do not consider themselves feminist."⁵ The feminist revolution is not a revolution anymore; it's simply a way of life.

While motherhood has made a comeback in the ratings of late—and only as a worthy interlude in an otherwise successful career—homemaking in its full

scope remains unpopular. Thus you may not have thought of housewives (a term usually employed while looking down on someone) as being world-changers before. But looks can be deceiving. True greatness isn't always flashy or attention-grabbing when it arrives on the scene. I didn't see it at first either.

My mom is a homemaker. I grew up with a living model of a woman who utilized all her intelligence, creativity, and energy to create a home and care for her husband and children. But I didn't always fully appreciate the true significance of her chosen career.

Sure, I wanted to get married and have kids someday and have a home of my own, but I lacked a biblical understanding and vision of the importance and priority of my future calling. However, Mom did not allow me to remain ignorant for long. Through Scripture, hours of conversations, and helpful books, she presented to me the noble calling of a homemaker and its powerful effect in the world.

I learned that, as John Angell James wrote, quoting Adolphe Monod, "The greatest influence on earth whether for good or for evil, is possessed by woman."⁶ Modern-day pastor John MacArthur echoes his sentiment:

The family might survive the problems with children and husband-fathers if the women who are wives and mothers were faithful to their godly calling. Their influence is so strong and pervasive in the home that it can mitigate the other influences. . . . when a wife and mother fulfills her God-given duty, she acts as a barrier against that family's dishonoring God and His Word.⁷

Mom not only taught me of the power of a homemaker's influence in the world but about the fulfilling nature of her job. Dorothy Patterson elaborates,

Homemaking, if pursued with energy, imagination, and skills, has as much challenge and opportunity, success and failure, growth and expansion, perks and incentives as any corporation, plus something no other position offers—working for people you love most and want to please the most!⁸

Through my mother's example and training, I caught a vision of the importance of my future mission. I knew that whether or not I got married, and no matter what other tasks God might have for me, I wanted to fulfill my biblical calling to be a "keeper of the home."

Today, although I may not be doing important works by society's standards, I am doing great things for God, by His grace. Although God did not call me to be a missionary in another country, I am able to share the gospel with my little boy, Jack. While I may not be an encouragement to thousands, I can pray for and encourage Steve, the godly man who is my husband. And I finally realized that I wasn't cut out to be a nurse, but each and every day I have the opportunity to serve the church and reach out to the community, all from the base of my home.

I know many other women, married and single, who are quietly and without fanfare starting a counterrevolution. They are intelligent, talented, godly visionaries who are seeking to change their world by answering God's call to be homemakers.

Carolyn McCulley is one such

single woman. She has turned her back on the feminist ideology she formerly embraced and now enthusiastically serves others through her home. While she holds down a demanding job, she also thrives on hosting singles and married couples alike in her home for fellowship or evangelism (and even gourmet meals!). She loves to have children—especially her nieces and nephews—spend the night. In fact, Carolyn has recently written a book to encourage other single women to embrace God's feminine design.⁹

Another revolutionary is my friend, Jonalee Earles, a young wife and mother. She was a straight-A student in high school who went on to study interior design and could have had her pick of career options. However, she's chosen to invest her creative talent into making a pleasant and delightful home for her husband and their three small children. Jonalee is a wonderful wife, an exceptional mom, and a skilled and artistic homemaker. In her spare time she helps other women decorate their homes.

Stephanie Pyle is a *future* homemaker. A bright college student at the local university, she does not hesitate to tell others that she hopes to make use of her degree as a wife and mother someday. Her fellow students are perplexed but curious. Stephanie is a young woman who has a clear vision of the importance of the home.

Carolyn, Jonalee, and Stephanie are participating in what one person called "the great task of renovating the world":

Even if we cannot reform the world in a moment, we can begin the work by reforming ourselves and our households—It is woman's mission. Let her not look away from

her own little family circle for the means of producing moral and social reforms, but begin at home.¹⁰

Crossway, 2004).

¹⁰ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18 (Summer 1966), 53, 174; quoted in Susan Hunt, *The True Woman* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 24.

You want to join us? I must warn you that the world will not applaud you. Or worse, they may look down on you and criticize you. I guarantee there won't be awards given out for homemakers—at least, not in this world. And we probably won't see the effects right away. But our influence will surely outlast our lives.

Actually you don't have to wait until a future day or time to get started on your mission. You can begin today. My mom, Carolyn Mahaney, will tell you how in the following article. But for the moment, consider: When the next person asks about your plans after high school, how will you respond? Will you join the vast number of women who have tossed away the keys to the home? Or will you join the homemaker's mission to change the world with the gospel? ■■

¹ From *Girl Talk: Mother-Daughter Conversations on Biblical Womanhood* by Carolyn Mahaney and Nicole Mahaney Whitacre, copyright 2005, pages 143–48. Used by permission of Crossway Books, a ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, www.crossway.com.

² John Angell James, *Female Piety: A Young Woman's Friend and Guide* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1860, repr. 1995), 91–92.

³ Danielle Crittenden, *What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 22.

⁴ F. Carolyn Graglia, *Domestic Tranquility* (Dallas, TX: Spence, 1998), 92.

⁵ Carolyn Mahaney, *Feminine Appeal: Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 103.

⁶ James, *Female Piety*, 72.

⁷ John MacArthur, Foreword to Pat Ennis and Lisa Tatlock, *Becoming a Woman Who Pleases God*, (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 12.

⁸ Dorothy Patterson, "The High Calling of Wife and Mother in Biblical Perspective," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* (ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 377.

⁹ Carolyn McCulley, *Did I Kiss Marriage Goodbye? Trusting God with A Hope Deferred* (Wheaton, IL:

HOMEMAKING INTERNSHIP¹

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Imagine preparing your whole life for a career in medicine. In high school you volunteer at the local hospital and spend your evenings reading medical journals. You make the honor roll and head off to a prestigious medical school. After eight years of only study and no social life, you finally graduate. Then you spend two, maybe three years in your chosen field—not even enough time to pay off the school loans.

But the more you practice medicine, the less you enjoy it. Suddenly you realize the truth. Your real calling is to be a teacher. You want to work with kids, small ones. So now with a mostly useless set of skills (at least you would know how to do the Heimlich maneuver if a kid choked on his hot dog in the school cafeteria), you want to enroll again at the university and study to be a teacher. But you can't. Your time and money have run out.

You can't afford to give six more years of your life to study, and you certainly can't afford the extra school debt.

The years and the funds allotted for career preparation have already been spent on another profession. You have to accept the reality that you didn't graduate with the right degree to teach.

All too often we stumble onto homemaking the way this student stumbled onto teaching. We devote ourselves to studying for a particular career, but suddenly discover we want to enter an entirely different field for which we never prepared. Surprise! We find ourselves engaged to be married but without a degree in homemaking.

But unlike all other professions, we aren't forbidden from marrying simply because we aren't prepared. While teachers are not allowed to enter a classroom unless they have a diploma, every day women become wives, mothers, and homemakers with little or no preparation.

Girls often spend years of intensive study for other professions and yet are completely *unprepared* to assume the career of homemaking. As I wrote in my

book *Feminine Appeal*, “Isn’t it telling that our culture requires training and certification for so many vocations of lesser importance, but hands us marriage and motherhood without instruction?”² One author lamented,

The fact is, our girls have no home education. When quite young they are sent to school where no feminine employment, no domestic habits, can be learned. . . . After this, few find any time to arrange, and make use of, the mass of elementary knowledge they have acquired; and fewer still have either leisure or taste for the inelegant, everyday duties of life. Thus prepared, they enter upon matrimony. Those early habits, which would have made domestic care a light and easy task, have never been taught, for fear it would interrupt their happiness; and the result is, that when cares come, as come they must, they find them misery. I am convinced that indifference and dislike between husband and wife are more frequently occasioned by this great error in education, than by any other cause.³

Although this author has accurately described the dismal state of education for the home today, she was actually writing in 1828. Only imagine what she would say were she alive to observe the situation now! If it’s possible, girls are even *less* prepared now than they were two hundred years ago. Young women tend to assume that homemaking doesn’t require any advanced skills or prepara-

tion. It’s similar to what a sixth grader might think about a test covering first-grade material: What’s there to study?

But the truth is that homemaking involves so much more than just cleaning a house. The commands in Scripture to love, follow, and help a husband; to raise children for the glory of God; and to manage a home encompass a vast responsibility. Homemaking requires an extremely diverse array of skills—everything from management abilities, to knowledge of health and nutrition, to interior decorating capabilities, to childhood development expertise. If you are to become an effective homemaker, then you must study these subjects and many more.

And consider the potential number of years you may function as a wife, mother, and full-time homemaker. Obviously, this will differ for every woman, given the age we get married, bear children, and then the age we die. However, many of us will spend a considerable portion of our lives in the homemaking profession—from twenty or thirty to upwards of fifty years or more. That’s no small amount of time in one career.

Most importantly, our homemaking mission is from *God*. For the majority of you who may be married someday, you will be called to support a husband and together to lead and train your children in godliness. And your home is to be a place from which the gospel goes forth.

So homemaking is a career that demands considerable expertise, may encompass decades of our lives, and has the potential to spread the gospel to our families, churches, communities, and future generations. Now that’s a career worth preparing for, wouldn’t you say?

Of course, it is not wrong to study for another career in addition to preparing for homemaking. However, the

point is that we must not pursue any career to the neglect of training to be a homemaker. God has called us to be the keepers of the home; thus I want to urge you to give careful attention to your education for this profession.

You need not wait for home economics classes to once again appear in high school and college syllabi. God did not assign this vital training to educational institutions. Instead, Scripture says that the older women should teach the young women to be effective home managers and to love their husbands and children (Titus 2:3–5). As with all other aspects of biblical womanhood, it is the mother's job to teach and the daughter's job to learn.

Mom, this is where you come in. I want to take a short intermission from our conversation with your daughter and speak with you for a moment. For the job of preparing our daughters to be homemakers—as we see from Titus 2:3–5—has been assigned to us as moms. And what an exciting task this is! We have the privilege of training our daughters to do what we love to do best—to be homemakers and world-changers for the gospel.

Mothers, we must begin by recognizing the full-time nature of our training. Remember Deut 6:7: “[You] shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” We must incorporate domestic training into the fabric of our daily lives. We must seize every opportunity to prepare our daughters for their mission.

We should speak often to them about the joys of being a wife, mother, and homemaker. Because when you hang around someone who is enthusiastic about her career, it rubs off on you. So let's spread some homemaking enthu-

siasm to our daughters. But we must also advise them regarding the realities of homemaking. Many girls enter marriage and motherhood without a clue as to what's required, and they quickly fall into despair. We must tell our daughters of the sacrifices that homemaking demands—but also of the unsurpassed rewards it offers.

Besides the ongoing and impromptu teaching opportunities, we must set up a *structure* for training. A good domestic training plan must begin with the heart. As mothers, we must shape our daughters' convictions to reflect the biblical priority of the home. A steady diet of God's Word and other biblically informed materials are indispensable.⁴

We must also continually orient our daughters' hearts to home life. This means—and I know this might be a radical concept—that our daughters need to *be* at home sometimes. I am aware from experience that this is not always easy during the teenage years, which are brimming over with options and activities. However, C. J. and I sought to preserve for our girls the priority of family and home. So family dinner each evening, weekly “Family Night,” and other family-together events were nonnegotiable.

Finally, moms, an effective training program equips our daughters to manage all practical aspects of caring for a home and family. It is impossible to list here the numerous skills your daughter must possess. But if you simply reflect on your various daily responsibilities, it will provide a template from which you can develop a specific plan.

Think of your daughter as your homemaking intern. She needs both practical training and instruction. You can provide hands-on training by delegating portions of the household responsibilities to her for short periods of

time. For example, you may assign your daughter to buy all the groceries and plan and cook all the meals for a week, or you may have her prepare dinner once a week on a consistent basis. Actually you could rotate through each section of your daily tasks in order to furnish your daughter with a well-rounded experience of the homemaker's world.

To provide your daughter with instruction in homemaking skills, you can get books from a library or bookstore on cleaning, organization, cooking, decorating, or childcare. You can also enroll together in one of the classes in the domestic arts offered by many county organizations or retail stores. My daughters and I have many fun memories from the courses we took on Chinese cooking, gift-wrapping, cake decorating, and more. If there is a homemaking skill in which you feel unequipped to instruct your daughter, contemplate asking a talented friend to teach her instead.

Practical training in homemaking skills should also be a factor in how you help your daughter approach her education. Author Tim Bayly has observed,

Women make academic decisions about course work and majors with little thought of the value of specific areas of knowledge for running a home, raising a family, or educating children. . . . Most . . . women, though, will be blessed by God with marriage and children and are therefore to raise up [their children] for the Lord. To fail to acknowledge this and make decisions accordingly in the critical years of life is so sad, really. Why should Christians join the world in

despising housewifery and motherhood?⁵

Let's not despise homemaking and motherhood but rather honor it. Whether our daughters pursue a formal education or take a more unconventional learning track, let's make sure their season of learning includes preparation for their possible futures.

I encouraged my daughters to acquire skills that would not only benefit them in the workplace but would have lifelong returns as well. Nicole pursued writing opportunities; Kristin took college courses in accounting; and Janelle studied photography. They are all married today, and their respective abilities have enabled them to supplement their family incomes and serve others.

Finally, back to you, daughters. Let me encourage each of you to embrace your mother's domestic teaching. Allow her to probe your heart and direct your affections toward the home. And take it one step further. Appoint yourself as your mom's homemaking assistant. In addition to your assigned chores, be on the lookout for practical ways you can shoulder more of her homemaking responsibilities. In so doing, you will not only receive vital training for your future mission, but you will honor God by expressing your femininity today.

In conclusion, let me leave you with these words from John Angell James:

My young friends, let it be your constant aim, and at the same time your earnest prayer, that you may first of all thoroughly understand your mission, and then diligently prepare for it, and hereafter as successfully fulfill it.⁶ ■

¹ From *Girl Talk: Mother–Daughter Conversations on Biblical Womanhood* by Carolyn Mahaney and Nicole Mahaney Whitacre, copyright 2005, pages 149–55. Used by permission of Crossway Books, a ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, www.crossway.com.

² Carolyn Mahaney, *Feminine Appeal: Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother* (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 21.

³ Lydia Maria Child, *The American Frugal Housewife* (Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1832), 96.

⁴ See “For Further Study” in chapter 20 of *Girl Talk*.

⁵ Tim Bayly, “Preparing for Motherhood: A Christian Response to the Cultural Attack on Domesticity,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 4, nos. 2–3 (Winter 2000): 24–25.

⁶ John Angell James, *Female Piety: A Young Woman’s Friend and Guide* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1860; repr. 1995), 97.

EQUAL, YET SO VERY DIFFERENT: UNDERSTANDING A MAN'S SEXUALITY AND HIS INHERENT STRUGGLE

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"It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen 2:18).

There is one subject that rarely surfaces in our egalitarian vs. complementary discussions regarding male/female roles and relationships. That is the vast difference that exists between men and women in the area of sexuality. Extending from that difference are its remarkable implications in terms of our natural inclinations and unique strengths, as well as the growing gulf it is creating between Christian men and women today. This article seeks to address that gulf.

What We Women Don't Get

"What's wrong with my husband? Is he over-sexed? He thinks about it all the time; but it seems like the more I give it to him, the more he wants it."

"Why can't my husband be intimate in any other ways except through sex? It leaves me cold."

"What is it with men that they are always struggling with sexual thoughts

and desires? Why can't they get control and grow up?"

These are the questions women are asking today. A 1991 Roper poll of 3,000 women revealed that 54 percent of women believed "men are sexually obsessed." This was fifteen years ago, long before the porn industry skyrocketed via cyberspace to exceed the income of professional baseball, basketball, and football combined, with literally millions of websites¹ and some 800 million porn videos and DVD's now available for public consumption.² In the year 2000, Robert Weiss, director of the Sexual Recovery Institute in Los Angeles and co-author of *Cybersex Exposed*, said 60 percent of all website visits were sexual in nature and "sex" had become the number one searched for topic on the internet.³ It is understandable that Christian women are troubled by what appears to be a virtual epidemic of male sexual sin within the church. In nationwide surveys among Christian men, sexual temptation consistently tops the list as their single

greatest struggle, and the number of those men admitting to using pornography is staggering.⁴ As a result, in the last decade there has been an explosion of books, support groups, and websites for men with sexual struggles and addictions within the Christian community. It matters little whether these men are in positions of church leadership or sitting in the pew. Christian colleges and seminaries have seen a surge of young men who admit to feeling trapped in a hopeless cycle of lust and sexual sin. In my own interviews of godly young guys with a passion for serving Christ, the story has been eerily the same: “I don’t know of anyone personally—not one guy—who isn’t battling (or hasn’t battled deeply in the recent past) with masturbation and pornography; and I know very few who have found long-term victory.” Due to its very nature (as well as mainstream media’s financial windfall from porn and its resulting reluctance for exposure), actual statistics on porn use have become increasingly difficult to gather, but the sheer success and the number of hits on their websites tell us the story.

Pornography is not the only “flaming missile of the evil one” (Eph 6:16). Our men walk through a daily mine-field of sexual temptation, and no man is exempt. It is “every man’s battle,” as Stephen Arterburn aptly put it. And it is all-out war.

Is the battle winnable? Absolutely. There is great hope for our boys and men. Satan may have found the Achilles’ heel of Western civilization, but God knows *his* Achilles’ heel (Gen 3:15). As with young David who took on Goliath, God is looking for men who will dare to engage the enemy, using their five smooth stones, a sling, and a warrior’s skill in hitting the mark. As their wives, *we are one of those five stones*. In fact, we

may be the very stone our husbands will use to bring the enemy down. But in order to be his best ally, we need a serious paradigm shift. We need to see from his perspective. What is God’s core design of our warrior husbands, and why is this their struggle?

A Few Important Preliminary Considerations

It is important to recognize that Christian women are not exempt from this epidemic of sexual immorality. Increasing numbers of women in the church are escaping into internet relationships, adulterous affairs, and even walking away from their husbands and families. It must also be underscored that the majority of highly moral Christian men have not relinquished the fight for control over the sex drive that often rages within them. But our men have several strikes against them.

Strike one is the sheer unfettered accessibility to temptation which was unthinkable even ten years ago, and the likes of which has never been known to mankind. Not only are porn producers using the latest cutting edge in technology, but technology in general is fueling the fire. Consider Apple’s latest version of iPod, a 60 gigabyte video iPod that boasts the ability to record up to 150 hours of video or 25,000 still images. Does anyone want to take a stab at what our kids will be downloading for immediate access—whenever, wherever? Al Cooper, a leading researcher in the field of sexual addiction, describes this technological porno boom as a “Triple-A engine: access, affordability, and anonymity.”⁵ Three traps, one pit.

Strike two is the reluctance of the church to speak openly and frankly on this issue. Most men attend churches in which leaders who otherwise openly

admit to struggling with anger or lack of trust in God, rarely if ever admit to personally struggling in the area of sexual temptation. The perception is this. Either godly men struggle only slightly in this area and deal with it successfully, or sexual sin is the “unmentionable sin,” never to be publicly acknowledged or openly addressed. In such an environment, even among male friends in accountability groups, it is a rare self-respecting man who will spill his guts and be real about his deep inner sexual struggle. When the silence is finally broken by the fall of a highly visible leader, a sense of hopelessness and cynicism sets into the souls of good men.

Adding injury to insult has been the change of attitude regarding what is normal male behavior in our own Christian sub-culture (i.e., the normalizing of masturbation, looking at pornography, and lustful thinking). The result has been a trap of confusion and rationalization among young maturing Christian men.

The “if he’s not talking about it, he’s probably okay” approach is clearly not working. The church must not ask *whether*, but *how* we are going to openly, appropriately, and straightforwardly address this huge elephant in our living room. Churches that *have* implemented an approach of brazen honesty and straight talk, beginning with their top leadership, are seeing a kind of reformation take place. Walls come down, sin is exposed, and lives are changed and restored. But such climates where open, humble honesty thrives are hard to find in our twenty-first century image-conscious church.

