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INTRODUCTION

Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women in God's Word

Welcome her . . . in a way worthy of the saints.

Romans 16:2

When Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, an epistle so important that Martin Luther called it “the chief part of the New Testament,”¹ he looked for a worthy emissary to deliver it. Whom could he entrust with such a precious document? At a time when travel was very dangerous, and particularly so for a woman who might be alone, it seems strange that Paul would choose Phoebe. Perhaps in her role as deacon from the church in Cenchreae she already had business in Rome and so she was entrusted with this precious cargo. But perhaps not. Perhaps Paul chose her just because he knew she was trustworthy and had sufficient means, wisdom,

and courage to complete the 800-mile journey by sea and land. Phoebe had a reputation for her work in the city, using her wealth and influence to assist those in need, including the Apostle Paul himself (Romans 16:2).

Paul's choice of her certainly confronts preconceived notions about proper feminine roles, especially in the ancient Near East. Why would Paul ask such a thing of a woman? Wasn't he concerned that she shouldn't leave her home? Shouldn't he have sent one of the brothers from the church? Didn't he worry that he might be greasing a slippery slope and that women all over the Mediterranean would start looking for ministry opportunities and traveling abroad? We don't know a lot about Phoebe, but we do know this: She was a woman worthy of honor.

Later in this book (chapter 11), we'll look at the life and ministry of Phoebe (and others) in more detail, but for now, let's just think about Paul's instruction to the church about her. They were to "welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints." When she finally arrived at her destination, undoubtedly a house church, the brothers and sisters were told to welcome her. They were to make sure she knew that the door was wide open to her and that they viewed her as one of them: Not first of all as a woman, but as a saint. They were not to look at her with suspicion or think that she was trying to take away anyone else's position. They were to befriend her as a person chosen and called by God and made holy by his gracious work. They were to treat her properly, acknowledging her worth. In other words, they were to treat her in the same way they would have treated Paul or any other servant of the Gospel.

What Gives Us Worth?

My husband, Phil, and I (Elyse) love *Antiques Roadshow*! Okay, I admit it. I am sure that my adult kids will cringe when they read that confession, but we really do enjoy it. They'll cringe because

they think the show is boring and only for old fogies (like us). I think I understand. *Antiques Roadshow* is not a suspenseful mystery or a historical romance, still Phil and I really do find it interesting—and we're not alone. *Antiques Roadshow* is PBS's most-watched ongoing series.²

What is it about this show that people find so interesting season after season? I think part of the attraction is watching an appraiser place an astronomical value on an old rolled-up canvas, something that someone just happened to rescue from the trash. When the appraiser notices that all-important signature, what once was viewed as worthless becomes priceless. In an instant, the way it is handled changes. It is cherished. It is valuable. It is celebrated. Why? Because a distinguished artist signed it, and that signature confers worth. Of course, it had great value all along—it's just that now the appraiser has opened our eyes to see it. What changes it from worthless trash into a priceless treasure? The artist's signature. And that signature usually produces great joy to the owners—sometimes they cry, sometimes they just stand there speechless. Still others jump up and down in celebration. But I've never seen anyone yawn in apathy or toss the canvas in the trash.

Whether you're an *Antiques Roadshow* fan or not, I'm sure you understand my point. Value is intrinsically tied to the reputation of the one who created the piece. What is true for paintings and historical artifacts is also true for you and me. All people have intrinsic worth for one basic reason: We are the creation of the living God. We have been made in his image. When the Lord said, "Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26),³ he was applying his signature to the crowning masterpiece of his creation. God's "image" and "likeness" bestow upon humanity an honor and dignity that set it apart from everything else. This is his seal of authenticity and worth. About nothing else did he speak, "in our image, after our likeness." Humanity alone bears this mark, and the implications are vast: *All people, no matter their gender, ethnicity, religion, history, or time, have value.* They have

value because they bear his signature, and his seal is invaluable. All people are to be honored and celebrated.