Strike three (and most relevant to this article) is the increased feeling men have of being misunderstood by the women in their lives. Men who care about their marriages and love their wives

are saying to their counselors, “My wife doesn’t understand me. She thinks I am selfish, off-balance. I’m dying here. The frustration has become unbearable. What do I do?”

“These are not easy times for men,” writes Archibald Hart, author of the Hart Report, a landmark study of Christian men and sex in the 1990s.⁶ There is a growing “masculine mystique,” says Hart—a kind of quiet desperation among men today that goes beyond the struggle to find masculine identity in a feminized culture. This desperation has to do with the ever-present battle in the area of sex. For many normal Christian men, Hart’s research indicates, it is a daily battle, and for some, it is hourly.⁷

Sadly, “one in four men have no one, not even a wife, they can talk with about their deepest sexual thoughts or feelings.” Only 20 percent said they had friends they talked to about it. Sixty-five percent said their spouse or partner was the only one with whom they could discuss it. But among those who did talk to their wives, they dared not share their deepest struggles, for such revelations “are embarrassing beyond words.”⁸ Would she understand? Would she judge and reject him? Their struggles are so frightening even to them, what would the knowledge of these things do to their wives? So most men continue on in their quiet world of desperation.

H. Norman Wright echoes this problem in his book, *What Men Want*, in which he reveals his own results of a mid-1990s nationwide survey of Christian men, counselors, and pastors. In response to the question, “What subjects do you think men hesitate most in bringing up or discussing with women?” sex was at the top of the list.⁹ One man stated the problem this way, “I don’t think women fully understand our sexual struggles because

they just don't think the same. It's like trying to explain back pain to someone who has never had it. Something gets lost in the translation."¹⁰

This is not good. Of all the people in the world with whom a man should be able to bare his soul, it should be his wife. The problem is that women are not wired like men. We speak a different sexual language, and our tendency is to think in our own native tongue. Try as we might, we will never fully relate. *But we can understand.* And a little understanding can go a very long way.

Philandros

Most women are familiar with the command to husbands, "You husbands likewise, *live with your wives in an understanding way*, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pet 3:7, italics added).

But is there a corresponding command to wives? Indeed there is. In Titus 2:4, the older women are to encourage the younger women "to love their husbands" or, literally, "to be husband-loving." The Greek word here is *philandros*, combining the Greek word for *phileo* (meaning "love") with the Greek word for husband.

Often in New Testament times, *phileo* spoke of the deep love between very close friends—a David and Jonathon kind of love, if you will. In Scripture, *phileo* is used when referring to the love of Jesus for his dear friend, Lazarus (John 11:36, "Behold, how He loved him!"), as well as his love for "the disciple" (most likely John, John 13: 23). It is also used in describing the deep, affectionate love of God the Father for his Son (John 5:20). Paul uses it when commanding us in Romans 12: 10, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference

to one another in honor...", and John uses it in referring to God's fatherly love for his children (Rev. 3: 19). These verses speak of a special deep affection and intimate relationship.

Interestingly, women are masterful at this kind of love. We tend to be gifted at making and nurturing intimacy in friendships. We are more naturally inclined towards seeing inside the hearts of people and empathizing with their feelings, even when they can't articulate their feelings themselves. Research underscores that women form intimate friendships more freely than most men, and that affection and expression of feelings usually comes far more easily for us.¹¹ Intimate friendship love is a love that we not only tend to do well, but that we naturally deeply long for.

So, in a manner of speaking, Paul is saying to us in Titus 2: 4, "*Wives, live with your husband in an understanding way*". A wife who embraces *philandros* seeks to get inside the mind of the man she loves and understand what makes him tick; she empathizes with his feelings and shares his burdens, and she looks for ways to meet his deepest needs. She also realizes that "understanding," biblically speaking, does not mean "excusing." On the contrary, in the case of destructive sin, a true friend is called by God to love with a tough love—which is usually the hardest part of love for us as women. Yet, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend," says Prov. 27:6, for wounds inflicted with a surgeon's wisdom and skill can sometimes save a life, a marriage, and a family.

How then do we begin to practice such understanding when it comes to our husbands' sexual needs and struggles?

- We must first understand every man's struggle in the

area of *sexual temptation*, and how we can be an ally rather than a hindrance to him in that battle.

- We must rightly handle the fact that every good man falls at some time in the area of *sexual sin*, even if only in the area of lustful thoughts.
- We must grasp a wife's important role when her husband's sexual sin becomes a lifestyle, or when it turns into a *sexual addiction*.

Whatever our husband's struggle—whether it be temptation, sin, or addiction—our men need us. We cannot save them, and we certainly must not be their moral policemen or mothers. But we do play a powerful role in their lives. And that begins with understanding God's creative wiring of the male sex.

Equal Yet Different

God created us *male* and *female* (Gen 1:27; Matt 19:4). In Eve, God made a “helper suitable (or “corresponding”) to” Adam—not precisely *like* him. Yes, like Adam she was created in the image of God—equal in her humanity, dignity, and worth, equal in her calling to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it,” equal in her position as fellow-heir in Christ, equally forgiven, gifted, honored, and significant in his body. Yet while she was as Adam declared, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” *she was not his biological replica*. Her X chromosome, studded with 1,000–1,500 genes, gave her a notable difference that complemented Adam's Y chromosome and enabled her to function uniquely as Adam's helpmate and the mother of their children. It also equipped her to contribute uniquely and purpose-

fully in the body of Christ. Egalitarians tend to pass over this profound reality in their passion for androgyny regarding the roles and functions of men and women in the home and church.

While the Bible assumes these differences, feminism (and the culture that it spawned some fifty years ago) rejected this idea outright. But Simone de Beauvoir's statement, that “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one,” can no longer be defended in the face of modern research. As a 2003 *Psychology Today* article declared, “It's safe to talk about sex differences again. Of course, it's the oldest story in the world. And the newest. But for a while it was almost treacherous. Now it may be the most urgent.”¹²

Research has now shown men and women to be significantly different from birth—physiologically, psychologically, socially, and intellectually (as groundbreaking studies on the brain have revealed). According to a 2006 *Newsweek* article, scientists are now realizing that the “boy brain”—that kinetic, sometimes disorganized, maddeningly rough-and-tumble behavior in young boys that drives mothers and educators crazy—is actually not a defection; it is *hard-wired* and *advantageous*. “Boys are biologically, developmentally and psychologically different from girls,” and our lack of recognition of this has put our boys at a severe developmental disadvantage.¹³

The “boy brain” is, of course, the “man brain,” produced when the male baby's brain is bathed in testosterone during gestation, wiring him differently from the female for life. And there is no place where this difference is more accentuated than in a man's approach to sex. Consider six ways that God has uniquely wired men in the area of sex, aside from their obvious physiological difference.¹⁴

Difference #1: For Men, Sex and Love Are Not Naturally Linked

This is a startling concept for most women. In fact, nothing separates men and women more in their sexual make-up than this single difference. For women, sex and love are inextricably linked. But not so for men.¹⁵ The male sex drive is primarily a matter of hormones. It is an instinctive drive that regularly demands to be satisfied. This drive for sexual release was built into the male for a reason, and it is as natural as the sun rising in the morning. In the man whose sex drive is normal (meaning it has not become unnaturally sublimated through excessive stress or physiological issues), it is a reality he deals with regularly. If left to languish in a marriage relationship, it will build up within him much like a smoldering volcano—strong, urgent, forceful, impatient.

By way of illustration, a man's God-given sex drive can be compared to hunger. None of us are hungry all the time. But at fairly regular intervals, we become hungry and need to eat. The longer we do not eat, the stronger and more urgent our hunger for food becomes. This is what men experience in the area of sex. Women, on the other hand, have no semen to release; they are more naturally spontaneous responders, and their sexual desires are greatly affected by relational needs and hormonal rhythms. God put this difference within us for our blessing, but it can become a curse.

This is because the analogy between the male sexual drive and hunger breaks down when it comes to satisfaction. Hunger can be satisfied by a man himself, or by any number of people; he can pull quickly into a drive-through or sit down at a nice restaurant. But a man's sexual needs are designed by God to be met only by another single human being—the

wife of his youth (Prov 5:18). God put a fence around sex, commanding that it should occur only within marriage in a one man/one woman relationship.¹⁶ He did this for many clear reasons (e.g., the prevention of physical disease, the development of true intimacy in the safety of fidelity and trust, and the depth of pleasure and happiness that can only happen in a long-term, sacrificial, monogamous relationship). But one reason not often considered is for the protection of women. In societies where sexual fidelity and monogamy is not honored, women fall in status, becoming only so much chattel, property to be used, abused, and disposed of at will. It should be noted that attitudes in our own society are moving us in that direction.

This plan of God has an important catch; call it a Catch 22. *God's good design for sex places a godly man in a very dependent position.* It requires that his wife understand and seek to meet his normal, natural, sexual needs. A wife who "gets" this is like medicine to a man's soul and a most powerful weapon in his fight against sexual sin.

Women need to realize that a man's sex drive is not the entire makeup of his sexuality. Men do need, long for, and deeply appreciate the intimacy and union of souls that occurs when love and sex come together. They are unfulfilled apart from that. But the male sex drive continues, whether genuine love and intimacy are present or not. (This helps to explain why a couple can have a heated unresolved argument in the kitchen, and thirty minutes later the husband can be making sexual advances in bed.)

A good woman who grasps her husband's physiological needs will not compromise communication on the altar of raw physical sex, but she *can* articulate an understanding of his inherent need as

she rightly expresses her own deep need for conflict resolution. A woman's natural need for sex to be an expression of communication and emotional intimacy is a healthy gift she brings into a marriage relationship. And it is exceedingly good for her husband.

Difference #2: Men Are Highly Visual

A man is naturally aroused by the sight of a woman's body—whether it be a woman walking down a street or in pictures, moving or still. We women simply do not comprehend the power of the visual on a man. Even the most visual of us cannot fully grasp it. Whether out of need or naivety, some women among us enjoy the attention they receive when they dress and act provocatively, not realizing that they are lowering their own value, objectifying themselves to men, and enticing them to sin. The apostle Paul (who as a man also experienced sexual temptation) wrote, “Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly” (1 Tim 2:9).

The truth is that without the complicity of women who allow their bodies to become objects of lust, the porn industry would be crippled. But any woman who leads men on by dressing provocatively, flirting with her eyes, touching inappropriately with her body, engaging in impure talk, or participating in extra-marital sexual intimacy designed by God to lead to sexual intercourse, has become complicit with the enemy.¹⁷ She is not only allowing herself to be used by men, she is being used by Satan. And this is a most sobering thought.

However, a godly, non-complicit woman still needs to understand something about her man. *Any* woman with a great body—even an attractively dressed woman in a business suit—is an

“eye magnet” for a man. The feeling of just looking at her is a riveting pleasure against which few things can compete. *And God put this into man before sin ever entered the world.* He put it there because he intended men to be the natural initiators in male-female relationships. God wired men to be attracted to, enjoy, love, and appreciate the female body. Then he stepped back and called this “good.” This strong physical attraction of a man to the sight of a woman's body is celebrated in Scripture. A woman's body is designed by God to be a turn-on. In Song of Solomon 4 (in which we should note that the virgin/bride says nothing), the husband/lover is simply gazing upon her and describing the power of the image of her body. Even her fragrance is celebrated. “Let her breasts satisfy you at all times,” says the writer of Proverbs regarding a man's wife (5:19). Have you ever read a verse commanding a woman to be satisfied with her husband's sexual organs? Why is it that men are the ones who are typically cautioned not to sin in their looking? That is because most women do not naturally look at a man and undress him. While physical traits do attract women, we are particularly drawn to a man who is strong, warm, verbally complementary, and relationally responsive.

But there is more for us to understand. Visual images of women are “burned” into the hard drive of a man's mind, stored away to be accessed at will or (as if his brain is constantly on-line) to simply pop up unsolicited at the most vulnerable, unsuspecting moment. A man need never worry about punching in “save.” It will be saved. Worse yet—and please get this—there is no “trash.” Once there, an image is permanently imprinted. A man's visual memory is not only long, but it is vivid and remarkably acces-

sible—whether that image entered his mind three minutes ago or three decades ago at the age of eleven. Since a young, innocent mind is not developmentally equipped to handle such images, the earlier and the more erotic the image, the more vivid is the memory. For men with obsessive behaviors, or for those who have made a habit of feeding on these images and replaying them often, things can quickly go seriously wrong.¹⁸

You may be a fresh young bride or a naturally beautiful fifty-something woman. You may be blessed with the most loving, intimate, and sexually fulfilling of marriages. But this does not change a man's instinctive wiring. The fact that the image of another woman arouses (or tempts) him has nothing to do with you. It has everything to do with him. Though a strong, happy marriage is surely a fortress of protection, in the end we have no control over what our husband sees in his mind or what he will do with it. We must understand this, accept it, and refuse to obsess over it.

“Philandros” on the Visual Front

There are, however, at least three selfless ways we can become our husband's ally on the visual front. When Willard Harley came out in 1986 with the results of his study on the top five needs in marriage expressed by Christian men, one could almost hear a collective moan sweeping across the sea of already overwhelmed wives and moms (who were doing well just to get some make-up on at the start of their day).¹⁹ The top three needs alone were enough to blow us over: (1) sexual fulfillment; (2) recreational companionship; and (3) attractiveness in a spouse. For women this said, “Perform, perform, and then perform some more.” But “piling on” was the last thing Harley had in mind. Believe it or not, *all three*

of these are directly related to innate male sexuality. And subsequent studies have reinforced Harley's findings. So, laying aside the performance guillotine for a moment, let us consider why these three particular needs rose to the top.

Need #1: Sexual Fulfillment

By divine design, sex is important to men. A normal, godly man who is sex-starved will be far more tempted to go to the “image files,” just like you would be exceedingly tempted to eat a box of donuts or pure trash from a garbage bin if nothing else was available and you were starving. “What is normal?” every woman asks. Each couple has to determine together what for them is normal.²⁰ But, ultimately, “normalcy” must be tempered by sacrifice and understanding on the part of both husband and wife. People get sick, lose jobs, and go through any number of unspeakable tragedies. Marriages hit difficult periods that affect a person's ability to respond sexually, and these times have to be worked through openly and completely. Past experiences profoundly affect a man or woman's present sexual health and appetite. Therefore, sexual appetite is never our final barometer; love expressed sacrificially as you walk through real life together is always our barometer (Eph 5:28–31). Keeping all this in mind, Paul laid down a simple, fundamental principle regarding our attitudes of meeting the normal sexual needs of our partner: “Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” (1 Cor 7:5). We help our husband on the visual front by understanding and incorporating this principle.

Need #2: Recreational Companionship

A man's high need for recreational companionship with his wife is more illusive, until we consider what the 24/7 industrial-technological age has done to both men and women. It has obviously divided our worlds and the natural flow of our lives together. It has also taken away a man's sense of power over his own life, putting him at the mercy of "the company" and placing him in a world that values success over all else. A man often feels he has to work overtime just to keep his job; then he must go on working double-overtime to carry out his responsibilities as husband and dad. In spite of all this, studies show that (whether religious or not, and regardless of age) men still deeply desire to provide for their families financially and feel the great weight of that responsibility—even if their wives are perfectly capable of bringing home the bacon. Their very manliness is at stake; they find it demoralizing and emasculating to have their wives outdoing them in this area that they are instinctively wired to fulfill.²¹

Philandros looks at this and steps back, letting him carry the ball and regularly expressing appreciation for all his hard work. Since a man rarely receives verbal appreciation at work (unless it comes from a woman who works very closely with him), a wife needs to be the one to meet that need in his life. She can let him know she cares very much about his daily work even though she is not physically there.

The industrial/technological revolution has also given rise to another trend among a certain segment of men. That trend is a decreased sexual appetite altogether. In *The Sex-Starved Marriage*, Michele W. Davis documents that one in five married men say their sex drive is not what it used to be.²² While other factors

can create low sex drive/performance in men, stress (which drains testosterone) has proven to be the number one culprit for the hypo-sexual male. At the expense of their health and marriages, workaholics are losing their healthy sex drive, as well as their ability to rest and play.

What does recreational companionship have to do with male sexuality and visual arousal? When a twenty-first century man walks in the door after a long day, he is likely to be hungry, angry, lonely, and tired (counselors call this HALT). He is, in a word, stressed-out. The wife and the mother of his children is probably in a similar state of mind. This is not a good time for in-depth conflict resolution. In fact, dumping family or marital frustrations on a man who has endured a long drive in traffic and a "God-only-knows-what-kind-of-day" is almost more than he can bear. A wife who does this regularly ends up becoming an *extention* of his day, rather than the woman with whom he desires and needs to decompress. Today's man has a genuine need to let down, to enjoy his wife, his children, his "place of refuge"—as much as that is possible in this busy, demanding world. If this is what he sees in his mind when he thinks of returning to his wife at home, that visual mental image will fight powerfully against a temporarily arousing image slinking down his office hallway. Call it a perk, a basic joy in being married, an invisible shield of visual protection. There are obviously times when urgent issues trump timing. But a woman who *continually dumps on her husband without impunity* is what Proverbs refers to as a "vexing" woman, "a constant dripping." What man does not want to escape such a woman, even if only in his mind?

Does this mean that we are to forsake healthy, needed conversation? Never. The Bible commands that we keep

short accounts and work through conflict ASAP (Eph 4:25–26). Sometimes there is no perfect time; in fact, “avoidance” is a common tactic used in dysfunctional marriages. If this is your situation, you must seek the LORD for wisdom, and then do what God has commanded you to do, which is to communicate from your heart in a spirit of love (1 Pet 3:8–12; Phil 2:1–4; Gal 6:6; Eph 4:15, 25–31; Prov 16:21, 23–24). But the man whose wife wisely considers her husband’s state of mind substantially raises the chances that he will actually hear and engage her concerns.

Consider this question. If you were to make a list of the top ten enjoyable recreational activities for men, would “talking through deep issues” appear on that list? Ninety-nine times out of one hundred it would not. Talking deeply for most men is a very hard but necessary work, as we will see in a moment.

What, then, *do* men enjoy? Women may find this hard to believe, but research shows that most men prefer to have fun with their wives even more than with “the guys.”²³ When you were dating, that was true; why should it not still be true? If your husband wants to relax and have fun with you (and evidence shows that he would if he felt he could), *nurture* that. Make it happen. Such marriages are a dying breed in our overloaded world. No matter how tight the budget, for the sake of our marriage, we must find a way to let go of the kids and the personal agenda, get a sitter if necessary, and be spontaneous with our husbands. A wife simply needs to let her husband know she enjoys being with him, even if it means sitting on the couch with him and watching the NBA playoffs or the Ultimate Fighting Championships (for twenty-something wives). Every man has a special activity that he loves. The

woman who does this activity with her husband might be surprised to discover why he enjoys it so much.

But what recreational activity do men find most relaxing, most rejuvenating, most enjoyable of all? Hands down, it is sex. Men love sex. A man feels most like a man when he is wanted, received, and pleased in sex with his wife.

To sum up, a wife helps her husband on the visual battlefield when he has visual images of enjoyable times with her.

Need #3: Physical Attractiveness

Breathe deeply and resist the urge to toss this journal in the trash right now. Given what we already know about a man’s visual make-up, this particular need makes complete sense. *But it is rarely if ever expressed by husbands.* Intuitively men know this is the most sensitive issue they could ever raise with their wives, and they frankly do not want to risk the hurt and further withdrawal it could create. Harley was one of the earliest to put the spotlight on this high-level need among Christian men; it has since come out in every major study of Christian men in the last ten years.²⁴

On the surface, this hits women as selfishly buying into the world’s values (and sadly, for some spiritually immature men, it truly is). However, let me put your heart at rest with regard to what the normal, godly man means when he expresses a need for “attractiveness.” Erase the comparison/performance mindset with which so many women are obsessed and become literally anorexic over. He is not expecting his wife to be a size 2, bikini-model. He knows that a real human-flesh woman can never compete with the anorexic, surgery-enhanced, vaporous objects thrust into our faces everyday, nor does he really desire that

from his wife. Men actually wish their wives did not feel so inadequate and obsess so much over their bodies. What they do desire is that their wives would make a genuine effort to be attractive *out of love for them*, rather than pursuing an empty kind of false beauty (“Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,” Prov 31:30). In one study, 97 percent of men said they would do whatever it takes to help make that happen if they knew this was their wife’s desire.²⁵

Knowing this fact and rightly responding to it are two separate things. We women tend to think in two unhealthy ways: (1) either we obsess over looks and feel continually inadequate in this area; or (2) we toss the idea out as worldly, unimportant, and unattainable, and just let ourselves go. There is a weird mindset floating around among some women’s groups which categorizes any focus on personal attractiveness as self-centered and unspiritual. These women have failed to differentiate between worldly, self-obsessed beauty and godly, *philandros*-driven beauty.

We cannot let the world’s perversion of beauty push us to the opposite extreme, conversely perverting God’s pure and wonderful design for beauty. The antidote to perversion is to soak in biblical truth. We are real women. Real women have children and serve their families from sun-up to sun-up. We are not desperate housewives. God created us to be women of substance, possessing dignity and character (Prov 31)—which by the way is *exceedingly attractive* to a man. We are to be beautiful from the inside out (1 Pet 3:3–4). We must remember that God created beauty. The Garden of Eden was breathtakingly beautiful. God refers to his own magnificent glory as beautiful (Ps 48:2; 96:6; Isa 4:2). And he honors substantive, virtuous beauty in

women throughout Scripture (the books of Esther and Song of Solomon are two primary examples).

There is an approach to physical health and beauty that is *philandros* in action. Modesty does not preclude attractiveness. And every woman can be uniquely attractive. One of the most personal, selfless ways a woman can be her husband’s ally is by appreciating his desire to enjoy her body visually. It is a happy man whose wife understands his natural response to the visual, and out of love for him chooses to make an effort to take care of her body *simply for him*. While time is not on the side of a Sport’s Illustrated swimsuit model, time is always on the side of the woman whose beauty is growing from the inside out. A godly woman ages with great beauty. That’s why, for her husband, empty, transitory, impersonal images can never compete with the real deal. A real-life relationship with a real-life woman with whom he shares real-life pleasurable intimacy and times of enjoyment are incredibly appealing—especially if that woman unselfishly seeks to please her husband in her appearance and lets him know *he is desirable* when he makes sexual advances. This is coming straight from the mouths of real, godly men.²⁶

In a nutshell, a woman’s desire to please her husband visually feeds his soul. Oddly enough, it is also feeds her soul and the souls of her children. Our men simply want us to know, “This is important to us. It makes more of a difference than we are willing to tell you. Please make an effort to love us by caring for your own body.”

Difference #3: Men Do Not Easily Articulate Their Innermost Feelings

In fact, sex is often the one place where a man finds an outlet for his feel-

ings.²⁷ Women need to better understand that articulation of inner emotions actually goes against the innate male nature and is not a natural part of the male language repertoire.²⁸ There are those for whom this is not true, but they are not the norm. This fact comes as no surprise to women; but it is a mystery.

Though the image of an iceberg is overused, there is no better illustration to describe this aspect of manhood. The normal man is much like an iceberg, with eight-ninths of its huge mass submerged beneath the surface. His true inner self—that core part of a man that experiences but rarely reveals fear, anxiety, hurt, depression, insecurity, grief, passion, love—remains deeply submerged. All the while, these emotions profoundly shape who he is, how he relates to God, the decisions he makes, and the way he interacts with his significant others. Even in our culturally “softened, sensitized male” world, the natural ability of a man to identify and articulate these feelings continues to lie outside his normal grasp. That is why, unless his emotional life has been nurtured in a healthy way as a child growing up, a man’s natural tendency will be either to explode (anger continues to be the one culturally acceptable masculine emotion) or simply to clam up and shut down.

There is a reason for this. Men were designed by God to be action-oriented, aggressive, strong, protective, fighters for good, able to “take it.” Even in childhood development, this inherent trait is obvious. A boy’s large motor skills develop earlier than girls, while his verbal skills develop much later.²⁹ Even then, his earliest words tend to be action words. (Give a third grader an assignment to write about how he *felt* on his first day of school and he will be stumped; he wants to write about what he *did* on the

way to school—like ramming his bike into a tree or tearing his pants on a high fence.) To adolescent boys, toughness is a virtue, and any emotion *other than anger* is a weakness. Manliness inherently comes to mean having your act together, being strong, unafraid, in control. Any revelation to the contrary is shunned. By adulthood, the majority of men do not tend to think in terms of “emotions” or “feelings” or “wounds” (an un-masculine word if there ever was one)—even though they deeply feel these things and are profoundly affected by them.

Yet Christian men love the Psalms. They envy the relationship of Jonathan and David where the male bond was so strong that two men could express love for one another and weep together. They feel passionately about issues that affect their souls, their families, and the world in which they live. The deepest hurt of a man’s life occurs when he fails to receive sufficient intimacy and verification from his father. When my husband speaks at men’s conferences, he has observed that it is the “Dad”-talk in which strong men actually break down and cry. There is no greater or more important love to a man than the love of another real man in his life, especially his dad. Yes, men are emotional beings.

A wife can become the single most powerful catalyst in helping her husband identify and articulate the feelings that churn inside of him. But male self-exposure is predicated upon the listener’s ability to be objective (rather than reactive). It is also predicated on the belief that he will not lose manly self-respect in the process. That is why your husband needs to know that you deeply respect him *when* and *because* he is vulnerable, that you value the strength and humility it takes to be vulnerable more than you value any other single masculine trait he

may possess.

Where does a woman begin in becoming such a catalyst? The best place to begin is where Jesus often began, by asking good questions. And then she must *simply listen*. When she does finally speak, it must be to articulate and verify what she is hearing him say. She is checking to see if she has gotten it right, and allowing him to correct her if she has not. By the way, have you ever noticed how Jesus' questions spoke directly to people's deep inner fears, needs, and motives? Wise questions are like golden keys to secret closets. It takes skill to ask good questions of our husbands.³⁰ If you love your husband, you cannot ignore his silence; for silence, as with the silence of Adam, is lethal.³¹ So if at first he "runs," patiently stay with it. Transparency for a man is usually connected to a loss of masculinity; he may not even know what he feels deep inside. If there is great pain in his heart, he will prefer to continue to live in that comfort zone of denial. But ultimately every man needs to understand his inner core; and he does desire emotional intimacy with his wife.

In fact, *transparency of both husband and wife is absolutely essential for true sexual fulfillment in marriage*. The flow of transparency must go both ways. This means that as a couple walks through life together, a woman will also need to explain herself to her husband.³² Men do not understand our sexual language either; we are an enigma to them. The more a husband "gets" his wife, the better he will be able to draw close to her emotionally and even please her sexually, which in turn will give him his own greatest sexual pleasure. Men enjoy sex most when their wives are enjoying it with them.

Paradoxically, the hardest area for transparency between a husband and wife is in the area of sex. It is the least openly

discussed topic among couples even in the very best of marriages. But in these times, it is crucial. Fifteen years ago Paul Tournier wrote in his excellent book, *To Understand Each Other*, "The best protection against sexual temptations is to be able to speak honestly of them and to find, in the wife's understanding, without any trace of complicity whatsoever, effective and affective help to overcome them."³³

Tournier is right. One counselor to sexually addicted men emphasized to me that a wife cannot afford to stand by with an "I would rather not know" approach to this subject. He suggested that understanding a man's natural needs is not enough. "Open the door and ask the right question," he said. Rather than asking, "Are you struggling with porn or lust?" ask, "What are you doing to keep from struggling with porn or lust?" *Philandros* cares enough to ask the hard questions—in a spirit of gentleness, looking to ourselves, knowing that we too are subject to great temptation (Gal 6:1).

Difference #4: A Man's Mind Easily Moves from Image to Fantasy

Visual images for men move quickly from thought to fantasy. As we have noted, once an image enters a man's mind, it is unconsciously catalogued and able to appear again at any time in the form of powerful temptation. It becomes a "mental time bomb."³⁴

Jesus understood this problem not only as the Creator, but as a man himself who was "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). Jesus fully grasped the intense battle that occurs in a man's mind at the point of visual and mental arousal:

You have heard that it is said, "You shall not commit

adultery”; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell (Matt 5:27–29).

There’s a familiar battle term called the “thin red line.” In this case, we might easily refer to the “thin green line”—that fine line between seeing and “envying your neighbor’s wife.” This line can be so thin, said Jesus, that even an image caught with a man’s right eye can draw him into lust. Jesus stunned his listeners when he suggested how much was at stake at this crucial point of the lust battle: *lust can take a man to hell* (v. 29). In essence, Jesus was saying that lusting (fantasizing) about sex is as destructive as actually committing adultery outright. Fornication in the mind, said Jesus, is, well, fornication. Wow, says the world, God is strict. But Jesus also understood what mental lust does to a man’s heart and soul. It alienates him from God (1 Cor 6:15–20), desensitizes his conscience, destroys his ability to sacrificially love his wife, and intensifies his appetite to go deeper. It is the germinal seed “that gives birth” to death (James 1:14–15). Jesus understood the addictiveness of lust. The conscious choice to entertain the idea of sexual pleasure apart from one’s own spouse does not stop with a mere thought. Lust undresses, craves, and fantasizes. Therefore, said our LORD, pluck out your eye rather than caving to lust and risking damnation. These are strong, jarring words. The Bible is clear:

those who practice sexual immorality *will not enter the kingdom of God* (1 Cor 6:9–10; Gal 5:19–21; Rev 21:8).

Is Jesus teaching that one who lusts can lose his salvation? John Piper answers this question with great theological acuity:

I have learned again and again from firsthand experience that there are many professing Christians who have a view of salvation that disconnects it from real life, and that nullifies the threats of the Bible and puts the sinning person who claims to be a Christian beyond the reach of biblical warnings. I believe this view of the Christian life is comforting thousands who are on the broad way that leads to destruction (Matthew 7: 13). . . . Faith that justifies is a faith that also sanctifies. And the test of whether our faith is the kind of faith that justifies is whether it is the kind of faith that sanctifies. . . . [True] Faith delivers from hell, and the faith that delivers from hell delivers from lust. Again I do not mean that our faith produces a perfect flawlessness in this life. I mean that it produces a *persevering fight*. The evidence of justifying faith is that it fights lust. Jesus didn’t say that lust would entirely vanish. He said that the evidence of being heaven-bound is that we gouge out our eye rather than settle for a pattern of lust.”³⁵

In other words, a truly regenerated heart of faith resists sin and perseveres in the fight against it. If a heart does not anguish over sin and persevere to fight it, it may very well be a heart in which true, saving faith has never been born. A tree is known by its fruit, said Jesus (Matt 7:16–20). Faith that bears no works is dead, says James 2:26. Therefore, the man who is united with Christ is necessarily engaged in a struggle.

Difference #5: Men Do Not Possess an Innate Defense against Sexual Arousal

Do you want to know what your husband's greatest challenge is? This is it. Because he does not naturally possess it, *every man must develop a system of self-control over his sexual impulse and drive.* And the best time to do this is in his transitioning years from adolescence into adulthood, when habits and attitudes are being formed and ingrained.

For this is the will of God . . . that is, that you *abstain from sexual immorality*; that each of you know how to *possess his own vessel* in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother (1 Thess 4: 3–5, italics added).

The Greek word here for sexual immorality (*porneia*) is the word from which we get pornography. It is also the word from which *pornē* comes, meaning prostitute or harlot. *Porneia* encompasses every form of sexual immorality—from lustful thoughts, to looking at immoral movies, to viewing pornography and masturbating, to visiting sex clubs, to committing

fornication with someone who is not your spouse. But simply dressing provocatively, or giving the very appearance of evil (1 Thess 5:22) is included. A woman can certainly be as guilty of not possessing her vessel as can a man.

However, the battle for men is a particularly difficult one. As one man explained, “Because of the way we are wired, it’s more natural for us to fall into sexual sin than to stay out of it. We have to learn to hate what is so destructive for us—that immediate sensation/gratification of pleasure that ends in emptiness and a need for more—and to desire what we really need, which is a faithful, intimate, deeply pleasurable relationship with our wives.” He is describing the age-old Rom 7:19 struggle.

But a man who is serious about the LORD and his marriage will set his heart to construct a defense. He will train himself to habitually avert his eyes and alert his mind to temptation, cutting it off at the pass. He will go to extreme measures to counter the enemy—even if it means having a TV removed from his hotel room or changing jobs. Like a right-handed basketball player training himself to bounce the ball with his left, he will have to learn by practicing what does not come naturally to him. Once he develops the skill, he becomes much harder to beat on the court. But he will need to continually practice this skill to stay good at it. As he is training his heart and mind, he may drop the ball. But a man whose heart is fully the LORD’s will get right back in the game. And he will be transparent with his wife concerning his battle.

If your husband is such a man, the worst thing you can do is walk around in a state of anxiety over potential infidelity just because temptation crosses his path. Being horrified that our husbands are

tempted every day and obsessing over their inevitable encounter with beautiful women accomplishes absolutely nothing (cf. Matt 6:27). Rather than living in a state of anxiety (even though some of us may have been betrayed by other men in our lives), the best thing we can do is to pray for him. At some point, we must put our husbands in the hands of God. Prayer is our first, most powerful line of defense. Counter your anxiety with prayer (Phil 4:6). As relentless as the enemy is, that is how relentless our prayers need to be for him. We fight not against flesh and blood, but against the forces of darkness. “Therefore, with all prayer and petition, pray at all times” (Eph 6:12, 18).

Differentiating between Sexual Temptation, Sin, and a Lifestyle of Sexual Sin

Women also need to understand the great difference between temptation and sin, thin as that line may sometimes be. It is interesting to note that temptation existed *before* the fall. The tree of knowledge of good and evil—with God’s clear instructions—was placed in Eden (Gen 2:9) before Eve sinned and her husband followed suit. Satan, the tempter, certainly existed before the fall. Temptation is not sin. It precedes sin. Jesus, the God-man, was tempted sexually, yet remained sinless. Each one of us is tempted to act selfishly every day of our lives, even though we may choose not to act upon that temptation. So, even though our husbands live in a daily war zone, we cannot confuse that temptation with sin.

There is also a great difference between sin and a lifestyle of sin. Will your husband sin? Sin is a given for every believer this side of heaven (1 John 1:8). There is no growth towards spiritual maturity that does not include stumbling and falling. “The issue is that we resolve

to fight, not that we succeed flawlessly,” says Piper.³⁶ There is a great difference between the kind of sinner who lives in awe of amazing grace and fights the good fight, and the sinner who has no fear of God and persists in a lifestyle of sin. Can sexual temptation be resisted? Certainly it can. Men can learn to control their sexual impulses. Too many women have bought into the lie that “it’s just a guy thing.” A Christian man or woman can develop self-control over *any* sinful impulse (gossip, anger, laziness, anxiety, unkindness). The fruit of the Spirit *is* self-control (Gal 5:22–23).³⁷

A Biblical Battle Plan

Paul gave his own spiritual son, Timothy, a two-pronged battle plan for building a defense system against sexual sin. *Flee* sexual immorality and *pursue* righteousness, he said (2 Tim 2:22). This is exactly what Joseph did when his youthful hormones were raging and Potiphar’s wife was enticing him day after day. He fled immorality and pursued after righteousness. Who would have known if Joseph had relented? God. “How can I do this great evil, and sin against God?” he said (Gen 39:9). What was his reward for obedience and self-denial? He was falsely accused and thrown into a dungeon for what could have been the rest of his life. But God was watching Joseph. He was pruning his character in order to raise him up and use him. Our husbands suffer also when they resist temptation, if only because they have denied themselves a powerful secret pleasure. But God sees, and he honors such a man.

Now let us think back to that question, “What are you doing to keep from struggling with porn and lust?” If a man is willing to be transparent, if he’s able to articulate specific safeguards he is taking, if he is open regarding temptations he

faces and is willing to confess sinful lust when it occurs, he has a built-in protection against a private lifestyle of sexual sin and addiction. A man who becomes willingly accountable to his wife is going to have a natural incentive not to sin when temptation crosses his path (and vice-versa when temptation crosses hers). Personal accountability—that willingness to explain oneself at any and every level—is a most powerful weapon in a man's arsenal of defense.

If, however, a man says that he really does not struggle, then know this: he will—or, more likely, he does. This is the unvarnished truth. The man who resists transparency and accountability in this area has hoisted a huge red flag. Take it from those who work with men who struggle with sexual sin and addiction. A wife is foolish to ignore this.

A lifestyle of sexual sin is perhaps the most secretive of all. It breeds deceit. It is masterful at hiding. If a wife begins to sense deceit, she should not ignore it. There are other major red flags: a growing emotional distance in the marriage, an abnormal increase or drop off in a man's sexual appetite, a sense that he is not really "there" (engaged with his wife) during the sex act, a growing attitude of anger whereby a man becomes more demanding and blames his wife for all the problems of their marriage, absences for long unexplained periods, hours of time spent on the internet while she is asleep, an unwillingness to let her have access to credit card and financial records. Counselors of sex addicts tell women to take heed of these things; a woman's instincts will tell her that something is wrong, even though she may not know exactly what it is. A man can lie and keep his sin so well hidden that a wife may never see it coming. But oftentimes, looking back she may recognize that there had

been signs. Sexual sin, unarrested and unexposed, easily leads to some form of sexual addiction, which brings us to our final point.

Difference #6: Men are More Vulnerable than Women to Sexual Addiction.

This is not an article about sexual addiction. But we must address it if only briefly, for a wife is instrumental in discerning the addiction and helping in her husband's recovery. At this point, the smooth stone must become a sharp, well-honed stone, as in "iron sharpening iron."

Why is a wife's role so urgent? It is urgent because not only is the soul of her husband at stake, but also the souls of future generations—for patterns of infidelity and the destruction that sexual addiction brings can be passed down to succeeding generations (cf. Exod 20:5). Our children's future lives are very much at stake.

Can women become addicted to sex? Yes, and more and more women are. As culture declines, Romans 1 tells us to expect women to act out sexually in unnatural ways (v. 26). But men are the ones who are most often convicted of crimes connected with sex, such as rape, child porn, sex abuse, and other crimes of a sexual nature. Biologically, the Y chromosome spurs the brain to grow extra dopamine neurons, the cells involved in reward and motivation, and in their release, underlie the pleasure of addiction and novelty seeking.

Does this excuse men? Far from it. It does explain that secret sexual sin can readily give way to sexual addiction in a man.

Early Exposure, Adult Addiction

Research indicates that most sexual addictions (but not all) begin early, usu-

ally in adolescence. It can start with an “innocuous” early exposure to soft porn during those formative years; then it can easily progress from there.³⁸ For the men of my generation, that exposure came most often from a father or older brother’s porn stash, or perhaps from that of a close relative or neighbor. Today, predators bypass parents altogether, pursuing our children via the most innocent of avenues, such as “My Space” websites on the internet. One in five children ages 10–17 “inadvertently encounter explicit sexual content,” and “the U.S. Justice Department reports that nine out of ten children are exposed to pornography while doing their homework on-line.”³⁹ Having a computer block is good, but it is only one line of defense. Young people do not have to own their own iPod or video cell-phones to access them. Besides, most boys from Christian families are more likely to view internet porn away from their own homes. This is why dads must frankly and openly address this subject early on with their sons. One Christian counselor of sex addicts estimated that 95 percent of his clients began their addiction in their developing adolescent years. Research bears out his experience.

The Nature of Sex Addiction

Sexual addiction has the same progressive traits as other addictions: (1) a denial of the addiction, insisting that the problem is really not a serious one; (2) self-loathing and multiple vows to change; (3) a craving for more stimulation with more frequency, accompanied by a feeling of urgency, that one simply cannot “go without”; (4) bolder steps toward acting out in real life what is being fantasized, since unhealthy sexual sensation by its very nature becomes less satisfying and requires more; (5) an increasing inability to think rationally

or to consider consequences—even if it means losing a job, a wife, a family, a reputation.