After granting humanity dominion and stewardship over the world he created, we are given even more specific detail:

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27 NIV

By himself, Adam was insufficient to display God's image and likeness. The Lord is so holy, so wondrous and glorious, that one created gender alone was inadequate to bear his image. So he created Eve, a female, a woman. In exactly the same way the male has worth because he is made in God's image, the female also bears God's image and has worth. All women, like all men, have value simply because they bear his image. We image God. And, just as that serendipitous *Antiques Roadshow* appraisal is transformational, this truth should transform us too. The more that women and men believe this truth, the more they will celebrate their creation and learn to honor and love each other as creatures of great worth.

We are created in God's image, and the people we interact with are not worthless, nor insignificant. C. S. Lewis writes,

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship. . . . There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. . . . It is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.⁴

Understanding that women, as well as men, have been fashioned by God to be immortal creatures eternally imaging his glory must, by necessity, transform the way we think of and interact with one another today.

What We're Up To

As we've said, women as well as men have intrinsic value because they have been created in the image of God. I am saying that because the entirety of God's Word testifies to it. As a woman, I am not declaring my gender's worth to flatter feminist sympathizers. No, Eric and I are declaring a woman's value because that is what the Bible declares. We're simply asserting what the Scripture says: Women have value because they are, just like men, created in the image and likeness of God, and that truth, when grasped and believed, is personally and relationally life-transforming. In addition to this, the Bible is clear that women are not an afterthought, a problem to be solved, nor are they ancillary to the overarching message of Scripture.

On Easter Sunday the Risen Jesus declared the church's one message, "that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all" (Luke 24:47). And women were an intrinsic part of this proclamation. In fact, they were the first ones tasked with this mission. Women are every bit as integral to this proclamation of God's sacrificial love for people as men are. As you're about to learn, this is unquestionably and overwhelmingly the biblical record. And we think it is time to challenge and then unleash all believers to fulfill the call of the ages.

Why should we notice and celebrate women in the storyline of Scripture? Where do you look when you're expecting someone important? If you're a child waiting for mom to come home, you look at the front door. If you're at an airport, you look at the returning passenger corridor. If you're at a bus stop, you look up the street. You look toward the place from which you know they will first appear. When God first proclaimed the Gospel, he promised deliverance through the offspring of the woman (Genesis 3:15). The deliverer will come through her. This promise teaches us to "watch the woman" as the storyline unfolds so that we see the Redeemer when he arrives. In looking for, noticing, and celebrating women in the storyline of the Bible, we are not sliding down a

slippery slope of liberalism, about to careen off a cliff into all-out goddess worship. Looking for, noticing, and celebrating women in the storyline of the Bible is climbing the ladder of careful Bible interpretation, seeing the rungs that the Author put in place, and stepping accordingly.

Eric and I want to remind you of the honor and prominence of women in redemption's narrative because it is biblical and right to do so. But that's not the only reason we're writing. We both believe that *every* story of misogyny and abuse should be heard and taken to heart. The #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements have demonstrated in spades what many women already knew: Too many of us are not cherished or valued; too many of us wouldn't even know what that means. Instead, many have been disbelieved, denigrated, and dismissed, simply because we are women, and this has happened both historically and in today's churches as well. But merely understanding that the church has been dismissive, abusive, or even misogynistic will not help us. If the heart of our problem is a sinful denigration and distrust of women (who make up more than half of God's image-bearing creation), then responding with care and empathy to negative stories alone is insufficient. Instead, we need to affirm the positive stories and contributions of women—not only as wives, mothers, and daughters, *but primarily as God's image-bearers*. This means we must see, hear, and speak about women just as God does. Once our eyes are opened to the way God values and honors the God-given dignity of women, we each will be able to rejoice in the other, and in what God has accomplished in both his creation and his re-creation. We will welcome one another in a manner worthy of the saints.

What Gives You Value

So let's begin by getting a little more personal. Let me ask you, *What gives you value? Have you ever even thought deeply about*

whether you have value? Do you have significance? Do you matter?
Do you ever even ask yourself these kinds of questions?