In a Christian man, a split occurs, for he is having to live two lives: one as the good Christian man who loves his wife and family, and the other as the addict who cannot seem to keep himself from going deeper. Lying becomes habitual, a skillful part of his everyday existence. His heart has long since grown cold towards God; he may not even truly know God, having acted out a Christian persona throughout his life because that was what worked for him. Yet he carries on this lie, relying on grace and the hope that at some point God will take him back. He hopes that if and when he marries a good woman, he will somehow be delivered. But the best, most beautiful wife cannot give him that selfish “rush” to which he has become so addicted. Such a man feels like half a person: one man in public, another in private. It is a torturous and ultimately disconnecting existence. A wife can be doing her best, but the addiction has now taken control. Only God can awaken, convict, and turn his heart.

When a wife discovers her husband’s sexual addiction, she is faced with a painful decision. She feels deeply hurt and betrayed; this is not the man she thought she married. She may even have a biblical right to divorce him. She must ultimately come to two unalterable realizations. The first is that it is not her fault. The second is that she cannot change him. Both are equally difficult and essential to embrace.

Once exposed, a sex addict will respond in one of two ways. The first kind of man will become deeply convicted of his sin and truly repentant. What is genuine repentance? Charles Spurgeon said that a man’s repentance is evident only

when his repentance is as great as the sin he has committed. Thomas Watson described godly repentance as “the vomiting of a man’s soul.” A truly repentant man will confess to his wife and to those significant others in his life who can help him. He will “come clean,” fully and completely. There will be no more hiding, no more lies. If he is wise, he will include his wife in the process of confession to others, especially with friends who are close to both husband and wife. If he is in visible spiritual leadership, he will confess to the entire church and, recognizing that he has disqualified himself, he will step down willingly from leadership. The goal of his repentant confession is not to make the front pages of the paper, but rather to begin the hard biblical process that leads to change and restoration. There will be a notable humility, a brazenly honest spirit, a willingness to do whatever it takes to come out of his addiction, an attitude of perseverance even when things get rough, and a recognition that he will be vulnerable throughout the rest of his life.

The second kind of addict is more tragic. Once caught, he will either angrily deny his sin until the evidence is overwhelming, or simply minimize the seriousness of his sin, excusing it and often blaming his addiction on someone else (usually his wife). He may take outward steps initially to make those around him think that he has dealt with his sin, and he may even have everyone “snowed.” But there is no true remorse or long term perseverance. Such feigned repentance is indicative of a heart skilled at lying and hardened at the core, able all the while to maintain a well polished exterior. This is a man who must be broken by God or face tragic consequences. Whatever category a sexual addict may fall into, the question for his wife is this: What would God have *her* to do?

Wife, Sister, and Friend

Sadly, what I am about to say is rarely taught to our women; yet it is a crucial underlying principle of marriage. You are your husband’s friend and neighbor (Matt 22:39). And if your husband is a believer, you are also his *sister in Christ*. This means that every command that applies to relationships between believers applies to you (cf. 1 Cor 12:13–27). This needs to be shouted from the mountaintops in every women’s ministry. God gives a wife a certain responsibility towards her friend and brother, her husband. She must not be an *enabler*. Rather she is called by God to be an *agent* for accountability and change in his life. This is a profoundly important aspect of the biblical relationship and responsibility to this man she has married. Passages like Ezek 3:18–19 (a sobering passage, which says a man’s blood is on our hands if we refuse to confront him about his sin). James 5:19–20, Gal 6:1–5, and many others, apply to the wife as her husband’s sister and friend. Once she has learned of his sinful lifestyle, she will be crushed and heartbroken; she will feel irreparably hurt and betrayed. Yet for his sake, God may call her to be the Nathan in her David’s life. If he refuses to confess to those significant others who should be a part of his restoration, tough true love will say to him for his sake, “You can tell them, or I can tell them. Which would you have it to be?” A woman may end up going through the biblical process of discipline with the leadership of her church, following Matt 18:15–17; 1 Tim 5:19–21, and Titus 3:10–11. It could be the most difficult thing she has ever done. But God will walk her through it (Ps 23:4) and she will do it because she cares about the soul of her husband. She will do it because, “‘Stolen water is sweet; and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.’ But

he does not know that *the dead are there*, that her guests are in the *depths of Sheol*" (Prov 9:17–18).

One woman whose husband betrayed her wrote this remarkable perspective:

Jesus Himself left the ninety-nine to go after the one. Well, didn't the one wander off on his own? Didn't he, like most stupid sheep, go his own way? Yes, true to his nature, he wandered; there he was on his way to destruction. But Jesus, being a good shepherd went after him. . . . As I feebly looked to the LORD and tried to look beyond the physical, temporal (pain), all I could see was spiritual devastation! He was ruined and on his way to hell. This whole thing took on a new perspective for me. It really wasn't about me at all, but it was about a man deceived by the enemy. And that enemy wanted me to become so wrapped up in myself and my feelings and my life that I would lose sight of what was really going on. Armed with this new perspective . . . I began to care on a completely different level than I had ever cared before. The primary battle for the hurting wife . . . is to look at our situation with an eye to the eternal.⁴⁰

Conclusion

The subject of sexual addiction is worthy of its own article. But it would be unfair to leave you without hope in what God can do. Countless couples

have recovered from situations in which there was unimaginable betrayal, sexual sin, and addiction. My husband and I have met many of them, couples who were once without any hope, yet by God's grace have been restored to a deep love and trust, and actually have a stronger marriage today than previously when things were seemingly at their best. They will testify that it was a long, hard road. It took enormous humility, tender teachability, extreme accountability, wise counseling (meaning a willingness to pay the price for this marriage in dollars), profound forgiveness, and an enduring perseverance. They recognized that recovery would be a long process requiring lifelong safeguards. Such restoration takes lots and lots of time. But who is counting the days when you know that God is doing a good eternal work?

In the end, we can say that *philandros* is not easy. Nothing worthwhile ever is. But it is unspeakably rewarding. Blessed is the man whose wife understands and embraces his male sexuality as a gift from the Creator of all good things. ■

¹ Brandon Cotter, CEO of www.PureOnline.com, a website which counsels and equips men who are trapped in sexual addiction.

² *The Village Pub 2* (2005): 1 (published by The Village Church, thevillagechurch.net).

³ Jim Dyar, "Cyber-porn held responsible for increase in sex addiction," *The Washington Times*, 26 January 2000, A2.

⁴ According to ProtectKids.com, the March 2000 issue of the *Pastor's Family Bulletin* from Focus on the Family reported that 63 percent of men attending "Men, Romance & Integrity Seminars" admitted to struggling with porn in the previous year. Two-thirds of these were in church leadership, and 10 percent were pastors. It also reported that one in seven calls to the Focus on the Family pastoral care line is about internet pornography. See "Archive of Statistics on Internet Dangers" n.p. [accessed 24 July 2006]. Online: <http://www.protectkids.com/dangers/statsarchive.htm>.

⁵ David Hiltbrand, "On-Line—Out of Control," n.p. [accessed 24 July 2006]. Online: www.pornnomore.com/OnLineoutofControl.htm.

⁶ Archibald D. Hart, *The Sexual Man* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

⁹ H. Norman Wright, *What Men Want* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1996), 93.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹¹ Researchers who have done extensive studies on the brains of men and women have learned that “women’s perceptual skills are oriented to quick—call it intuitive—people reading. Females are gifted at detecting the feelings and thoughts of others, inferring intentions, absorbing contextual clues and responding in emotionally appropriate ways. They empathize. . . . Such empathy fosters communication and primes females for attachment” (See Hara Estroff Marano, “The New Sex Scorecard,” *Psychology Today Magazine*, July/August 2003).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Peg Tyre, “The Trouble with Boys,” *Newsweek*, 30 January 2006, 44–52.

¹⁴ Note: The following is compiled from my own personal interviews of Christian marriage and sex addiction counselors, along with the following studies: The Hart Report, by Dr. Archibald D. Hart (a groundbreaking mid-1990s study based upon 600 surveys of sexually conservative men in the 30–50 age group including many ministers, and incorporating counseling data acquired from a 25 year period); a nationwide mid-1990s study by H. Norman Wright (who incorporated his own personal counseling data, a questionnaire of 700 other counselors, and a survey of men across the country); and three more recent studies done after the year 2000: (1) one by Chuck Cowan of Analytic Focus (former chief of survey design at the U. S. Census Bureau) and Cindy Ford, with the survey team at Decision Analyst (this was a blind, random, anonymous survey of 400 men across the country of men aging 21–75); (2) a second follow-up survey by Shaunti Feldhahn (nationally syndicated columnist and graduate of Harvard) of 400 anonymous men who are specifically churchgoers; (3) a third survey done by Feldhahn and Decision Analyst, verifying the first two studies and adding additional insights. Other resources were studies reported in *Psychology Today* as well as internet articles of studies by well-known experts in the field of human sexuality.

¹⁵ Eighty-one percent of respondents in Hart’s study among conservative Christian men said that they believed it was physically possible for them to have sex with someone they did not love. They did not say they *would*, and many emphasized that based on their moral value system they would not. On the other hand, in all his years of counseling Hart never had a female patient who agreed with this idea (see Hart, *The Sexual Man*, 37–38).

¹⁶ Gen 2:24; Deut 17:17; Matt 19:4–6, 1 Thess 4:3–8; Heb 13:4.

¹⁷ Prov 6:24–33; 7:5–27; 9:13–18.

¹⁸ Many women wonder if this means that a man’s

mind is irredeemable. Healing can occur and the power of those images can be diminished. But such images are a violent assault on the mind, not unlike images of war or sexual abuse, and can reappear at unsuspecting, vulnerable points in life.

¹⁹ Willard F. Harley, *His Needs, Her Needs* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1986).

²⁰ To use the analogy of eating, if you are consuming 10 meals a day (which we will make the equivalent of requiring sex every night), you are way out of the norm, and your appetite is probably being fueled in an unhealthy way. On the other hand, if you are eating only two meals a week (which we will make the equivalent of having sex only once every month or so), then your marriage has become sexually anorexic.

²¹ Seventy-eight percent of men felt so strongly about being the provider in their families, that they indicated they would want to work even if their wives were capable of earning enough to completely support the family’s lifestyle; 71 percent also said they live continually with the concern of failing in this area (Shaunti Feldhahn, *For Women Only* [Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004], 77–78).

²² Michele Weiner Davis, *The Sex-Starved Marriage* (New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, 2003), 23.

²³ See Feldhahn, *For Women Only*: “(representative quote from one married man) ‘Most married men don’t want to abandon their wife to do guy things. They want to do ‘guy things’ with their wife. They want her to be their playmate.’ . . . (in my research) I heard this over and over” (147). “The majority of men actively enjoy and desire romance. In answer to the question, ‘Regardless of whether you are able to plan romantic events, or whether your wife/significant other appreciates it, do you, yourself, desire romance?’ 84 percent said, ‘Yes, very much or, yes, somewhat.’ 14 percent said, ‘I can take it or leave it’, and 2 percent said, ‘I don’t care for it.’” (139).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 160–61.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 155–84.

²⁷ Hart, *The Sexual Man*, 24.

²⁸ Wright, *What Men Want*, 21–31.

²⁹ Tyre, “The Trouble with Boys.”

³⁰ A few ground rules: (1) For those now living in great emotional distance, pick your first moments: a quiet meal; a week-end retreat together; an uninterrupted time after the kids are asleep and the TV is turned off; a quiet satisfying time after you have had sex. (2) Go slow. (3) Start with outer concrete needs (as Jesus did), with things that are tangible and *on the surface*—his career, his goals in life, his concerns, fears, disappointments about these. (4) Ask about your children. Discuss your children and *his* perspective on them. Then ask about your marriage. How is he feeling about your life together? Does he feel respected by you? Does he ever feel neglected by you, frustrated? What does he need most from you? How does he feel about your sex life? Receive what he says; validate what he is feeling. (5) As he feels

understood and verified, you can safely venture into the harder, deeper places of the heart: What was his childhood like? What brought him happiness in his childhood? What was hard for him? How did he feel about himself growing up, about his parents' marriage, about his relationship with his dad, his mom, his siblings? What experiences were traumatic for him? How does this affect him now, with you, with God, with your children? Be prepared for initial denial of early hurt and pain. God will lead you as you venture into the deeper part of your husband's heart, and he will enable you to probe, draw out, even put "words" to those feelings that make up his inner core.

³¹ Larry Crabb, *The Silence of Adam* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 11, 12.

³² Note: What does your husband not understand about you? He does not understand that most women have a lower sex drive than men (this is the norm), while some women may actually have a stronger sex drive than their husbands (this is the exception). An increasing number of women are actually unhealthy in this area—being "undersexed." He needs to understand why this might be: early abuse or betrayal, depression, childbirth (in which hormonal changes are significant and vaginal nerve endings can be damaged or literally cut, causing sexual desensitization). He needs to know that your natural sexual response is affected by/contingent on certain needs being met. You need to feel loved, valued, understood; that you and your marriage are more important to him than even his work; that he will do whatever it takes (includes spending money on marital counseling) to communicate and work through these deep issues together. Your top three needs are (according to Harley) affection, conversation, and honesty and openness. If these are unmet, it directly affects a woman's sexual response. Women are not usually ready for sex at the same time that men are; they need sex less frequently; their deepest desire is that physical intercourse be an expression of honest verbal intercourse. Women prefer quality over quantity; they are aroused by sensitive actions (this floors men); they are not as adventurous sexually and like a softer physical environment (soft light, etc.); they need time, much more time. Ultimately, every woman needs to feel absolutely no pressure to perform; she needs patience, kindness, tenderness. Sex and love are intricately connected with women. This is hard for a man to grasp, but very enlightening to men.

³³ Paul Tournier, *To Understand Each Other* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), 46.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁵ John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah), 1995, 331–33 (italics in original).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 331.

³⁷ Some scholars have proposed that the traits of "joy, peace, patience, etc." of this passage are actually an outworking of the first trait, "love." I tend to agree with them; sexual self-control in marriage is certainly an expression of love.

³⁸ Hart's study underscored what many other studies have found, that young males have their sexual beliefs and attitudes shaped by pornography, with exposure often beginning at age thirteen. The more repressive and unexpressive a child's home is, the more vulnerable he appears to be. The gateway to addiction is masturbation. Research shows that if a young man who is regularly masturbating is not looking at porn, he will be—for one feeds on the other. Since a real woman cannot possibly measure up to the air-brushed, color-enhanced photographs (especially with the newest "virtual" pornography entering cyberspace), a young man's appetite simply increases with use.

³⁹ "Research Shows Early Porn Exposure Has Lasting Effects," *American Family Association Journal*, 21 April 2006. Online: <http://headlines.agapepress.org/archive/4/afa/212006g.asp>.

⁴⁰ Kathy Gallagher, "Wives Protecting Themselves," Pure Life Ministries. Online: <http://www.afa.net>.

INTO THE MAINSTREAM¹

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The women . . . had neither adopted nor rejected feminism. Rather, it had seeped into their minds like intravenous saline into the arm of an unconscious patient. They were feminists without knowing it.²

In 1989 a publisher approached twenty-seven-year-old writer Danielle Crittenden to write a book about why feminism had lost its appeal, particularly to women under thirty. These were the “daughters of the revolution,” those on whose behalf liberation had been sought but who appeared to be “rather ungratefully bored by the whole thing.”³

Crittenden, in order to understand the state of the feminist movement, drove around eastern Canada and the northeastern United States interviewing young female students—mostly at universities. She found that most young women ardently reacted to the label “feminist”—“as if it were an orange bell-

bottomed pantsuit found at the back of their mother’s [*sic*] closets.”⁴ Few of these women had read Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* or any other feminist pop classic for that matter. Nor did they belong to any feminist organizations. But, according to Crittenden, they were feminists nonetheless:

The young people of their generation had been made the laboratory mice for the numerous social experiments of the past 20 years: infant day care and no-fault divorce; textbooks illustrated with little girls flying planes and little boys doing the vacuuming; coed shop classes instead of home economics; the frank discussions about condoms with high school gym teachers. Their brains, meanwhile, had been irradiated with a mishmash of feminist cultural messages, from the proudly

menstruating teenage heroines of Judy Blume novels to the supportive articles about single mothers in the Sunday life-style section to the audience applause on Donahue for the woman who left her husband and three kids in Minnesota to realize herself as a potter in Santa Fe.

The women I interviewed had neither adopted nor rejected feminism. Rather, it had seeped into their minds like intravenous saline into the arm of an unconscious patient. *They were feminists without knowing it.*⁵

Over the past few years, “The Decline of Feminism” has been the tedious subject of afternoon talk shows and long, emotive articles in women’s magazines. But the apparent lull in activism should not be interpreted as a decrease in feminism’s overall social power. As a popular movement, feminism seems in decline only because it has been so wildly effective. All the major institutions of society—businesses, government, universities—have absorbed feminism’s tenets. There are women’s studies departments at universities, women’s directorates, status of women councils, sex-harassment boards, and board of education committees on “gender-free” curricula in the school system. Ideas that were once considered radical or bizarre are now conventional. Feminism as a movement appears to be in decline only because it has been so thoroughly integrated into our cultural mind-set. Recently officials at the National Action Committee on the Status of Women said the thirty-two-year-old Canadian feminist organization was broke. But prominent feminist Judy

Rebick is not dismayed, for she recognizes that today’s young women “are feminists whether they call themselves feminists or not.”⁶ The philosophy of feminism hasn’t declined. On the contrary, it is more “alive” than ever before. Feminism hasn’t died—it’s just gone mainstream.

Mainstreaming the Agenda

The social and political agenda of the feminist movement expanded as the philosophy of the movement evolved. Women initially wanted to overcome their biological differences in order to be equal with (i.e., the same as) men. They thus sought legal freedom for abortion, changes in marriage and divorce law, tax reform, universal daycare, pay equity, affirmative action in employment, and changes in language.

In the second phase of development, their agenda expanded. Women were becoming proud of their differences. They shifted attention from naming themselves to naming their world. They emphasized female strengths—women’s capacity for love, acceptance, peace, and empathy— and added issues such as nuclear disarmament, militarism, homosexual rights, aboriginal rights, women’s art, women-centered politics, and feminist interpretive law to the list.

Finally feminism moved into a third phase of spiritual awareness. Esoteric metaphysics, which asserts woman’s divine connectedness with nature, motivated feminist women to direct their energy toward saving the earth. Ecological awareness, pollution, animal rights, and rain forest preservation were, therefore, added to the feminist agenda.

By the time feminism had reached its third phase of development, its earlier goals were well on their way to being realized. North American society had moved toward accepting and integrat-

ing the feminist view of abortion, daycare, divorce, sexual liberty, and affirmative action into common policy. The agenda of the second phase had also progressed toward mainstream integration. At that point the movement lost its distinction. Further distinction was lost as third phase feminists turned their attention to other problems that could not be categorized as “belonging to women.”

Feminists are becoming difficult to identify, not because they do not exist, but because their philosophy has been integrated into mainstream society so thoroughly that it is virtually indistinguishable from mainstream. This is not to say that there has been a decline in feminism. Far from it! Organized secular feminist groups still exist. They are in large measure funded by government dollars and justify their existence (and their funding) by addressing the remaining legal and social barriers for the phase one and two feminist agendas.

Some of the key issues addressed by the National Organization for Women in 2004 were

- Abortion Rights/ Reproductive Rights (Opposing fetal rights legislation, protecting *Roe vs. Wade*, supporting RU-486 Mifepristone)
- Affirmative Action
- Constitutional Equality (Equal Rights Amendment)
- Economic Equity (Pay Equity)
- Fighting the Right
- Judicial Nominations
- Lesbian Rights
- Media Activism
- Protecting Title IX
- Violence Against Women
- Women in the Military
- Promoting Young Feminism

NOW's five official priorities for 2004 were the passing of an equal rights amendment to the U. S. Constitution, opposing racism, advocating for abortion and reproductive rights, supporting lesbian and gay rights, and ending violence against women.