It's not uncommon for people to say that they feel worthless, especially if they have been denigrated, molested, or abused in any way. Both Eric and I know women who struggle to believe that they are of value and that this value is central to who they are as humans. They view themselves as insignificant, or unworthy. And they feel ashamed—not merely ashamed of something they've done, but of who they are in their essence. Women who have been systematically disparaged by men (and other women) have trouble believing that God values and honors them. How can we claim that God loves, values, and honors women when it sure seems that historically God's people have seen women as a temptation to be avoided, a house slave to be employed, a voice to be silenced, a rebellious creature to be subdued?

Many women have been brought up in the church and have read the Bible but never seen the way that the Holy Spirit speaks stories of God's cherishing love for women throughout redemption's history. And perhaps they've been taught to see themselves as primarily sinful, fallen, easily deceived, and weak. While it is true that all of mankind has been marred by sin and estranged from God (Romans 3:10ff), our sinfulness is not the most important thing about us. What is most important is that we have been created in God's image and after his likeness. And he said that his creation was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Again, all of creation—women included—was deemed by him to be "very good." The "not-goodness" of Adam's aloneness was made very good by the joining together of male and female in unified oneness. Adam and Eve together—that was what was very good.

The Bible speaks consistently of God's valuing of women. We see this in the crucial and indispensable role they play throughout redemptive history, from Genesis to Revelation. Consequently, if God so values women that he includes them as a consistent and essential part of his mission, how can we feel and act any differently?

A Few Items of Interest

This book found its genesis on Twitter. At one point in mid-2018, Eric tweeted a list of firsts about women in the Bible, something that coincided with thoughts I was having along those lines, so we connected. Soon afterward, he published the list as an article on The Gospel Coalition's website⁵ and made a guest appearance on my family's podcast, *Front Porch with the Fitzes*. During that conversation we discussed the possibility of collaborating on this project . . . and here we are.

Right up front I want to say that Eric has done most of the heavy lifting on this project. We are drawing heavily from work he has already done. I'm so thankful for his desire to honor and value women. Having a pastor's voice join with mine in this endeavor is invaluable. He and I have divvied up the chapters so that each of us will write and the other will edit and augment. When we're writing in the first person (as I did in this introduction), we'll indicate whose voice you're hearing. But even when we do this, you can be assured that everything here is a harmonizing of our thoughts on this topic. Eric will come at this as a husband, a dad, a pastor, a songwriter, and (of course) a man. I'll come at it as a counselor, a writer, a mother and grandmother, a wife, and (of course) a woman. And we'll both come at it as believers who deeply value God's Word and respect and welcome one another.

From beginning to end, the Bible affirms the value of women. In this book, *Worthy*, we will help you see that truth by beginning with the Genesis accounts of creation and the Fall. Yes, even when Eve sinned, and her husband joined her in her folly, the Bible affirmed her value and celebrated her worth. Once we have spent time at the very beginning, we'll work through the rest of the Old Testament (history, law, worship, and wisdom), pointing out the places where the worth of women is revealed and celebrated. Next we'll look at the value of women in the New Testament, especially in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Finally, we'll see how they fit into the church's redemption story and in the new

world and in the church today. If one of these chapters is of more interest to you, feel free to jump ahead and read it. Although we believe that the precepts presented in each chapter are significant and build on each other, it's not necessary that you read this book in the order presented. Just jump in where you like and be blessed. Also, if you find one chapter too challenging, feel free to start on a different one. For instance, if the chapter on celebrating women in Israel's law is too difficult or not of interest, just skip ahead to something you may be more familiar with, like the role of women in Jesus' birth. It's your choice!

At the end of every chapter, you'll find questions that will help you crystallize and process the information you've just read. Whether you're going through this book individually or with a group, those questions will facilitate thought and discussion, and we strongly encourage you to make the effort to answer them. There is also a "Digging Deeper" section for you dear overachievers who just can't get enough and want to learn even more. In any case, please take time to work through what we're presenting. You may read some things here that you've never heard before or that strike you as a different way of thinking. Remember that our hope is first of all to transform the ways men and women think about and relate to women in the home, in the church, and in society at large. But we're also hoping to convince women who weep with joy at the thought that God cherishes and values them that perhaps what they've believed about themselves and the Lord is not the truth and that there is welcome and love in him for them.

We hope that, at the end of the book, you will have more than an increased appreciation of the value of women. We pray you'll have an increased delight in the value of the God in whom we find our worth. That is what this book has done for us. The last part to be written was the Epilogue: "Worthy—A Song of Praise," an original worship song by Eric and his collaborator, David Ward. This song walks through the storyline of the Bible, celebrating God in the ways he created and redeems women.

So, no matter who you are or why you're here, whether you're a woman hoping to hear some good news or a man wondering if he's missed something important, you are welcome here. It is our prayer that the Lord who created us in his image will help us all cherish, value, and honor one another, all for his glory.

ONE

The Worth of Women in Creation

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image,
after our likeness. And let them have dominion."*

Genesis 1:26

I (Eric) spent countless hours as a child lying on the floor, chin propped in my hands, listening to music on the stereo. At some point, I tired of reading liner notes and staring at album art. I started fiddling with the knobs on the front of the machine. That's when I discovered the meaning of "stereo."

If I twisted the balance knob all the way to *R*, the music played only from the right speaker, all the way to *L* and it played only from the left. Listening only to one channel or the other fascinated me. Each channel highlighted a different set of instruments or vocal elements. Both channels played the same song, though they sounded different. They complemented one another, each supplying something the other channel lacked. Eventually, the novelty

wore off, and I returned to listening to both channels together. This was “Stereo Sound.” To hear it as the artist intended, you had to listen in stereo.

Conversations about the value of women (or men) can unfold like a child playing with the stereo knobs. Some crank the balance knob all the way to *W*. According to them, we understand woman in isolation from man. She is to be known in herself, by herself. She doesn’t need him—perhaps, at all!

Others crank the balance knob to *M*. Women are known only in contrast to men. He is primary; she is secondary. We learn what she is by deducing the missing parts of the song. She can remain silent, thank you very much.

The problem with such approaches is that God created humanity in stereo. To understand what it means to be human requires us to hear both channels together. There is a time and place for adjusting the balance knob. Someone before us may have thrown things out of balance. There is a time for focusing on one channel to better understand the song. Even so, the goal is to go back and listen to the song as a whole, both channels playing in balance.

Yet, as any recording artist will tell you, it’s not about the speakers, the left channel or the right. It’s all about the song, the music as the artist intended it.

In the creation of humanity, God is the artist. He is singing a song about himself, about his glory. His music is the display of his excellence. He plays this composition in stereo. It flows through the corresponding channels of male and female “speakers,” if you will.

In this book, we’re trying to adjust the balance knob to the Artist’s intended setting. We want to see women set free to play the song God is singing through them. We want all to lean in and hear God’s music.

This book exists for one simple reason: to glorify God by seeing and celebrating the value of women in God’s Word. So we will ask two central questions:

1. Where is the value of women seen in the Bible?
2. Seeing the value of women there, how do we celebrate it?

And in that celebration, her Creator is glorified.

How does seeing and celebrating the value of women glorify God? As we will see in this chapter, women are created in his image and likeness. When the value of women is rightly seen and celebrated, their Creator is honored and glorified.

We must celebrate women—just as we must celebrate the goodness of every created thing. This is not contrary to God-centeredness—it is necessary for God-centeredness. It is not wrong to celebrate a created thing, any more than it is wrong to celebrate an artist’s work. When you dine at a famous chef’s restaurant, she is not glorified when you say, “I’m unimpressed by every dish you’ve served, but I glorify you as a marvelous chef.” The chef’s glory is displayed in the goodness of her meals. To fail to celebrate the meal is to fail to glorify the chef. To fail to celebrate the value of women is to fail to glorify God.