In feminism, as in any major social/ political/religious movement, the radical end of the philosophy provides the driving impetus. Furthermore, the thoughts that are radical at one point become the accepted, integrated norm for future generations. The feminist philosophy proposed by first phase feminism—radical as it was—has now become conventional wisdom. Phase two woman-centered analysis is also broadly accepted by society. Furthermore, the feminist spirituality—that seemed so brash when introduced in the late 1970s—has progressed from being viewed as radical and deviant to being included in the spectrum of normative belief.

Mainstreaming Feminist Spirituality

The mauve and gray seminar room is filled with women dressed in business coordinates. An oblong table, draped with lace cloth, is positioned on a slightly raised platform in the center of the room. Were it not for the tall candles, the heady aroma of incense, and the music emanating from sophisticated stereo speakers, this would appear to be nothing more than a respectable professional conference or executive business meeting. But the table looks suspiciously like an altar, and the lyrics sung by the flute-accompanied female chorus intimate the true purpose of this gathering:

Oh, great spirit, earth, sun,
sky and sea.
You are inside and all
around me.

The anthem softly echoes over and over again, until a woman—smartly dressed in a black skirt and coordinating pink and black jacket—takes her place in a director's chair in front of the altar.

"This is the third Women's Empowerment Night," she says. "We will start with the closed-eye process."

On cue, all the women in the room close their eyes while the music picks up again, and a new choir sings:

*Goddess of grace, goddess of strength,
keeper of the creative force. . . .
Goddess of Love, I long to be one with you.
Teach me to be a goddess too.⁷*

This snapshot is not of a leather-fringed, metal-studded, or nude counter-cultural group of social misfits partaking in some ritual in a hidden enclave. All these women, aged twenty-five to forty-five, are highly educated middle- and upper-class professionals. They have each paid admission to enter this respected center of education. The Omega Centre of Self-Discovery, with its bookstore and seminar rooms decked out with tweed and chrome armchairs, is on the edge of Toronto's high-rent Yorkville district, across the road from a Mercedes Benz service center and two minutes from the posh department store Holt Renfrew.

The Women's Empowerment Night is one of thousands of events that take place every day across the continent. The Big Sisters Association does exercises in "brain gym" at their annual conference. The Cancer Society runs "creative visualization" classes. The Y.W.C.A. sponsors women's empowerment retreat weekends. Law classes at universities educate prospective lawyers in women's concerns and help them contact their

"deep selves." Feminist spirituality has gone mainstream.

In 2003 *The Da Vinci Code*, a book "re-imagining" Mary Magdalene and her role in Christianity, topped the *New York Times* best-seller list for thirty-six weeks, with 4.3 million copies in print. *The Da Vinci Code* is revisionist fiction that challenges the traditional "male misreading" of biblical texts. The book is essentially a feminist attempt to extract a useable "her-story" from the Bible and other existing historic documents. Relying on the Gnostic Gospels, which the compilers of the New Testament denounced as heretical, the book claims that Mary Magdalene was actually Jesus' intimate female partner. After the Resurrection, she became a leader within the church and a rival of the apostle Peter. According to this revisionist history, Mary Magdalene had a greater understanding of the teachings of Jesus than his male apostles did. Her importance was suppressed by the patriarchal authorities who favored a males-only clergy.

The implication of *The Da Vinci Code* is that gender warfare lies at the heart of Christianity and that if Mary's faction had triumphed, the history and structure of the church would have been radically inclusive of women. It is significant that this book, which so clearly promotes feminist theology, has been so embraced by mainstream culture. Most men and women reading the book wouldn't dream of calling themselves "feminists." But the philosophy the book espouses is feminist through and through.

An article in *Newsweek*, reflecting on *The Da Vinci Code* phenomenon, announced that God was having "woman trouble."⁸ Across the continent, women of all faiths are exploring "fresh research" and "new insights" about women's historical role and importance in the Christian

faith. They are demanding their right to be part of formulating church doctrine and theology. A slew of literary interpretations of women's Bible stories, such as Anita Biamant's 1997 bestseller, *The Red Tent*, are hitting the popular market. These events are having a marked effect on religion. Worshipers in *every* denomination are beginning to accept the feminist precept that patriarchy has shaped doctrine and that Christian doctrine—even the very canon of Scripture—needs to be revised to include the long-suppressed female point-of-view. *Newsweek* cites the example of a twenty-six-year-old female college student, attending a Baptist church, who reported that *The Da Vinci Code* raised troubling questions for her about how women's contributions to early Christianity were suppressed by church leaders. "My faith was really shaken." She told *Newsweek*, "I started doing a lot of research on my own." Learning more about the neglected female perspective of Christianity made her feel "closer to God."⁹

Even the music industry has been affected by feminist spirituality. In 2002 Columbia Records released an album by country music icon Travis Tritt that croons, "God must be a woman."¹⁰ Though it may not be identified as such, feminism is a new mainstream religion in our culture.

Mainstreaming the Image

Girl power. *Powerpuff Girls*. Gun-toting, butt-kicking tomb raider. *Terminatrix*. *Sex and the City*. Hollywood has totally inundated us with feminist images of what it means to be a woman. The Hollywood/feminist paradigm portrays girls as the aggressors. Women are beautiful, sexual, uninhibited, independent, powerful, and above all—in control. According to the image, today's woman

pursues, seduces, uses, and discards men according to her own personal whims. As country/pop icon Shania Twain confidently vows, "I'm gonna getcha, baby—I'm gonna getcha good!"

Today's woman is entitled to have it all: what she wants, when she wants, and how she wants it. She has absolutely no *need* of men, though if she so desires, she may use them to cater to her own sexual desires. Today's woman knows and exercises her rights. No one tells her how to act or what to do! She is a woman—a goddess—and that gives her the right to decide for herself what is right.

Millions of viewers watching MTV's 2003 Twentieth Annual Video Music Awards witnessed firsthand the implications of this paradigm. Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera opened the show dressed in skimpy white bridal corsets, singing Madonna's classic hit "Like a Virgin." Madonna, wearing a black tuxedo, then stepped out of an oversized wedding cake. During the performance, Madonna suggestively caressed the other two female singers. The performance culminated with Madonna giving Spears and Aguilera an extended, open-mouthed, erotic kiss. The underlying pulse of lesbian sexuality was unmistakable. Though undoubtedly a publicity stunt, the act epitomized the feminist concept of what it means to be a fully liberated woman.

Just a few months later, during the Superbowl XXVIII half-time show, the general viewing public was subjected to another sexually charged image of the liberated woman. Janet Jackson, dressed in a tight, black leather gladiator outfit, stood center stage in a spread-leg dominant stance, suggestively inviting Justin Timberlake, the servile-yet-sexual male, to cater to her. On cue Timberlake tore the cut-out of her gladiator outfit, reveal-

ing Jackson's bare breast, adorned with a shiny silver sun goddess nipple ornament. The imagery is not insignificant.

The mantra of Helen Reddy's 1970 smash-hit song—"I am strong, I am invincible, I AM WOMAN! (Hear me ROAR!)"—has now been integrated into popular culture and into the collective female psyche. Women definitely have, in the words of the popular Marlboro ad, "come a long way, baby!" Today's young women are domineering and demanding. They use their "girl power" to dominate, lure, control, use, and punish men. The "National College Health Risk Behavior Survey," undertaken by the federal Centers for Disease Control just prior to the new millennium, indicated that sixty-seven percent of female and fifty-six percent of male college students were sexually active in the three-month period leading up to the survey, with five percent of women and ten percent of men reporting they had engaged in sex with three or more partners in that period of time.¹¹ What is astonishing about this study is that the sexually active women outnumbered the sexually active men by more than ten percent.

Woman's liberation has empowered women to be brash and bold and sexual without inhibition. The girls have gone wild—much to the delight of Joe Francis, owner of Mantra Films, who in 2002 sold \$90 million worth of *Girls Gone Wild* videos. A camera crew patrols an area in search of women who agree to expose their bodies and even perform sexual acts in exchange for a T-shirt. There is no shortage of female volunteers. Exposing the body is a mark of female pride and power. Today's young women cater to a pornographic culture. They wear less and take it off more often. And it is their personal decision to do so. Ultimately, therefore, the trend is merely an example

and outworking of feminist thinking.

"A new generation of feminists has stepped up to the plate," proclaims a full-cover feature in my morning paper.¹² The new feminist is sexual as well as independent—epitomized by Sarah Jessica Parker in the TV series *Sex in the City* and Uma Thurman in the movie *Kill Bill*. Today's feminists can wear navel-baring T-shirts and proclaim themselves as "Hotties" or "Porn Stars." Young girls are taught that the ultimate expression of "girl power" is exhibited in a girl's sexual prowess and unabashed pride in her body.

The feminist ideal espouses a woman's need for a career. In the past, homemaking was regarded as a noble and viable occupation, but now women who do not pursue higher education are deemed to have wasted their potential. Paid employment is regarded as the only type of work with significant social worth. Work in the home and caring for children has been devalued—relegated to the domain of the menial. Pushing women out of the home into the workforce was feminism's way of giving women more choice. But it has, in essence, given them less. It has created an economic culture in which few women are able to choose to stay home to nurture their families. For some, the economic reality makes this choice virtually impossible. But according to the feminist ideal, a woman can have it all—a high-powered career, happy, well-adjusted children, and a healthy marriage (having a husband is, of course, optional). She can climb the corporate ladder, help her children with homework, drive them to extra-curricular events, pursue personal hobbies, develop professionally, volunteer in the community, connect with friends and family, and have the time and energy left over to stay fit, sexually attractive, and sexually active. After all, she is strong and invincible. She is woman.

A Change in Default

Nowadays, proposing that men are more suited to provide for their families or to be in such occupations as the military, law enforcement, fire fighting, or chief executive officers of corporations—or that mothers are more suited to nurture young children—would be tantamount to cultural heresy. Suggesting to young women in grade school that they dress modestly and refrain from being the initiator in girl-guy relationships would be met with wide-eyed disbelief. Intimating that affirmative action and gender quotas are harmful to the workplace or that textbooks should be filled with images of fathers as providers and mothers as caregivers would be met with incredulity.

Even within the church, those who believe that God has given men and women unique roles are regarded as outdated, anachronistic throwbacks to a less-enlightened era. And not only has the church been feminized with regard to gender roles, but it is also beginning to promote the feminist perspective with regard to the nature and character of God. “Inclusive” images of God are becoming more and more commonplace. At Cornerstone, an annual festival of the Christian arts, attended by 27,000 evangelical youth, Mimi Haddad, president of the evangelical organization Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE), proposed that God could be called “Mother” as well as “Father.”¹³ Her radical, unorthodox suggestion was met with scarcely a blink. The “default setting” of cultural belief has changed. We all—to one extent or another—are “feminists without knowing it.”

The mainstreaming of feminist thought has profound implications for the church. Over the past ten years, the ordination of women (and homosexu-

als) to the office of elder/bishop/pastor, inclusive language, womanist liturgy, feminist theology, and feminist hermeneutics have become commonplace. Even the evangelical church has witnessed popularization of the ordination of women, inclusive language, and most recently challenges and changes to historic Trinitarian doctrine. But by far, the most noticeable shift in the church in the past ten years is in the “default” understanding of male and female roles. In generations past, individuals generally understood and accepted that God assigned the male a unique spiritual role in the governance and guidance of the home and church. Distinctive, complementary roles for male and female were supported in both thought and practice. By default, complementarity was regarded as the right, good, and natural order of creation.

The feminist tsunami changed all that. Feminism maintains that equality necessitates role interchangeability—a woman cannot be a man’s equal unless she can assume the same role as he. This philosophy of egalitarianism is well on its way to thorough acceptance in the evangelical church. Egalitarianism maintains that there is no unique position of spiritual authority reserved for men in the church or home. Women can and ought to assume all positions freely.

Egalitarianism is the “default setting” of the new millennium. In the past, people in the church were complementarian until they volitionally decided to be egalitarian. Now, for the most part, they are egalitarian until they volitionally decide to be complementarian. What this means for the evangelical church is that the biblical pattern of complementarity is no longer the standard. Whereas in the past, complementarity could generally be “caught,” the new cultural milieu dictates that it must now be “taught.” The

default belief of the average churchgoer has changed.

The Ripple Effect

It is a quiet reform movement that is unstoppable. In two or three generations from now it won't even be an issue.

Gilbert Bilezikian
(Evangelical Egalitarian
Theologian)

We are entering into an era in which feminist precepts are largely accepted by default. This has profound implications for the evangelical church. In the past, the feminist agenda was pursued by a small but radical group of theologians devoted to the cause. But now the agenda is being furthered by pastors and theologians who would not consider themselves feminists at all and who would, in fact, be quite aghast to be labeled as such. There is, for example, a well-meaning attempt to “update” the church’s language: “Patriarchal” hymns and liturgies are being purged. Christian publishers enforce strict “gender-inclusive” language guidelines upon their authors. Some Bible publishers are even changing their translations to make them more gender-inclusive than the original text—for example, *Today’s New International Version of the Bible*. These changes at first glance appear small and justified. However, I believe that those who adopt feminist philosophy—even unwittingly—are placing themselves on the side of a divide that will lead far away from the Christianity of the Bible. Feminism is a watershed issue. It is to the evangelical church of the new millennium what liberalism was to the church in decades past.

A Watershed Issue

The Continental Divide is an imaginary line running north to south along the uppermost ridge of the North American Rocky Mountains. When the snow falls on the ground, it lies on the ridge in a seemingly unbroken unity. However, the unity is an illusion, for upon melting, the snow will flow in opposite directions—west to the Pacific Ocean or east to the Atlantic. At first the snow lies side by side, but then, based on the slightest difference in position, it ends up in separate oceans—thousands of miles apart. A clear line can be drawn between what seems at first to be the same or at least very close but ultimately ends in a very different position.

I believe that this illustration is an accurate description of the situation in evangelicalism today. Feminism is, to the evangelical church, a watershed issue. In order to introduce feminist concepts into Christianity, basic beliefs regarding the inspiration and authority of Scripture need to be adjusted. Christians who accept feminist precepts may appear very close in doctrine and theology to those who do not, but if they follow the precepts consistently, the process of time will see them at a destination far from traditional evangelical belief. Just like the snow that lies side by side, the two current philosophies of evangelicalism—egalitarianism and complementarianism—will melt and flow into separate valleys, rivers, and finally into distant oceans thousands of miles apart. ■

¹ From *The Feminist Mistake: The Radical Impact of Feminism on Church and Culture* by Mary Kassian, rev. ed. copyright 2005, pages 279–90. Used by permission of Crossway Books, a ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, www.crossway.com.

² Danielle Crittenden, “Let’s Junk the Feminist Slogans: The War’s Over,” *Chatelaine* (August 1990): 38.

³ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁵ Ibid (emphasis added).

⁶ Joanne Lucius, "Not Your Mother's Feminism," *Ottawa Citizen*. Published in the *Edmonton Journal*, 21 March 2004, D3.

⁷ Patricia Davies, "Mysticism Goes Mainstream," *Chatelaine* (March 1990): 86-88.

⁸ Kenneth L. Woodward, "God's Woman Trouble," *Newsweek*, 8 December 2003. Online: <http://www.msnbc.com/news/99453.asp?0cb=313195047>.

⁹ Barbara Kantrowits and Anne Underwood, "The Bible's Lost Stories," *Newsweek*, 8 December 2003. Online: <http://www.msnbc.com/news/999077.asp>.

¹⁰ Vernon Rust, "God Must Be a Woman," from the album by Travis Tritt, *Strong Enough*, Columbia Records, 2002.

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PRACTICING BIBLICAL HOSPITALITY

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Whether enjoying personal devotions, a Bible study, or a worship service, what mental images emerge when you are presented with the passages that encourage the practicing of hospitality? For many, the images are based on the glossy photos in women's magazines—an immaculate home, a gourmet menu, and an exquisite table setting. While some of these images could be applied to biblical hospitality, what they actually portray is entertaining. When hospitality is described in the Scriptures, there is an absence of instructions relating to the home décor, menu, or table setting and an abundance of directives about the character, home, and guest list of the hostess.

John 14:15 and 21–24 clearly state the primary evidence that individuals are Christians and that they love their heavenly Father is their choice to obey his commands. Though we live in a world that promotes “have things your own way,” I learned that to please my heavenly Father I need to respond to all of his

instructions with an obedient spirit, not just pick those that appeal to me—and that includes my response to what his Word teaches about hospitality.

Romans 12:13b says I am to practice hospitality. According to Hebrews, I am even to “pursue the love of strangers” (Heb 13:2)—not simply offer hospitality to my friends. If I want to demonstrate obedience to my heavenly Father, I will choose to practice hospitality.

First Peter 4:9 builds on the instruction to practice hospitality and reminds me that my attitude is of utmost importance—I am to practice hospitality without complaining! This verse challenges me to search my heart to discern whether I am approaching this opportunity to minister with a “hearty attitude” (see Col 3:23).

I am reminded in Heb 13:2 that my willingness to extend hospitality may have far-reaching implications. If I study the lives of Abraham and Sarah (Gen 18:1–3), Lot (Gen 19:1–2), Gideon (Judg 6:11–24), and Manoah (Judg 13:6–20), I

learn that all entertained strangers who were actually special messengers from God. While my motive should never be to give so that I will receive, Luke 6:38 clearly states that the measuring cup I use to dispense my gifts and talents will be the same one used to provide my needs. What is the size of your hospitality-measuring cup?

Third John 7–8 challenges me to extend hospitality to those involved in ministry for our LORD. It is exciting to know that as I share my home and resources with our LORD's servants I become an active part of their ministry.

Biblical Hospitality and Your Character

The desire to encourage twenty-first century society to embrace some form of ethical values is evident in the establishment of numerous secular organizations, including the Josephson Institute, whose sole purpose is to remind the culture that "character does count."¹ Their literature suggests that a person of character

- Is a good person, someone to look up to and admire.
- Knows the difference between right and wrong and always tries to do what is right.
- Sets a good example for everyone.
- Makes the world a better place.
- Lives according to the "Six Pillars of Character": trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.²

As a member of twenty-first century society, I can certainly affirm their definition of a person of character. However, as I ponder the definition, I find myself searching for a standard by which to measure my application of it. Because I am a Christian first and a member of society second, I am blessed to have the Word of God as a standard that challenges me to cultivate a lifestyle that conforms me to the only person who exhibited character in its purest form—Jesus Christ. Daily it is my prayer that I can say to those whose lives I touch, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1).

Since we are blending hospitality and character, let us take a survey of the Scriptures and create a word collage of what a person of character, who desires to practice biblical hospitality, might look like. Our collage could be labeled

A Person Of Christian Character Who Practices Biblical Hospitality Is . . .

H—Humble

Humility is the opposite of self-sufficiency and is a necessary prerequisite if I am going to be of service to my heavenly Father. I can exercise humility by choosing to step out of my "comfort zone" and invite individuals into my home with whom I may not be totally at ease or those who may have unrealistic expectations about the event (1 Pet 5:5b).

O—Obedient

The primary evidence that individuals are Christians is their choice to obey all of their Father's commands. I demonstrate obedience by obeying all of my Father's commands that focus on hospitality (1 Sam 15:22b).

S—Sincere

"Genuine," as well as an "absence

of deceit or hypocrisy,” describes sincere actions. I will “stay on my knees” (pray) until I can extend sincere invitations (2 Cor 1:12).

P—Prayerful

Prayer—that is, communicating with my heavenly Father, shows my desire for his direction about and dependence on him for the event. I resolve to pray about all aspects of the events that I plan (1 Thess 5:17).

I—Interested in Integrity

Integrity is choosing to do what is right when given a choice between right and wrong, even when it is unpopular. I will choose to adhere to my heavenly Father’s standards, regardless of what the mainstream of society is doing (Ps 25:21).

T—Trustworthy

A trustworthy home provides an ambience of trust and confidence. I will study Elizabeth’s life (Luke 1:39–56) as a model for my life (Prov 31:11).

A—Adopted into God’s Family

Adoption is making a conscious choice legally to integrate an individual into another’s home and nurturing him/her as if he/she were their biological child. I will choose, through the strength of the Holy Spirit, to behave in a way that reflects my royal heritage, so that my guests will observe a bit of “heaven on earth” in my home (Rom 8:15).