In this first chapter, we’ll see how God is speaking of himself through human beings. We’ll examine the significant part women play in that symphony. We start in Genesis 1–2, where God created the heavens and the earth. Here we meet the first woman. (We’ll be calling her “the woman” in this chapter because she isn’t named “Eve” until Genesis 3. Isn’t that a great move on God’s part? By withholding her name in these chapters, he makes her overtly applicable to every woman on earth!) What God says in the opening chapters of the Bible is foundational for seeing and celebrating the value of every woman—and the value of God himself.

Where Do We See the Value of Women in Creation?

During the Memphis sanitation strike in 1968, black sanitation workers carried placards bearing the slogan “I am a Man.” That

iconic declaration became a theme of the civil rights movement. It stated the heart of the issue in bold font: Black people are *human*.

We see the value of a woman in her humanity.

That '60s slogan could summarize the first biblical statements about woman. *She is a MAN*. That sounds strange to say, in a world that often equates “manhood” with “maleness.” But it is entirely biblical.

The first mention of human beings occurs in Genesis 1:26–28. God says, “Let us make man. . . . And let them have dominion.” Man is a *them*—plural, more than one. We soon learn that man exists in two genders. “So God created man . . . male and female he created them.” In fact, this is God’s name for them both. Moses writes, “Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created” (Genesis 5:2). When God made “Man,” he made a male man and a female man. This is why the common terms we use for “man” in the sense of all humans is “mankind” or “humanity.”

This sounds strange to our modern ears. It may even sound sexist. It is anything but. Instead, the first thing we learn about “male and female” is that they are both “man.” They share the same nature. Each is as human as the other. Through these two channels of gender, God is playing the same song.

Genesis 2 zooms in on day six of creation, giving us an up-close look at the creation of the man and the woman. In the search to find a “helper fit for him” (v. 18), the Lord causes the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man sleeps, the Lord scoops out part of his side—his flesh and bone—and fashions a woman from it.¹ When the Lord brings the woman to the man, he responds with the first recorded human song—a poetic exclamation:

This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.

v. 23

“Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” means “She’s made of the same stuff I am! She is what I am!” She is not an animal—she is fully, completely, and entirely *human*. The second half of the statement reinforces this point.

“She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” The man is not naming the woman here. (God has already named them both man—see Genesis 5:2.) Neither is he exercising authority or sovereignty over her. He is making a play on words. The Hebrew word for a female human, “*ishah*,” sounds like the Hebrew word for a male human, “*ish*.” The man emphasizes that she shares his essence and nature—she is human, the image and likeness of God.

Consider this wondrous truth:

*The first recorded song in human history is
a celebration of the fact that the woman is
equal to the man—“She is a MAN.”*

Why does this matter? Because we should declare woman to be good! The refrain that echoes through the creation week is “And God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). It is not until after God creates male and female that we read, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was *very good*” (v. 31, emphasis added).

If God has declared the existence of women to be good—indeed, *very good*—our words (and hearts) should say as much. If the first recorded human words celebrate the woman’s equality with man, how can we not join him in this celebration?

We should declare her to be *human*, every bit as human as her male counterparts. As we have seen, when the first two chapters of the Bible speak of male and female, they speak to equality in

essence. Of course, there are differences between *male* and *female*. (If there were not, we wouldn't be writing this book.) But the Bible does not begin with differences; *it begins with sameness*.

In thinking about women and men, we should imitate God's thoughts. When we speak about women and men, we should imitate God's Word. God begins with what we have in common—a shared name, a shared nature, and a shared mission. Likewise, we should emphasize what we have in common. We share a human nature and a divine mission. *We are more alike than we are different*.

We should defend woman as human. Unfortunately, we must make this point. (This too is an unfortunate reason for writing this book.) We live in a world in which people deny the full humanity of women in word and in deed. The Bible does not allow for such—and Christian men and women should not either. (This point is not aimed at men alone. Women have been guilty of demeaning and devaluing women themselves.)