L—Led by the Spirit

Being led by the Spirit literally means keeping in step with the Holy Spirit. I will purpose to allow the Spirit to lead me so I will not carry out the desire of my flesh (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:16).

I—Instrumental in Producing Righteousness

Instrumental in producing righteousness suggests bringing “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5) and refusing to fret or worry about anything (Phil 4:6–8). I must control what I think about and purpose to be spiritually renewed by humbly presenting my concerns to my loving heavenly Father—even when the hospitality event appears to be beyond my capabilities (Rom 6:13).

T—Thankful

Being thankful is an act of the will that generates the giving of thanks to God—regardless of the circumstances. I choose to learn to be content regardless of my circumstances (Phil 2:11b; Col 3:15).

Y—Yielded

Possessing a willingness to yield to my heavenly Father’s specific instructions to his children in relation to practicing hospitality. I demonstrate my love to him by choosing to embrace his instructions with my whole heart—and that is when my joy is complete (Rom 6:19; 1 John 1:4; 2 John 12).

The words of Russell Cronkhite, former executive chef of Blair House, the guesthouse of the president of the United States, offer a fitting conclusion to this section:

Hospitality is a wonderful gift. We don’t need a grand palace, or a dream home—few of us have those. To make others feel truly welcome, we only need an open heart and the greater beauty of love expressed.³

Only as I allow my heavenly Father to refine my character will I possess the heart of a Christian hostess that allows genuine love to be expressed in my home. As you read the words below, would you say that you are a Christian woman who has the heart of a hostess?

The Heart of the Christian Hostess⁴

If I am a Christian woman who teaches other women about their scriptural responsibility to practice hospitality but lack the motivation to apply the teachings to my life, I am arrogant (1 Cor 8:1).

And though I know about the women of the Bible who practiced hospitality but fail to emulate their model, I am nothing (1 Cor 10:11).

If I pursue Christian ministry and stay up all night preparing a theologically correct Bible study but fail to open my home to others, I am neglecting the New Testament commands to pursue hospitality (Rom 12:13a).

A Christian hostess is gracious (Prov 11:16) even when others are not. She believes that the biblical instructions to pursue hospitality are as relevant today as the day they were written and seeks to integrate into her daily life the teaching of home being “a prepared place” for her family, friends, and strangers (John 14:2b).

A Christian hostess gleans insight from God’s Word that motivates her to develop an open heart to entertaining a variety of kinds of guests (Rom 2:11), a tongue that speaks wisdom and kindness to them (Prov 31:26), and a submissive spirit that provides hospitality without grumbling (1 Pet 4:9).

She takes seriously the mandate of Titus 2:3–5 and intentionally acquires instruction in time management, family finance, nutrition, food preparation, and

the art of hospitality so that God’s Word is not discredited.

As for professional contacts, they will diminish in importance; as for speaking opportunities, they will be presented and the content forgotten; as for strategic social events, they will occur and the memories will fade; but the woman who develops the heart of a hostess will be blessed because she chose to fulfill the New Testament commands to practice hospitality (3 John 1:8; 1 Tim 3:1, 2; and Titus 1:7, 8).

So, both the Christian woman and the Christian woman who has the heart of a hostess abide in the Christian community; however, the Christian woman who has the heart of a hostess cultivates a lifestyle that reflects her values and a character that aligns her with the Word of God.

Biblical Hospitality and Your Home

What is a home? To the architect, it is an amalgamation of design features. To the contractor, it is the assembly of an assortment of building materials, while to the interior designer, it is a backdrop for the aesthetic application of color, texture, fabrics, and accessories. A home from a biblical perspective, however, is to be both a place of refuge and a center for evangelism.

The Home as a Place of Refuge

Refuge, by definition, means a “shelter or protection from danger, trouble, etc.; anything to which one has recourse for aid, relief or escape.”⁵ Scripture is filled with illustrations of refuges provided by God; these describe qualities that are to be characteristic of the Christian home—first to those who reside there and then to those who are welcomed as a gesture of biblical hospitality. According to Scripture, the

Christian home is to be a place of

- Refuge for those who have done wrong (Num 35:6, 11–15).
- Safety (Num 35:25–28).
- Protection that mirrors the illustration of God providing shelter as a mother bird shelters the young and fragile with her wings (Exod 19:4; Deut 32:11; and Pss 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:1–4).
- Security—a stronghold that is safe from the hostility of the world (2 Sam 22:3).⁶
- Refreshment for those who communicate the gospel (Acts 9:35–10:23; Luke 10:38–42; 3 John 5–8; Heb 13:2; Rom 12:13; 1 Pet 4:9; Acts 16:15; Philem 22; Rom 16:23).

Our homes become places of refuge for others as we choose to use our hospitality skills to minister to them.

The Home as a Center for Evangelism

The church of the twenty-first century has cultivated highly sophisticated procedures and tools for evangelism—training sessions, videos, seminars, manuals, and methodology books are available. However, as you study Scripture you find that the home, not the church, served as the center for evangelism in the early expansion of Christianity. Michael Green writes, “One of the most important methods of spreading the gospel in antiquity was the use of homes.”⁷ He then affirms the home of Aquila and Priscilla by stating, “Homes like this must have been exceedingly effective in the evangelistic outreach of the church.”⁸

An excursion through New Testament Scriptures gives us insight into the importance of evangelism for the believer. Our LORD’s final instruction to His disciples was to make disciples, not merely converts, of all nations (Matt 28:19). Paul writes that our LORD gave spiritual gifts, including the gift of evangelist, to those He called into service (Eph 4:11). Repeating the term in 2 Tim 4:5, Paul directs Timothy “to do the work of an evangelist.” John MacArthur provides insight on this passage by defining evangelist for us:

Used only two other times in the New Testament (Acts 21:8; Eph 4:1), this word always refers to a specific office of ministry for the purpose of preaching the gospel to non-Christians. Based on Eph. 4:11, it is very basic to assume that all churches would have both pastor-teachers and evangelists. But the related verb “to preach the gospel” and the related noun “gospel” are used throughout the New Testament not only in relation to evangelists, but also to the call for every Christian, especially preachers and teachers, to proclaim the gospel. Paul did not call Timothy to the office of an evangelist, but to “do the work” of one.⁹

As with the concept of our homes becoming places of refuge for others, they become centers for evangelism when they are dedicated to our LORD. However, converting them to places of refuge and centers for evangelism requires time and effort; to coordinate or “dovetail” the two,

consider using the Spiritual Entertainment Timetable (see table below) as you prepare for your guests.

Biblical Hospitality and Your Guests

Several years ago I read “The Boxcar Wall,” a devotional that put the principle of James 2:14–16 in perspective for me:

I ate breakfast the other day
with a man who 60 years

ago sold newspapers and
shined shoes on the streets of
downtown Boise, Idaho. He
told me about his life in those
days and how much things
have changed.

‘What’s changed the most?’
I asked him. ‘People,’ he said.
‘They don’t care anymore.’

As a case in point, he told
me about his mother, who
often fed hungry men who

Spiritual Entertainment Timetable

As I physically	<i>Spiritually I will</i>
Prepare my guest list.	Thank my heavenly Father that I am included on the guest list for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:7).
Create my menu.	Bring to mind God’s providential care of me (Ps 104:27; 136:25; 145:15–16).
Prepare my time schedule.	Evaluate my use of time in relation to the brevity of life (Ps 90:12).
Grocery shop.	Recall that I was purchased with a price (1 Cor 6:19–20).
Decide on my table linens.	Recall that God gave Moses specific instructions for the table appointments for the tabernacle including the color of the table linens (Num 4:7–10).
Select my table appointments (china, silver, glassware, etc.).	Focus on being a vessel of honor (2 Tim 2:21).
Make certain that all of my table appointments are spotless.	Examine my heart to ensure that it is clean (Ps 24:4; 51:10).
Sacrifice my time and energy to clean my home and prepare the meal.	Remind myself of Christ’s sacrifice for me (Luke 24:44–47).
Serve my guests.	Reflect on Christ’s example of servanthood (John 13:1–20).
Intentionally direct the conversation in wholesome avenues.	Model the speech of the Wise Woman (Prov 31:26).
Tidy my home after the event.	Think about the process of cleansing from sin (1 John 1:7, 9).

came to her house. Every day she prepared food for her family and then made several more meals because she knew homeless travelers would start to show up around mealtime. She had deep compassion for those who were in need. Once she asked a man how he happened to find his way to her door. ‘Your address is written on all the boxcar walls,’ he said.¹⁰

As you concentrate on applying James 2:14–16 to your life, you will want to consider the guests to whom you could minister—singles, widows, the grieving, individuals experiencing food insecurity (low-incomes, poverty level, and the homeless), as well as the elderly; to apply this passage effectively you must first understand the characteristics of biblical compassion.

Biblical Compassion—What Is It?

Hospitality is not about you and me—as a matter of fact, when our ego gets involved we are definitely missing the primary reason for hospitality. John Ruskin writes, “When a man is all wrapped up in himself he makes a pretty small package.”¹¹ I have an idea that the same description applies to women. Let’s craft an equation that helps us understand the relationship between hospitality and compassion using the definition of each word:

The Friendly Reception
and Treatment of Guests or
Strangers¹²

+

A Feeling of Deep Sympathy
and Sorrow for Someone
Struck by Misfortune,
Accompanied by a Desire to
Alleviate the Suffering¹³

=

Compassionate Hospitality

This “Compassionate Hospitality Equation” moves us from an “I” to an “others” focus. As believers, we know that one of the attributes of our heavenly Father’s character is compassion—as his children, our compassion should include a sense of empathy for the distress of others (Rom 9:15), coupled with the desire to minimize the distress (Matt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22; Luke 7:13; 10:33; 15:20), as well as a heart that demonstrates kindness and mercy to others (Matt 18:33; Mark 5:19; Jude 22). Graciousness, longsuffering, an abundance of goodness and truth, delayed anger, and great mercy (Exod 34:6–7; Ps 86:15; 145:8), are additional qualities of our heavenly Father’s character that should typify our behavior. Through his strength, if you make his compassion yours, your “Compassionate Hospitality Equation” will move away from being ego centered, be directed toward the needs of others rather than your own, and most importantly, reflect his character.

While you may think of hospitality and compassion as inviting someone to your home for meals or lodging, a journey through Scripture introduces you to individuals who chose to extend compassionate hospitality in a variety of ways:

- Pharaoh’s daughter chose to extend long-term hospi-

tality to baby Moses (Exod 2:6–10).

- Shobi brought beds, basins, vessels, and sheep to David and his people while they were in exile (2 Sam 17:27–29).

- Elijah restored the life of the widow's son—a relationship that was cultivated because she chose, out of her need, to share with him (1 Kgs 17:18–24).

- Nehemiah wept, mourned, prayed, and fasted for Jerusalem and its citizens (Nehemiah 1:1–11).

- Job's friends traveled from their homes to mourn with and comfort him in his pain (Job 2:11–13).

- Job wept for those in trouble and grieved for the poor (Job 30:25).

- David displayed sympathy to those who falsely accused him (Ps 35:13–14).

- The Jews came to comfort Mary and Martha at Lazarus' death (John 11:19).

- Paul communicated the gospel message to all classes of people—Jew and Gentile alike (1 Cor 9:22).

- The LORD Jesus

- Having experienced physical hunger, he empathized with the hunger of others (Matt 4:2).

- Offered rest to the spiritually bankrupt (Matt 11:28–30).

- Brought comfort and encouragement to the weak and oppressed (Isa 40:11, 42:3; Matt 12:18–21).

- Ministered to physical and spiritual needs (Matt 14:13–21; Mark 6:31–44, 8:2; Luke 9:11–17; John 6:1–13).

- Attended to the afflicted (Luke 7:13; John 11:33, 35).

- Alleviated the plight of the diseased (Mark 1:41).

- Offered hope to perishing sinners (Matt 9:36; Luke 19:41; John 3:16).

- Modeled the character qualities necessary for those in spiritual leadership (Heb 5:2, 7).

Putting your scriptural journey in practical terms, if you are going to exhibit compassionate hospitality, you will consider

- Nurturing the abandoned
- Providing material needs
- Weeping, mourning, praying, and, when appropriate, fasting for others
- Sharing your faith with the spiritually bankrupt
- Encouraging the weak and oppressed
- Assisting with the needs of the infirmed

Hospitality as a Way of Displaying Compassion

Your opportunities to use hospitality as a way of displaying compassion are literally limitless, but to get you started let us target several categories of people—singles, widows, the grieving, individuals experiencing food insecurity (low income, poverty level, or the homeless), and the elderly.

Singles

The October 20, 2003, cover story of *Business Week*, reports,

The U.S. Census Bureau's newest numbers show that married-couple households—the dominant cohort since the country's founding—have slipped from nearly 80% in the 1950s to just 50.7% today. That means that the U.S.'s 86 million single adults could soon define the new majority. Already, unmarrieds make up 42% of the workforce, 40% of homebuyers, 35% of voters, and one of the most potent—if pluralistic—consumer groups on record.¹⁴

As you consider your guest lists, consider the singles you know who could be included. More than likely, their life experiences are rich, and they will enhance your social gathering.

Widows

In 1999, almost half (45 percent) of the women over 65 were widows. Nearly 700,000 women lose their husbands each year and will be widows for an average of fourteen years. There were over four times as many widows (8.4 million) as widowers (1.9 million) in 1999.¹⁵

Scripture provides a clear definition of a Christian widow and specific instructions on how the church is to respond to her if she has no means of providing for her daily needs. A Christian widow, according to 1 Tim 5:3–16, is one who is 60 years or older—in the New Testament culture 60 was considered retirement age (5:9). The church is instructed to nurture widows by

- Honoring them (1 Tim 5:3).
- Providing for their daily needs if they lack financial resources (Acts 6:1; 1 Tim 5:9).
- Visiting them (James 1:27).

As with the single, the widow possesses a wealth of life experiences that will enhance your social gathering—in the beginning of the grieving process she may not be the life of the party, but your invitation, extended with a heart of compassion, may allow her recovery process to accelerate. Remember, as believers, we are instructed to be sensitive and compassionate to the pain and sorrows of others (Rom 12:15; Col 3:12).¹⁶

The Grieving

Grieving individuals are an interesting dichotomy—generally they desperately need nourishment but have no desire to eat. Having lost both of my parents, I can attest to the blessing that hospitality to those grieving provides. As we fulfill Rom 12:15, more often than not, we will find that we have provided a ministry of compassion that no restaurant or catered meal could.

Compassion and Food Security

Food Security is a twenty-first century term that describes whether or not an individual has access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life; you are more than likely familiar with terms like low income, poverty level, or the homeless—which describe food insecurity. This term should touch the hearts of believers when they consider that the LORD Jesus, during his earthly ministry, met the physical needs of the

hungry. According to the USDA *Hunger Report*, the prevalence of food insecurity rose from 10.7 percent in 2001 to 11.1 percent in 2002, while the prevalence of food insecurity with hunger rose from 3.3 percent to 3.5 percent.¹⁷

While our pantries may not always be filled with all of the delicacies that our palate might desire, most of us have an adequate enough food supply to be considered food secure. We can demonstrate hospitality and compassion by designating a portion of our food budget each month to those who encounter food insecurity. You may ask, “What would I buy, or how would I begin?” If your church has a program in place, consider supporting it. If not, begin by researching what programs your local community might have. Conducting an internet search should yield websites for the local agencies that can provide a list of needed food and non-food items. These lists become a helpful resource for purchasing groceries to share with others. While you may lack the resources to purchase a full bag of groceries, you probably can manage several items—even if it means excluding the ice cream or chips from your grocery list. Perhaps you can collect the items for several weeks and then make a trip to the distribution center of your choice to apply hospitality and compassion in a practical way—and if you have children, do include them in the delivery process.

Sharing one’s time and/or resources at an agency whose primary purpose is to meet the needs of the food insecure is another way to practice compassion and hospitality. Again, an internet search can provide you with a description of some of the needs of a typical rescue mission. Clearly everyone could do something to demonstrate hospitality and compassion to the food insecure throughout the year.

Before I bring this section to a close, I want to share with you another category of the food insecure—the elderly. I recently read an article entitled “The Driver Behind Meals on Wheels,”¹⁸ which paints a word picture of Helen Barnes who, at the age of 58, helped found Meals on Wheels in 1971. At 90 she still drives two Meals on Wheels routes each week and arises each Monday morning at 4:30 a.m. to bake coffeecakes and assorted treats for the more than fifty Meals on Wheels volunteers. As the article suggests, more than 65 percent of their clients live alone, and the volunteer may well be the only person a client sees all day. Using the Meals on Wheels concept is a perfect way for believers to apply Matt 25:40 by providing both spiritual and physical sustenance to those who are experiencing food insecurity!

A Concluding Consideration

Matthew 5:1–12 and Luke 6:20–26 are passages of Scripture that are commonly referred to as the *Beatitudes*. When describing the *Beatitudes*, John MacArthur writes that blessed literally means “happy, fortunate, and blissful.”

It speaks of more than a surface emotion. Jesus was describing the divinely-bestowed well-being that belongs only to the faithful. The Beatitudes demonstrate that the way to heavenly blessedness is antithetical to the worldly path normally followed in pursuit of happiness. The worldly idea is that happiness is found in riches, merriment, abundance, leisure, and such things. The real truth is the very opposite. The Beatitudes give Jesus’ descrip-

tion of the character of true faith.¹⁹

As a conclusion to this article, I would like to share with you a word I coined to summarize its contents—*hospitalitude*; it is drawn from the word *hospitality*, meaning to pursue the love of strangers, and *beatitude*, signifying the character of true faith. It is my prayer that you are stimulated to practice biblical hospitality so that the *Hospitalitudes* will be evident in your life.

The Hospitalitudes

Happy are those

- Who practice biblical hospitality, because in so doing, they are demonstrating their love for God (1 John 3:17–18).
- Who “pursue the love of strangers,” for they are choosing to obey their heavenly Father’s command and modeling his character (Rom 12:13b).
- In church leadership who practice hospitality, for they allow others to observe them in their homes where their character is most graphically revealed (1 Tim 3:1–2; Titus 1:5–8).
- Who include people of all cultures on their guests list, for in this manner they are demonstrating the expansive love of their heavenly Father (John 3:16).
- Who develop hospitality management skills, for in this way they are capable of being faithful stewards of all that our LORD has provided

for them (1 Cor 4:2).

- Who intentionally extend hospitality to “the others”—singles, widows, the grieving, and those experiencing food insecurity—for they are choosing to live out biblical compassion (James 2:14–16).
- Whose homes are both a place of refuge and a center for evangelism, for they are glorifying their heavenly Father by their actions (1 Pet 2:11–12) and fulfilling his instructions “to do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4:5).
- Who do not become disillusioned in practicing biblical hospitality, for they understand that in due time they will reap if they do not grow weary (Gal 6:9).
- Who acknowledge that they are unable to practice biblical hospitality in their own strength, for by this means they learn that our LORD’s power overcomes their weaknesses and allows them to become vessels used for his honor and glory (2 Cor 12:9–10; Phil 4:13)! ■

¹ Online: <http://www.charactercounts.org>.

² Ibid.

³ Russell Cronkhite, *A Return to Sunday Dinner* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 195.

⁴ See Pat Ennis and Lisa Tatlock, *Designing a Lifestyle that Pleases God* (Chicago: Moody, 2004), 184–85.

⁵ *Webster’s College Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. “refuge.”

⁶ See Pat Ennis and Lisa Tatlock, *Becoming a Woman Who Pleases God: A Guide to Developing Your Biblical Potential* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), chapter 3, “The Wise Woman Develops a Heart of Contentment,” for further elaboration on this topic.

⁷ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 236.

⁸ Ibid., 207.