Women should be treated with the same dignity and respect as men—for both are made of the same flesh! All misogyny (hatred of women) is the hatred of man—for both share the same nature and name. We must refrain from demeaning women with our speech and silence, our actions and inactivity. Expressions such as “You throw like a girl!” or “You're acting like a woman!” reduce women to insults and undesirables. Our silence in the presence of such statements communicates that women are not worth defending.

We see the value of woman in her humanity. But what does it mean to be human?

We see the value of woman in her relationship to God—she is created in his image and likeness.

To be human is to be made in the image and likeness of God. When God defines mankind, he uses these words: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Image and likeness—both those terms are foreign to our modern ears. Yet both terms are

essential to understanding the nature of a human being. Thus, they are the first and most important thing about being a woman. Like the channels on a stereo, the terms “image” and “likeness” play the same song. But they play it in different (and complementary) ways. We’ll take them one at a time and then bring it back together.

Image of God—To be made in “the image of God” means to rule as God’s representative. In ancient Egypt, the king was called the living statue of a specific god, an idea Moses’ first readers knew well. As such, the king displayed the “character traits” and “essential notions” of the god he imaged.² The title “image of God” was reserved for royalty; it would not be given to a common laborer.³ Similarly, pagan temples would feature an image of the god who dwelt there. This image would represent and mediate the presence of that deity to the people. The first readers of Genesis understood “the image of God” with the idea of a royal representative who rules on behalf of a god.

God did not carve his image out of stone or wood. He did not select an individual out of the highest class of humans. He fashioned his image from the stuff of earth and breathed into him his own breath. Body and spirit, the man became a perfect representative of God on earth. God did not limit the status of image to a class or gender—he declared all humans his image-bearers. As such, God made humans to be royal representative rulers, exercising dominion over his kingdom (*king’s-dominion*).

God’s likeness—“In our likeness” refers to humanity’s relationship with God as Father. In Genesis 5:1 we read: “When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.” Made in God’s likeness, Adam is God’s “son” (see Luke 3:38). Then, in verse 3, we read that Adam “fathered a son in his own likeness.” “Likeness” connotes sonship. (“Like father, like son,” we say.) This sonship means that mankind could relate to God as Father.

Taken together, “image” and “likeness” show us that mankind was made to rule the earth as God’s representatives, as God’s royal sons. This is why Israel’s king was known as the son of God (see Psalm 2:7–9).⁴

How does this show the value of *women*? As the image of God, women were created to be representative rulers, exercising the dominion of her Father-King in his kingdom. As the likeness of God, women were created to be royal children, daughters of God.

Why does this matter? We must include her. God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let *them* have dominion . . .” The woman was not an afterthought. She was there in Genesis 1, in the first recorded declaration of man’s nature and purpose. God’s plan included her ruling the earth in shared responsibility and privilege with man.

This means that we must include women. We must involve women in ruling the earth—having “dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis 1:26). When God blessed them—male and female—he said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (1:28). There was no realm of dominion from which the woman was excluded. She was to be there with the man as they exercised dominion together.

God said, “And let *them* rule.” Man and woman are designed to rule together. Exclusion of women is the opposite of God’s design. To exclude women is to exclude half of God’s creation means of ruling the earth. This means that we must include and celebrate the influence and presence of women in all realms of life. Women should be sought after and encouraged, educated and equipped, taught, learned with and learned from, celebrated and needed as essential partners in the shared task. In our local church, I (Eric) am making an intentional effort to seek out and invite the feedback of women. This might mean pre-reading this chapter, asking their insights on a passage I’m about to teach, or seeking their wisdom in how to lead a ministry. It also means equipping and tasking women with significant responsibilities—

and then affirming their value and gifts in public and in the presence of male leadership. God has given them strengths and wisdom that are a gift to the church. I don't do this to make them feel good. I do this because I need their help! I do this because I see it as a God-designed and biblical way of life, leadership, and ministry.

Honor her as God's representative. People do not burn the United States flag because they hate red, white, and blue cloth. They burn it because it represents the United States, which they intend to disrespect. How we treat God's representatives (humans, male or female) demonstrates how we value God. The devaluing of a woman is a denial of and hatred of the image of God. *All abuse of women is an act of violence against God himself.*⁵

Honor her as God's child. We should not measure a woman's worth based on her attachment to an earthly husband or father. A woman does not need the voice or presence of a man to validate her. She does not need a particular relationship status, nor should she be valued according to her social proximity to a particular man. She needs only the description given to her by God—"made in our likeness" (Genesis 1:26; 5:1-2). A woman does not need a specific body type or physical features to have value. She is valuable because God is her Father; she is a human, created in the image and likeness of God.

We see the value of a woman in her creation purpose—a priestly-helper.

Why did God make women? On the sixth day, after making the male, God says, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). So, he declares, "I will make him a helper fit for him."

What comes to mind when you think of a helper? Perhaps you have a little helper who tags along in the kitchen or workshop, lending "help" that (though well-intended) only doubles the time it takes to do the job. Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help* took its

title from the derogatory term for African American household workers. “The help” are lower class, forced to do the bidding of another.

Do you think of “helper” as a title of honor? You should. We’ll return to the idea of “helper” throughout the book. But there are a few things we should establish about a helper up front. In the Old Testament, the person most often referred to as “helper” is the Lord. He is the helper of Israel.⁶ Of the twenty-one times the Hebrew word for helper is used in the Old Testament, twice it references the woman and sixteen times it refers to God, especially in his help in the fight against enemies. “Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield,” says Psalm 33:20. Obviously, the word *helper* does not indicate a lower status or class, inferiority or subordination. In fact, the word translated “helper” (*ezer*) never means that. On the contrary, the word *helper* implies a deficiency in those being helped! (If they didn’t need help, they wouldn’t need a *helper*!)

So, what exactly does the woman help the man do? In Genesis 2:15, the LORD God puts the man in the Garden of Eden “to work it and keep it.” “Work” means to serve. The word is often used of man’s service of God. “Keep” often refers to care for the tabernacle and God’s Word. Moses uses these words as a close pair in Numbers 3:7–8 and 8:25–26 regarding priestly service in the tabernacle. This leads us to conclude that God creates the man to serve as a priest in the Garden sanctuary. The core task of mankind is to rule the world as a worshiper.

But even in a sinless state and perfect environment, the man is unable to fulfill his purpose—to be a priest to God. He needs a helper “fit for him.” “Fit for him” means one who “matches” or “corresponds.” This means the helper must also be created in the “image and likeness of God”—absolutely and entirely human. The only “helper fit for him” is the woman. She alone corresponds to his nature. Far from inferior, she is his equal. As a “helper fit for him,” God created women to serve in the priesthood, ministering as worshipers of God.⁷

How do we celebrate the value of women as priestly-helpers?⁸

Mourn her absence. God can declare (of his own creation, *before* it is corrupted by sin) that “it is not good for man to be alone.” How can we *not* admit the same? We should mourn the exclusion of women. We should condemn it as “not good.”

Confess our need for her help. We (men and women) must confess that the presence of women is a necessity. Our creation purpose—to rule the world as worshipers of God—is impossible to fulfill without the help of women. Women are necessary for more than procreation. We should feel and confess this in every realm of life—church and home, government and education, the arts and skilled labor.

Remedy her absence. When God saw that “it is not good that the man should be alone,” he took steps to address it. He created the woman and brought her to the man. Being godly (*God-like*) means following his example, doing what is necessary to secure the presence of a helper. It is not enough to say that women are invaluable and essential. We must work to overcome any unjust exclusion and to invite and encourage their inclusion.

Honor the role of helper. Before the creation of the woman, the Lord paraded the animals before the man. The Lord designed this scene to make a point. “There was not found a helper fit for him” (Genesis 2:20). Animals are *helpful*, but they are not *helpers*. Helper is an exalted status, a place of honor.