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WHO'S CAPTIVATING WHOM? A REVIEW OF JOHN AND STASI ELDREDGE'S *CAPTIVATING: UNVEILING THE MYSTERY OF A WOMAN'S SOUL*

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John and Stasi Eldredge recently wrote *Captivating: Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman's Soul* (Thomas Nelson, 2005), and already the female counterpart to John Eldredge's best-selling *Wild at Heart* (Thomas Nelson, 2001) promises to be as popular as the version targeting men. The high school and college women in my life are carrying it with them. Just what is it about this book that quickly captivates young women?

Three potential reasons come to mind. Perhaps it is the clear message that God is accessible and knowable. They emphasize the immanence of God who is personal and involved in the daily lives of his people. Surely this is comforting to the reader.

Perhaps readers are also refreshed by the authors' emphasis on the wonderful, unique creation that is *woman*. There is no hint in this work of blurring the differences between the genders. On the contrary, women are special, beautiful, and responsible to reflect certain aspects of God's character. In an age when dis-

tinction between the genders is unpopular and when the idea that the Creator may have intended these distinctions is antiquated, this book bucks the cultural trends.

Further still, readers may feel a measure of camaraderie with Stasi as she reveals examples from her life of disappointments, struggles, and sins. She provides hope for those who have struggled with the issues that, sadly, are common among women, affirming that God can and will heal relationships and emotional pain. Many women will surely find an emotional connection with her as she speaks of their experience while sharing her own.

While these positive points draw readers in, some caution is necessary before recommending it to the women in your life. When compared with the biblical view of God and humanity, the work offers a low view of God and a heightened view of women. For instance, instead of beginning with an understanding of God that comes from his Word, they observe

the women in their lives and claim that they want to be romanced, want to play an irreplaceable role in a great adventure, and want to unveil beauty. While these tendencies may be true of women, the authors' conclusion proves problematic. They conclude that these desires are true of God as well. Their theological method begins with human experience rather than God's revelation of himself. This "theology from below" invariably leads to distorted, human-centered conclusions.

One of the central points of the book is represented by this statement: "This may be the most important thing we ever learn about God—that he yearns for relationship with us. . . . He yearns for us. He cares. He has a tender heart" (28). They claim that the prevailing view of God fails in its breadth. They aim to remedy what they deem an incorrect view of God "as strong and powerful, but not as needing us, vulnerable to us, yearning to be desired" (29). They believe a proper view of God includes all of these. As a means of defense against those who do not agree that God yearns to be desired, the authors claim, "[I]f you have any doubt about that, simply look at the message he sent us in *Woman*" (28). It appears that rather than turning to Scripture or the synthetic work of theologians, the Eldredges want to begin with woman to understand the complexities of God's nature. This becomes more clear in the statement, "After years of hearing the heart-cry of women, I am convinced beyond a doubt of this: God wants to be loved" (29). One would expect the sentence to say that after counseling women, the authors are convinced that women want to be loved. Somehow the needs of women become the needs of God in their worldview.

The authors have flipped the process of understanding who God is and

who we are. Because women are made in God's image, they are like him and represent him. Therefore, they can look to God to infer things about themselves, but they should not assume that conclusions can be drawn in the opposite direction. Just because we have certain tendencies or desires does not necessitate that God shares those. God is high and lifted up; he is transcendent as well as immanent. In Ps 50:21 God corrects man with a strong accusation, "You thought that I was one like yourself, but now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you." We must look to God to learn who we are, not the other way around.

This method of drawing theological conclusions is flawed and, therefore, results in flawed views of both God and woman. We must guard against any view of God that is unworthy of him. When an idea of God subtly veers from truth and appeals to our emotions, we must discern the flawed method that surely has profound ramifications. Not only does our view of God determine the priorities and trajectory of our lives, but our very purpose is to know him. To know him, we must seek him where he has most clearly revealed himself.

As the authors' starting point is faulty, it proves difficult to salvage the rest of their message. Surely, God is a relational being. We do not have to look any further than the Trinity and its perfect fellowship to know this about him. At the same time, one of his attributes that has most powerfully provided peace and courage for believers has been God's independence and self-sufficiency. This doctrine indicates that God has no unmet needs, is independent from his creation, provides for it, and has authority and control over it. Further, in his omnipotence he cannot be harmed by outside forces. In his omniscience, he is

not vulnerable from something outside himself over which he has no control or of which he has not foreseen. In the Bible, God is often praised for being different from his creation in this way—he is not needy as we are and that is reason for our trust and our worship. In Psalm 50, God asserts his independence by declaring, “I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it” (Ps 50:9–12). He is saying, I have no needs that you can meet! Paul distinguishes the true God from pagan gods in Acts 17:24–25: “The God who made the world and everything in it is the LORD of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.” He is wonderfully different from us in his self-sufficiency.

Another unworthy conception of God is revealed in the Eldredges’ assertion that a woman’s need to be romanced is an indication of God’s desire to be romanced. Speaking of God’s heart, the authors posit, “What would it be like to experience for yourself that the truest thing about his heart toward yours is not disappointment or disapproval but deep, fiery, passionate love?” (113). When the Eldredges speak of the loving relationship between God and a believer, they mean a romantic one. They instruct the reader, “We must choose to open our hearts again so that we might hear his whispers, receive his kisses” (116) which come in the form of sunsets and swaying trees. They encourage the reader not to worry that they might be rejected,

for “He knows what takes your breath away, knows what makes your heart beat faster” (116). God, as our Lover, “[W]ants to be known as only lovers can know each other. . . . [Y]ou are the one who takes his breath away” (120–21). They write that each woman is “made for romance, and the only one who can offer it to you consistently and deeply is Jesus” (125). They suggest imagining yourself in a romantic scene with Jesus. They offer five romantic movie scenes and then suggest that you “put yourself in the scene as the Beauty, and Jesus as the Lover” (114). They base this conclusion on the passage in Matt 9:15 where Jesus calls himself the Bridegroom, “the most intimate of all the metaphors Jesus chose to describe his love and longing for us, and the kind of relationship he invites us into” (114).

Is our relationship with God intended to be so sensually conceived? Scripture tells us that “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Creator and creature demonstrate love in necessarily different ways. His sacrifice on our behalf communicates his love for us, and our obedience most clearly communicates our love for him. This is radically different from the romantic love between a beauty and a smitten lover!

Beyond the low view of God, another major misconception of the work is its inflated view of women. The Eldredges point to women as the pinnacle of God’s creation. “She is the crescendo, the final, astonishing work of God” (25). To aid the reader in personalizing this, the authors suggest taking in a beautiful vista and declaring, “The whole, vast world is incomplete without me. Creation reached its zenith in me” (25). It may be tempting to empathize with this attempt to build a woman’s self-esteem, but the sins of pride and self-centeredness are only en-

couraged with this declaration. A more appropriate response would be to praise God rather than self after gazing upon his handiwork. Such instances should humble us as we realize God's goodness in choosing us and bestowing his grace upon us, not because his creation was lacking, but because he is good.

Throughout the book, the Eldredges look to movies that attract women as evidence of her deepest desires. This is further confirmation of their inflated view of women. When they raise a new issue, they suggest "think of the movies you love" (9), as proof of what the reader really values. Unfortunately, many of us are intrigued by movies that are blatantly contrary to Christian values. The simple fact that a romantic movie scene resonates with our hearts does not suggest that the scene is worthy of our desire. Rather, because we are fallen, we need to exercise caution when we find our hearts piqued with interest at something inconsistent with what is true or right. While there is truth to be found in general revelation, we must always measure that against the special revelation of Scripture.

The authors suggest that the central question that steers a woman's life is "*Am I lovely?*" They answer, "Our God finds you lovely. . . The King is enthralled by your beauty. He finds you captivating" (146). Further, they state that beauty indwells every woman. It is her essence: "The essence of a woman is Beauty. She is meant to be the incarnation—our experience in human form—of a Captivating God" (130). This beauty is "a soulish beauty" with physical implications. What woman does not want to read that her very essence is beauty? The idea may appear encouraging at first glance, but a woman's essence is not really beauty. Rather, her essence, or the central core of her being that gives her immense worth,

is the very image of God in her.

The Eldredges may desire to encourage women by identifying beauty as their essence, but even more they want to inspire women to *unveil their beauty*. One explanation they offer is that unveiling beauty "just means unveiling our feminine hearts" (147), which is a woman's greatest expression of faith, hope, and love. Again, the authors demonstrate their inflated view of human nature. The act of unveiling our beauty, or revealing our heart, may not bless the world and express faith, hope, and love. Rather, this unveiling and revealing might, on occasion, expose the indwelling sin that we still seek to overcome, horrifying both us and our loved ones. It is foolishness to conceive of everything in a woman's heart as good and beautiful. Perfection of the heart is the draw of heaven, and every godly woman longs for it, rather than a fictitious perfection this side of heaven.

Thankfully, God loves us out of his own loving character, not because we are lovely and incite that love. This should be a relief to us. His image is imparted to us, and when he chooses us, we are his children to be loved forever because of the mediating work of Christ, regardless of anything in ourselves. Women may think that they want to be lovely in and of themselves, but true security lies in the truth that we are loved in Christ whether we look or act lovely or choose to unveil our beauty. The truth is that we are loved, and we need not ask God whether we are lovely. God sets his affection on us through Christ; he is the Initiator, not the Responder in our loving relationship.

It is easy to see how the Eldredges' conceptions of God and women could develop. Out of a desire to be loved and known and appreciated for who we are, we can create a god who appreciates us and responds to us and yearns for us. But

is this the God of the Bible, or the god of our felt needs? Our God is relational; the Bible says he has emotions and he responds to our moral status. Certainly his relational nature is evident in Jesus. But he does not need us! The Eldredges seem to assume that if God does not need us, he does not really love us. But God's love is more secure and provides more hope and stirs more obedience when it grows from his eternal, unchanging, loving character.

Isaiah 57:15 answers the cry of a woman's heart for intimacy with God: "For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.'" God tells his people that intimacy will result when their estimation of him increases. When God is high and lifted up, women are humbled as a result, and then he draws near and revives the heart of the contrite. The Eldredges' effort to lift women high and lower God does not result in a contrite heart or intimacy with him. The reader must, instead, keep God lifted high and herself humble if she is going to know her Creator deeply.

Let us wisely alter our inquiry and devote our efforts toward knowing God and answering the question, "*Isn't God lovely?*" May this pursuit captivate us, and may the answer cause us to praise him. Surely, then, we will be less concerned with being captivating ourselves. ■

A REVIEW OF *DOES CHRISTIANITY SQUASH WOMEN?* BY REBECCA JONES¹

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It seems that Christian women living in a post-Christian era are often an enigma to society. There is far too little ammunition to combat the increasing mentality that biblical womanhood is outdated and irrelevant. Rebecca Jones's provocative book provides readers with an arsenal full of cogent arguments based on biblical truths. She also enlists the support of a virtual "Who's Who" among conservative Christian scholars. In just over two hundred pages of text, she quotes from more than eighty of the most respected evangelicals of our time as well as from the recent past. Her thesis, not surprisingly, is that Christianity does *not* squash women: "[Women] are, on the contrary, given a place of high honor in the Bible. . . . They play a huge part in the accomplishment of God's will and in the arrival of the promised seed."

While the book makes logical arguments that fly in the face of feminism, it also serves to bring encouragement to women who are seeking to uphold biblical femininity but often feel like they are

swimming upstream. This work is written "by a woman, for women and about women." The discussion questions at the end of each of the twelve chapters would surely lead to a lively and soul-searching dialogue.

Jones reflects first on the results of the fractured feminist movement. She quotes a feminist who is clearly confused as she seeks to define liberal feminism. Rebecca accurately concludes, "This woman affirms differences she can't discern and claims rights she can't define." The root of the problem, accurately identified in this book, is the starting place:

[We] begin with our own definitions of what we expect. We end up creating God in our own image rather than accepting the fact that we are made in His. God defines the rules in the game of life. We don't get to pick what color piece we want on the board. . . . The wonderful thing is that

God has told us these things.
He doesn't hide the truth
from us, but tells us clearly
in His Word who He is and
who we are.

It is important to note, as Jones does, that there are some Christians who clearly seek to squash women. These men serve to blight the gospel as they seek to squash, stifle and silence women—all in the name of Scripture. Francis Schaeffer warned us long ago that we never have the luxury of fighting a battle on only one front. It is not surprising that the media sniffs out the outrageous and plasters their stories on the front page. Jones tells of one church that refuses to sing hymns written by women. This type of ridiculous practice is certainly not commonplace, but even one occurrence is dreadful and provides a basis for ranting blogs and exaggerated stories. Jones makes a key point about abusive husbands as well: “A man who understands the gospel cannot ‘lord it over’ anyone, especially his wife, who is his own flesh. ‘Christian’ men who misuse their position will one day answer to the perfect man, the head of the church.”

Jones spends the majority of the book exploring Scripture. She carefully outlines the importance of hermeneutics. She proceeds to provide a detailed analysis of four Old Testament women: Eve, Sarah, Deborah, and Abigail. She makes the point that God used these women powerfully to change history—not as queens and heroines—but as wives and mothers. How radical is that? She also reminds us in descriptive narrative of four notorious Old Testament women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba who were “dubious characters in the line of the Savior.” The vivid point is that women are given a place of high honor even before

the advent of our LORD. He used them to unfold his eternal purposes just as he is using us today.

Moving on to the New Testament, Jones embarks on two chapters that present vignettes of Jesus’ earthly encounters with women. As she carefully cites the references in the Gospels for each account, she makes the case that Jesus Christ met the needs of women as He encountered them. Jones’s “cut to the chase” writing style makes this point clearly when she states, “Jesus doesn’t sit under a fig tree writing vague poetry about women. He meets their needs by stimulating their minds and teaching them theology.”

She is honest enough to include two encounters in Scripture when Jesus appears to be “abrupt, almost rude.” She admits that his dealings with the Syrian woman in Matthew 15 and with Jesus’ mother on several occasions could be construed as fodder for those who believe that Christianity squashes women. Yet, with careful examination, she guides the reader to look past what may first appear as harsh to see that Jesus’ words are carefully selected and full of meaning. He esteems women highly. In the case of his earthly mother, it was powerful for him to show that even she could not have a relationship with him outside of one obtained by faith—and faith alone. This will surely bring gasps to those who support the heresy that Mary is the “Co-Redemptrix” or “Queen of Heaven.”

Jones readily admits that she is not a theologian. That is actually encouraging to those of us who, like the author, consider ourselves to be diligent, intelligent Christian women but who do not hold theological degrees. Such credentials are not necessary to articulate a biblical view of womanhood. While we certainly appreciate the work of both men and

women who have studied the languages and earned terminal degrees, women who have been dedicated wives and mothers at home need not shy away from stating boldly and proudly what we believe. We are not on the lecture circuit to expound on our views, but we hold them with deep conviction nonetheless.

No one can accuse Jones of side-stepping the word that seems to make feminists bristle the most: submission. She spends a significant portion of the book spelling out what submission in marriage looks like. It will challenge women who affirm Scripture but prefer to gloss over how that plays out on a daily basis. At one point, she pauses to state simply, "Radical stuff. Biblical stuff." That is true enough. While our culture shakes its head in disbelief at our adherence to this "radical stuff," we must be ever more resolved to show them that we are not going to go away but will seek to model the role of Christ and the church until he comes.

Continuing in her truly politically incorrect form, Jones makes this bold statement: "All Christian women are called to be homemakers." A careful reading of her convincing biblical arguments will serve to motivate women who may tend to feel intimidated to stand up and take notice. She exhorts women to stop feeling sorry for themselves when they seem to be working in the shadows and receiving no accolades for being "merely wives and mothers." This is timely advice in spite of the fact that it sickens the same feminists who were irritated forty years ago when women proudly described themselves as "homemakers" on census forms.

Admittedly, there is very little fanfare with this role. Jones notes that we often do not see the significance of our faithfulness nor do others. She humor-

ously quips that the role of a homemaker will not "earn you a spot on 'Fox and Friends'." But, we should be assured that the honor earned in the sight of the LORD is priceless.

Like a district attorney making a closing argument, Jones drives her point home in her concluding chapter titled "Why It Matters." She applauds Southern Baptists for taking a stand in making clear what we believe about the family. As one of the two women who served on the committee to add the family paragraph to our doctrinal statement, I know first hand what a firestorm resulted. Our statement comes directly out of Scripture but sounds so radical to a biblically ignorant world.

Yes, the gender issue matters. Yes, it goes beyond being a peripheral issue, because it is anchored to the primary issue of biblical authority. How heartening it is that as evangelicals, we can join ranks in this pivotal debate and let the chips fall where they may! The more our families are seen as happy and holy places where submission and sacrificial love actually work, the more our churches reflect the amazing phenomenon of men and women joyfully working together based on God's design, the more the world will wonder. However, we realize that the beautiful picture of Christ and his church in our homes and our churches will draw men and women to Himself. As Jones says, "We women can delight in showing the world that God made women glorious, in His image, not to be squashed, but to work for His honor in our homes, churches and society with grace, power and eloquence."

What an awesome role we have as women! It is time to embrace it for all it is worth. We will never come close to exhausting all the ways that the LORD will use willing women. Squashed? No way.

We are loved and cherished by a Holy God who has remarkable work for us alone to do. For the sake of the kingdom, let us get on with the task. This book will boost you along the way. ■

¹ This review first appeared in February 2006 on reformation21, the online magazine of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals (see http://www.reformation21.org/Past_Issues/February_2006/Shelf_Life_/Shelf_Life_/148/vobId__2024/). Used with permission.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR GENDER-RELATED BOOKS IN 2005

Compiled and Annotated by Oren Martin and Barak Tjader
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In this issue of the journal we profile some of the most significant gender-related books from 2005. Here is a brief reminder about the categories we are using and our intent in using them. **Complementarian** designates an author who recognizes the full personal equality of the sexes, coupled with an acknowledgment of role distinctions in the home and church. **Egalitarian** classifies evangelicals who see undifferentiated equality (i.e., they see no scriptural warrant for affirming male headship in the home or the church). Under the **Non-Evangelical** heading, we have classified important secular works and books that address the subject of biblical gender issues from a religious, albeit, non-evangelical point of view. This category also serves as our classification for liberal scholars wanting to retain some sort of Christian identity. Finally, under the **Undeclared** heading, we have listed those books that do not give sufficient indication of their fundamental stance for us to classify them more specifically.

Complementarian

Botkin, Anna Sofia, and Elizabeth Botkin. *So Much More: The Remarkable Influence of Visionary Daughters on the Kingdom of God.* San Antonio: Vision Forum, 2005.

This book, written from the perspective of two teenage sisters, deals with the theological framework, practice, and importance of the father/daughter relationship. The Botkins's emphasis on the family unit and distinctive biblical roles for men and women will be appreciated, although many will disagree with a number of their conclusions and applications, as they appear to go beyond what Scripture commands.

Crotts, John. *Craftsmen: Skillfully Leading Your Family for Christ.* Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2005.

Crotts opens up the wisdom of Scripture, particularly Proverbs, to instruct men on how to lead their families for Christ. Bringing rich application and

a caring pastoral perspective, he demonstrates how biblical wisdom should inform men to live wisely in the areas of work, godliness, speech, sex, discipline, and temperament. This short book contains a wealth of wisdom that will help men become the godly leaders God has called them to be as they look to Christ, the perfect wise man.

Farrar, Steve. *King Me: What Every Son Wants and Needs From His Father.* Chicago: Moody, 2005.

Without minimizing the role that the mother plays in raising sons, Farrar argues that every son wants and needs his father to mentor him. By looking at various stories of the kings in the OT, both good and bad, he draws examples and lessons that fathers can apply as they raise their sons to become mature men who will one day lead their own families. Using his own experience and knowledge of the Scriptures, Farrar describes that the task of mentoring takes place through mistakes, discipline, masculinity, guidance, sexual purity, manly communication, and friendship.

Grudem, Wayne with Jerry Thacker. *Why Is My Choice of a Bible Translation So Important?* Louisville: The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 2005.

This valuable resource reviews the translation inaccuracies of Today's New International Version (TNIV). The authors demonstrate that in changing thousands of verses by removing male-oriented words or by changing the singular to the plural, the gender-neutral translation loses the details of meaning in the original text. This brief overview will aid the Christian community in choosing a Bible translation that faithfully conveys the words of God. For more information

concerning gender-neutral translations, see www.genderneutralbibles.com.

George, Elizabeth. *A Young Woman's Call to Prayer: Talking With God About Your Life.* Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2005.

George writes a practical book for young women on the theme of prayer. She encourages her readers to experience the joy and centrality of prayer in the Christian life. In many ways this book is simply a description of a relationship with God lived in utter dependence upon him. Included are sections on hindrances to prayer, when to pray, discovering God's will through prayer, how to pray, and developing the habit of prayer. She offers practical wisdom from Scripture and thoughtful application that will help deepen her reader's relationship with the God who hears and is mindful of his children.

Jaynes, Sharon. *Building an Effective Women's Ministry.* Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2005.

Jaynes has provided a helpful resource in planning and building a women's ministry in the church. The majority of the book offers very practical advice on beginning a women's ministry, cultivating leadership, programming, and overcoming difficulties. Jaynes works through the details and develops a strategy for developing a biblical model of women teaching, encouraging, and ministering to other women.

Jones, Rebecca. *Does Christianity Squash Women? A Christian Looks at Womanhood.* Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005.

In this excellent work, Jones articulates the meaning of femininity through a biblical worldview and answers questions

regarding womanhood and Christianity. This book shows that, contrary to many assertions that the Christian faith oppresses and demeans women, in reality, a proper understanding of what it means to be a woman actually provides fulfillment and meaning. Looking at examples of women in the Bible, the treatment of women by Jesus and the biblical authors, and evidence from Christian experience, Jones provides an important and compelling case for the goodness of God-ordained gender roles and the freeing disposition of biblical womanhood.

Kassian, Mary. *The Feminist Mistake*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005.

In this revised and updated version of *The Feminist Gospel* (1992), Kassian traces the history of feminism from 1960 to 1990 and looks at the sociological impact of feminism during the 1990s, as well as the convergence of secular and evangelical feminist thought. Kassian's critique of feminism provides clarity and warns the church against the dangers of feminist theology. Especially helpful in this volume are Kassian's insights into the effect of feminism on popular thought and its infiltration into mainstream culture.

Kassian, Mary A. *In My Father's House: Finding Your Heart's True Home*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005.

In this very thoughtful volume, Kassian demonstrates that the universal human need to be fathered was placed there by the God who has revealed himself and relates to his sons and daughters as Father. Kassian shows that throughout Scripture, and most fully in the New Testament, God has revealed himself as Father, which is most clearly seen in his relationship with his Son Jesus Christ. In

understanding this, Christians can know how to correctly relate to their heavenly Father as he guides, protects, provides for, corrects, and is faithful to his children.

Köstenberger, Andreas J., and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds. *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*. 2d ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.

Ten years have passed since the first edition of this book was published, and it still stands as the definitive work on 1 Tim 2:9–15. As new material has emerged over the past decade concerning the interpretation and application of this fiercely debated passage, this second edition has been updated in light of current scholarship. Also, it has been streamlined as articles deemed less crucial to the overall flow and argument of the passage have been removed, while a new chapter with rich and thoughtful application has been added. The contributors include S. M. Baugh, Henry Scott Baldwin, Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, Robert W. Yarborough, and Dorothy Kelley Patterson. They address issues that are crucial to understanding and applying the passage such as historical background, grammar, syntax, exegesis, hermeneutics, and application. Once again, this resource is unsurpassed in its presentation and argument, and the church is well-served by its immeasurable contribution.

MacArthur, John. *Twelve Extraordinary Women*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005.

In this complementary volume to *Twelve Ordinary Men* (Thomas Nelson, 2002), MacArthur looks at the lives of twelve women in biblical history who played a critical role in the story of redemption. He examines and describes the lives of Eve, Sarah, Rahab, Ruth, Han-

nah, Mary, Anna, the Samaritan woman, Martha and Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Lydia. MacArthur hopes that his readers will be encouraged by the gracious and faithful work of God that made each of these women extraordinary so that they will be challenged to imitate their examples.

Mahaney, Carolyn, and Nicole Mahaney Whitacre. *Girl Talk: Mother-Daughter Conversations on Biblical Womanhood.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005.

The authors provide a wonderful picture from their own experience of the mother-daughter relationship and discuss how to pass on the legacy of biblical womanhood in a way that commends the gospel. Part One focuses on various aspects of the mother-daughter relationship, and Part Two focuses on how to apply biblical womanhood in the world. In addition to describing God's design for women in the context of a mother-daughter relationship, the authors conclude with a variety of ways to apply the contents of the book. Complete with sections on how to lead your daughter to Christ, ideas for mother-daughter memories, practical discussion on modesty, and discussion questions, this book is an excellent resource for mothers and daughters who desire to live out the roles God has given them in a way that points to the gospel.

Piper, John, and Justin Taylor, eds. *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005.

This is a book about the importance of viewing and enjoying God's gift of sex from a biblical, God-glorifying, Christ-exalting perspective. Each contributor demonstrates that sex is a good gift given by God and is designed to increase

our joy in him as it is kept within the institution of marriage. The book proceeds in five main sections, successively addressing sex as it relates to God, sin, men, women, and history. Contributors include John Piper, R. Albert Mohler Jr., C. J. Mahaney, Carolyn Mahaney, Mark Dever, David Powlison, Carolyn McCulley, Justin Taylor, and Ben Patterson.

Piper, Noël. *Faithful Women & Their Extraordinary God.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005.

In this hope-inspiring and challenging book, Noël Piper recounts the lives of five ordinary women with an extraordinary God who enabled and used them to do extraordinary things. She demonstrates how Sarah Edwards, Lillias Trotter, Gladys Aylward, Esther Ahn Kim, and Helen Roseveare—whether as sisters, daughters, wives, mothers, missionaries, or friends—challenge women today to be faithful in their calling as they fulfill their God-given roles for his glory.

Ryken, Phillip Graham. *Galatians: Reformed Expository Commentary.* Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005.

For the purposes of the present bibliography, comments will be limited to Ryken's interpretation of Gal 3:28. Ryken rightly emphasizes that divisions of race, rank, and gender can only be overcome in Christ. Just as all people are equal under the law and therefore deserve God's wrath due to sin, so all who are united to Christ by faith are equal in status before God. He argues against the view that portrays Paul as a male chauvinist who viewed women as inferior and second-class citizens. To the contrary, Paul recognized that women were created in the image of God and that through Christ they were remade to

live as his image-bearers. However, this equality in status does not obliterate the differences between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female. Rather, this fundamental equality in status is the basis for which diversity can be most appreciated. It is here that Ryken clearly sees that differences remain between men and women, and that God-given gender has implications for the distinct roles of men and women in the home and the church. In other words, differences in roles can remain without diminishing equality in Christ. He then specifies that men are called to exercise servant leadership as husbands and officers in the church, while women are called to submit to this leadership as wives and as members of the church. This commentary provides solid exposition and pastoral application as it follows the flow of Paul's argument to the Galatians.

Ware, Bruce A. *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Reliance*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005.

This book is rich in its presentation and application of the one God who has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ware examines the ways in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relate to one another, how they relate to us, and what difference it makes in our pursuit to know God as he has revealed himself. Rather than succumbing to the spirit of the age that wishes to erase any role distinction between men and women, he argues that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are simultaneously equal in essence, yet differentiated with respect to their roles and relationships, with respect to each other, in creation, and in their unified work of salvation. This biblically-saturated presentation provides a wonderful pattern for men and women who are both equal in essence and

personhood yet distinct in their God-given roles. This awe-inspiring picture is applied throughout the book to relationships, marriages, parenting, families, the workplace, and the church. Ware has provided a rich and invaluable resource that will help Christians both grasp the doctrine of the Trinity more clearly and worship him more truthfully, and the church is indebted to his contribution.

Complementarian/Egalitarian

Beck, James R., ed. *Two Views on Women in Ministry*. Rev. Ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

This revised edition includes essays by complementarians Thomas R. Schreiner and Craig L. Blomberg and egalitarians Linda L. Belleville and Craig S. Keener. A helpful update to the first edition (2001) is that after each contributor offers his or her position, a response is given by each of the other contributors. It should be noted that, although he uses the term "complementarian" and clearly affirms differences in roles for men and women, Blomberg's "mediating" position places less restrictions on the roles of women than the traditional complementarian view.

Egalitarian

Allender, Dan B., and Tremper Longman III. *The Intimate Mystery: Creating Strength and Beauty in Your Marriage*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005.

This title looks to Genesis to unpack the "leave-weave-cleave matrix" of marriage. Allender and Longman seem to be on solid footing as they suggest that the relational aspect of marriage is reflective of intra-Trinitarian relationships that are ontologically equal yet different in

function. However, by this the authors simply mean that marriage should be lived out in a self-sacrificial and giving framework. Allender and Longman then develop a model of marriage that is strictly egalitarian in decision-making and structure.

Creegan, Nicola Hoggard, and Christine D. Pohl. *Living on the Boundaries: Evangelical Women, Feminism, and the Theological Academy.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005.

Creegan and Pohl examine the landscape of evangelicalism with regard to women in theological institutions. Their methodology includes a survey of women who have pursued vocations in theological education. By interacting with answers from these women as well as relating personal experience, the book attempts to give a picture of the tension that exists for evangelical feminist women in the academy. In doing so, Creegan and Pohl wish to encourage evangelical-feminist dialogue in the academic world and an acceptance of egalitarian principles in the practices of evangelical institutions.

Scorgie, Glen G. *The Journey Back to Eden.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

Scorgie argues that the Holy Spirit is moving the church toward a model of complete gender “equality, freedom, and mutuality” (20). He asserts that while God created gender relations as good, the Fall initiated a pattern of gender oppression and dominance. Scorgie asserts that the key to understanding the biblical teaching on gender requires one to discern the “trajectory of the Spirit” present in Scripture. According to Scorgie, just as NT authors no longer advocate OT practices such as the slaughter of unbe-

lievers, the gender ethic presented in the NT is culturally conditioned. One must acknowledge then, argues Scorgie, that at times the New Testament does not present a finalized ethic for all believers. Rather, NT passages such as 1 Timothy 2 and Ephesians 5 make temporary accommodations for a persistent hierarchal view of gender in the societies that the apostles were trying to reach with the gospel.

Stackhouse, John G., Jr., *Finally Feminist.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.

In this book, Stackhouse suggests a paradigm that explains why both sides of the gender debate are right and wrong at the same time. In doing so, Stackhouse does not propose a *via media* as some have attempted. Instead, he argues that some NT texts present a double message—one that accommodates cultural patriarchy but also affirms its ultimate abolition. Although Stackhouse asserts that both complementarians and egalitarians are right and wrong on these gender-related texts, he proposes that when properly understood, the Bible presents an egalitarian model of gender roles with no distinction of role or function in the home, church, or society. Stackhouse rightly points out that understanding the Bible’s teaching on gender is a matter of hermeneutics. He argues that egalitarians have often mistakenly attempted to deny gender differentiation in the NT. Maintaining that Paul did not have in mind a hierarchal ordering of gender roles in Ephesians 5, for example, is a wrong approach to biblical interpretation. Stackhouse concedes that complementarians have correctly recognized a pattern of male headship in the NT. According to Stackhouse’s hermeneutic, however, the purpose is pragmatic given the apostles’ eschatological expectations and the

priority of the gospel in their ministries (42). And in a society that vigorously rejects patriarchy, Stackhouse suggests that Christians should dismiss gender distinctions, as they are no longer needed as a social concession for the sake of the gospel and that the complementarian position has become incoherent in the modern-day context. After conceding hierarchal meanings in many biblical texts, Stackhouse wonders why God would call equal sexes to completely different roles and functions. He concludes that this made sense in the biblical times but no longer in a mostly-egalitarian society. Stackhouse's irenic tone can be appreciated in this debate even though complementarians, of course, will find his method of biblical interpretation unacceptable, since it dismisses the gender distinctions that Scripture recognizes as good and Christ-honoring as culturally insensitive and unnecessary.

Non-Evangelical Books

Cochran, Pamela D. H. *Evangelical Feminism: A History*. New York & London: New York University Press, 2005.

According to the author, this book follows "the story of the emergence and theological development of biblical feminism, why the members of the movement split, the results, and what all this reveals about conservative Protestantism and religion generally in contemporary America." Cochran rightly centers the debate on the nature, meaning, and scope of biblical authority and how presuppositions and methods affect the way the Bible is interpreted. She focuses on the two leading evangelical feminist organizations—the Evangelical Women's Caucus and Christians for Biblical Equality—and chronicles not only their

beginnings, growth, and struggles, but also their theological development and progression.

Deweese, Charles W. *Women Deacons and Deaconesses: 400 Years of Baptist Service*. Macon, GA: Mercer University, 2005.

This volume provides a history of women serving as deacons and deaconesses in Baptist churches. Although complementarians have allowed some room for disagreement as to whether Scripture allows for women deacons, Deweese argues for the inclusion of women in the diaconate using clearly egalitarian reasoning. Interestingly, while texts such as Rom 16:1, 1 Tim 3:11, as well as the nature of the diaconate itself, have been used by some complementarians to support women's inclusion as deacons, Deweese actually dismisses these verses as inconclusive and appeals to the same arguments that egalitarians have espoused in favor of women pastors. Moreover, the positive examples of women in the diaconate provided by Deweese are those in which women have had governing authority in the church.

Epp, Eldon Jay. *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

Epp's primary purpose in this short volume is to argue that Junia is both female and an apostle. To build his argument, Epp demonstrates the inseparability of textual criticism and biblical interpretation. Pointing to 1 Cor 15:34–35 as an example of exegetical concerns leading to a text-critical conclusion of interpolation, Epp argues that similar exegesis led to textual corruption of the feminine form of Junia in Rom 16:7. Even though this is in keeping with much of recent evangelical scholarship, complementar-

ian and egalitarian alike, Epp devotes most of his attention to these text-critical matters. Epp gives far less time to the more pertinent issue of translation of the dative preposition *en* in Rom 16:7. Epp concludes that this should be translated as inclusive, “distinguished among the apostles,” rather than the exclusive “well-known to the apostles.”

Myers, David G., and Letha Dawson Scanzoni. *What God Has Joined Together? A Christian Case for Gay Marriage.* San Fransisco: HarperCollins, 2005.

This book claims to provide a bridge between marriage-supporting and gay-supporting people. Myers and Scanzoni build a case for the legitimacy and goodness of same-sex marriages. To do so, the authors examine the nature of homosexuality, the meaning of marriage, and even the biblical “evidence” for their argument. Noteworthy are the marriage paradigms noted by Myers and Scanzoni, one in which complementary gender makeup is the bottom line in life and, thus, marriage, and another that sees marriage primarily as an inclusive covenant of fidelity and commitment and is, therefore, open to homosexual unions. And while the arguments presented against gay marriage are fairly superficial and biblical appeals are obviously weak, it is important to note that at least these authors see two marriage paradigms—one based on creation and ordered by complementarity and the other governed by a liberal sexual ethic that is accepting of homosexual marriage.

Olson, Laura R., Sue E. S. Crawford, and Melissa M. Deckman. *Women with a Mission.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2005.

The authors of this volume con-

ducted research on the political attitudes and activism of female clergy. They examine the influence of gender roles and professional experience on both political ideology and mobilization of clergywomen. The authors’ data suggests a highly homogenous liberal political outlook among female ministers and rabbi with a focus primarily on social injustices. This interest in issues such as poverty and racial intolerance as well as abortion and homosexual rights stems largely from perceived professional discrimination. The authors suggest that women clergy have the potential to affect a relatively broad contingent of people as they are uniquely positioned as females championing liberal causes while at the same time leading religious bodies that are looking for spiritual guidance.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History.* Berkeley: University of California, 2005.

Ruether traces the history of goddesses and divine female imagery from prehistoric society to modern-day Wiccan goddess worship. Ruether explores goddess worship and religious life in the ancient Mediterranean, arguing that priestly duties were carried out in a fairly egalitarian manner. She also discusses biblical wisdom literature, arguing that Wisdom is a female personification of God—a Hebrew goddess. Ruether also details ancient and Medieval Mariology in addition to modern Wiccan and neopagan ecofeminists with a goal of restoring the “feminine life principle” and resisting patriarchal destruction.

Sax, Leonard. *Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know about the Emerging Science of Sex Differences.* New York: Doubleday,

2005.

Sax has written an important book about recent scientific research on sex differences. He offers advice for parents and educators on the importance of recognizing and welcoming gender-specific differences in child development. Bucking the sociological trend of blurring gender distinction, Sax explores the relationship between gender and sexual activity as well as parental discipline. Much to be welcomed are some of Sax's arguments for strong gender and age-related discipline in the home, preferring an inductive, reflective method of discipline for girls and "power assertion," including physical restraint and corporal punishment, for boys. While one will certainly not agree with every conclusion, this volume provides a helpful reminder that gender affects every aspect of life and that gender differences need to be enforced in parenting and teaching.

Undeclared Books

Eldredge, John and Stasi Eldredge. *Captivating: Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman's Soul*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005.

John Eldredge, author of *Wild at Heart* (Thomas Nelson, 2001), teams up with his wife, Stasi, to offer a female counterpart to the very popular men's volume. The Eldredges promise to connect women with their three core desires: to be romanced, to play a part in their own adventures, and to be beautiful. The Eldredges can be appreciated and commended for their realization of deep God-given differences that exist at the heart of masculinity and femininity, as this flies in the face of cultural trends that minimize gender distinction. Nonetheless, serious problems plague *Captivating* in that it approaches femininity first and

foremost from human experience, leaving it with an inflated view of women and an inadequate picture of God. For a review of *Captivating*, see the article by Donna Thoennes in the present issue of *JBMW*.

James, Carolyn Custis. *Lost Women of the Bible: Finding Strength & Significance through their Stories*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

James suggests that the model of womanhood presented in the church simply does not fit the experiences of many women today. The book tries to apply examples of marginalized women in the Bible to the struggles of women in the modern context. Problematic is James's picture of marriage as a "blessed alliance" in which the woman is called as a "strong warrior" to fight alongside man in every sphere of life. James claims that a proper understanding of the Hebrew word *ezer*—usually translated as "helper"—sees the Garden of Eden as a war zone in which man and woman co-labored to exercise dominion over the earth and fight against the enemy. This *ezer*-warrior motif characterizes the entirety of the book, as James sees this as the essence of biblical femininity.

Murrow, David. *Why Men Hate Going to Church*. Nashville: Nelson Books, 2005.

Murrow observes the widespread lack of men in churches and seeks to answer the question of what is driving them away in modern Christianity. Through examining various aspects of the differences between men and women, such as physiological and psychological, he finds that men want things such as adventure, danger, and opportunities to take risks. His conclusion is that men are being driven away because they are not being

offered opportunities to be masculine in the context of the local church. His solution is for churches to recover a place for men through masculine-oriented leaders and pastors (whether male or female), teaching, worship, and ministry which caters to the masculine spirit. Although his observations are helpful, his pragmatic solutions and acceptance of women pastors undermine the authority and sufficiency of Scripture to provide what men and churches need to recover biblical masculinity. What the church must recover is a biblical understanding of sin and its effect on men's, as well as women's, God-given roles, and a faithful proclamation of the whole counsel of God which includes not merely a risk-taking and adventurous Christ, but rather a Christ who gave himself up for his bride.

says, is not the way it was from eternity past. Although he does not deal specifically with gender as it relates to ministry, certainly these ideals will lend themselves to a form of egalitarian ministry.

Seamands, Stephen. *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005.

It is not Seamand's intention in this volume to deal specifically with the issue of gender as it relates to the Christian life and ministry. He argues and demonstrates that in an age when the Trinity is largely misunderstood and ignored, a fuller understanding of it provides a pattern for how Christian ministry should be done. However, he includes a chapter on the mutual self-denial and deference of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As each person of the Godhead denies and defers himself for the sake of the others, he argues that each "finds his personhood by being subject to the others and allowing his identity to be established by the others" (80). Seamands also attributes the Gospel of John's minimization of the self-giving and deferring nature of the triune persons to his emphasis on the economic trinity. This, he