The woman is not an animal to be subdued, domesticated, used, or ruled over. To think of woman should bring to mind God and the help he provides. Like God’s absence, her absence is “not good.” Like God’s, her help is crucial. As it is without God, the good life is impossible without her presence.

Depend on her. A helper meets a need in the one helped. We should not honor women with our speech and include women as a token gesture. We should honor and include women *because we cannot live without them*. They are that valuable. Life as God intends it is “not good” without them.

Where Are We?

We've only skimmed the surface of the Bible and the value of women. But consider what we've seen in the opening two chapters of the Bible. Women are

- human.
- made to be royal rulers (in the image of God).
- made to be children of God (in the likeness of God).
- made to be helpers in the priestly service of God.

We have this remarkable conclusion: *God created women to be royal rulers and priestly-servants in his kingdom.* “Royalty,” “rulers,” and “priestly-service.” Those probably are not among the first words that come to mind when you think about women. *But they should be.* God is in the business of creating and redeeming “a kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:6; Revelation 5:9–10). Women are right there in the mix of it. Even Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, will not reign alone. *He will reign with his bride* (Revelation 21:1–5; 22:1–5).

Yet, we need not look far to see that women are not valued the way God values them. Whether in ancient history or current events, local and global, we read of women undervalued, overlooked, silenced, ridiculed, pushed aside, abused, objectified, used, and oppressed. Women are treated as objects for the gratification of men, sometimes traded and sold. The crimes against women are perpetrated by men and women alike.

Humans wrestle with the balance knob. Sometimes it seems like the knob is cranked to *W*. At other times, it seems perpetually stuck on *M*. When this happens, we can't hear the glorious song God is singing about himself. His glory is distorted.

This is not how God created things to be. So, what on earth happened? Where did things go wrong? And what, if anything, can we do about it? How can we reset the balance and hear the beauty of God's glory through the corresponding channels of man and woman?

These are important questions. We'll consider them in chapter 2.

————— **DISCOVERING A WOMAN'S WORTH** —————

1. Describe your experience of the relationship between man and woman. How were men and women treated as equal or unequal, celebrated or disparaged in
 - a. the home you were raised in?
 - b. the religious institution you were raised in?
 - c. your workplace?
 - d. the church you attend now?
 - e. your marriage?
 - f. your friendships?

Make suggestions for how each could better reflect God's intentions.

2. Have you ever thought about your creation in God's image and likeness before? Why might it be important for you to think about it now?
3. Say this aloud: "I am created in the image of God. How I act shows the world what God is like. How I treat other image-bearers reveals what I think of God."
 - a. If you believed that statement, how would it impact your life in the world? At work? Church? Home? In private? In government?
 - b. What has your behavior today communicated to others about what God is like?

- c. What have your attitudes about and treatment of women communicated to the world about God's worth?
4. Summarize what you have learned in this chapter in two or three sentences.

DIGGING DEEPER

1. Read Genesis 1:27–28. “Man” in this passage refers to a kind of creature. Every “man,” both male and female, is created in the image of God, with the mandate to subdue and exercise dominion over the earth together.
 - a. What implications does this have for gender equality?
 - b. In what ways might our present culture (in the world, church, or home) diminish the image of God in one gender and exalt it in the other?
2. Read Genesis 2:18. The refrain “God saw that it was good” occurred seven times in Genesis 1. With those words fresh in our ears, the declaration here that “it is not good” should get our attention.
 - a. What does God declare “is not good?”
 - b. What aspects of the creation mandate (Genesis 1:26–28) are impossible if the man is alone?
 - c. Explain in your own words why “it is not good that the man should be alone.”
- d. Read Revelation 21:1–5 and 22:1–5. Will Jesus, the last Adam, reign alone? If not, with whom will he reign?

3. God says he will “make a helper fit for him.” What terms does Genesis 1–2 use to describe the distinctive quality of man?
 - a. How does this inform the meaning of “fit for him”?
 - b. Does “helper fit for him” refer to something inferior, equal, or superior in status?