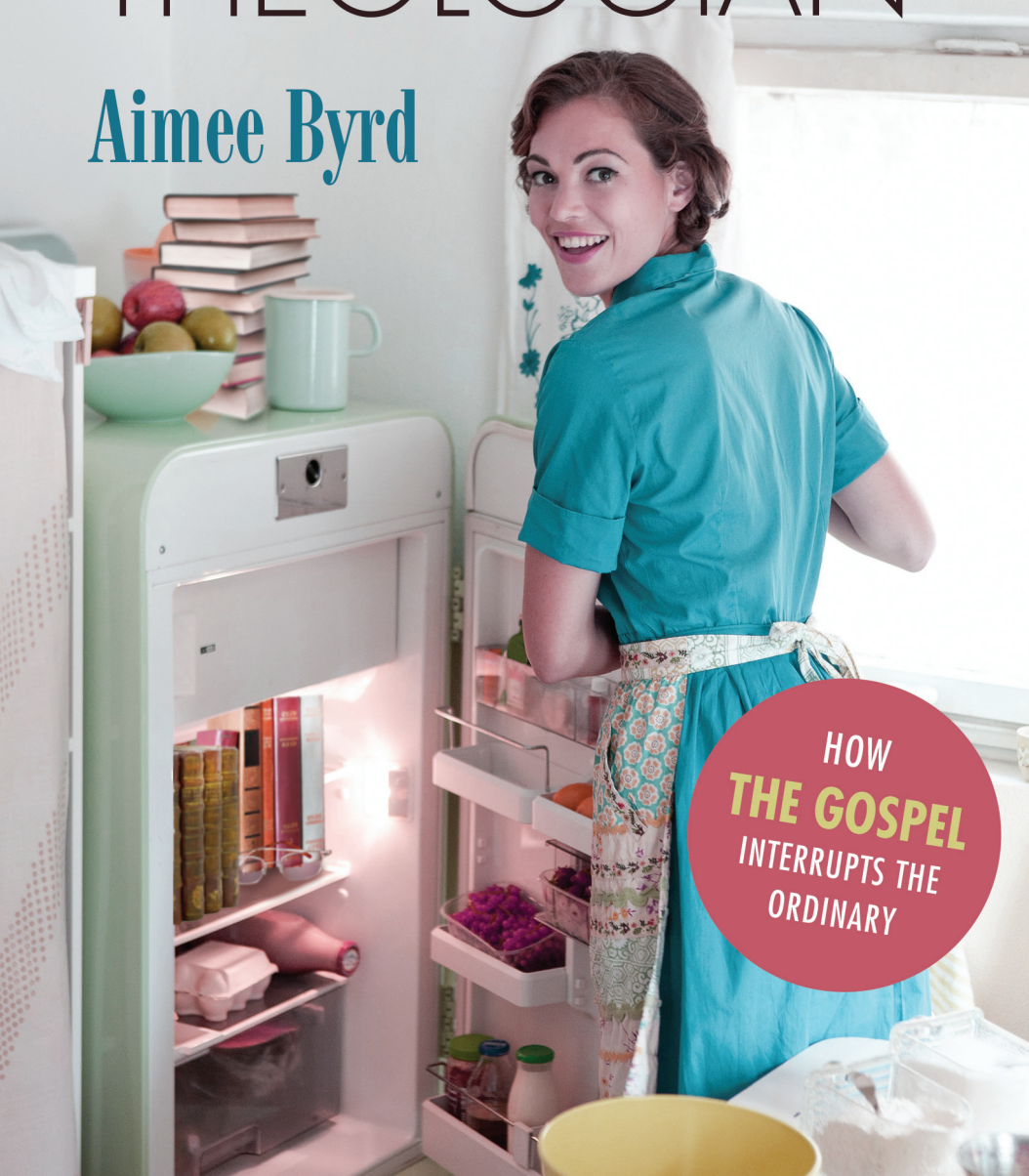


Housewife

THEOLOGIAN

Aimee Byrd



HOW
THE GOSPEL
INTERRUPTS THE
ORDINARY

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INTERRUPTS THE
ORDINARY

Aimee Byrd



P U B L I S H I N G
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To Matt,
with thanks for representing our Heavenly Groom
with your sacrificing and edifying style of leadership,
while incessantly looking at me through the eyes of grace.

And to our three developing theologians:
Solanna, Zaidee, and Haydn—
May you grow in the knowledge and affection
of our Great Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Contents

Acknowledgments	9
Introduction	11
1. I Am Woman	17
2. In the Eye of the Beholder	37
3. Do You Mind?	53
4. Hear Me Roar	71
5. Here We Stand	93
6. Welcome In	113
7. My Two Pence Worth	133
8. The Lion's Tooth	151
9. Girl Interrupted	169
10. What About Sunday?	185
11. The Other Six Days	203
12. Expensive Grace	227

Acknowledgments

I have been apprehensive about writing an acknowledgments page. In some ways it feels a little arrogant to me, as if I'm stepping up to receive an award and want to publically thank everyone who helped in my great work. I'm not really sure how God is going to use this work, and I hope it is received well. But I certainly don't want to come off as unappreciative to the wonderful people who have been integral to this book being published.

So first I would like to thank my readers. Thank you for buying my book! My prayer is that God will use it mightily in your Christian sanctification and in your relationships with other women in the church.

Without the amazing support of my husband, Matt, I wouldn't have written a word. Thank you, Husbee, for your encouragement, and most of all for not thinking I was crazy when I said I had a book in my head that needed to come out.

I also have two very supportive parents, Margie and Blaine, who have taught me to think outside the box. Rock and Vickie, you have been such generous stepparents, for whom I am also very thankful. And many of my best theological conversations have been with my brother and sister, Luke and Brooke. Much appreciation goes to them, and to my friend Dana, for listening to all the thoughts (over and over again!) that went into this book.

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Introduction

This book is for women. It is for all women who want to know God, or better yet, want to be known by God. Striving to find meaning amidst the mundanity of everyday living, many of us feel swallowed up in mixed messages of purpose and significance, all the while merely wanting to contribute, to connect, to share joy and suffering. And yet, we find ourselves still slaying the dragons of pop culture’s entrapping labels. A simple word like *housewife* has been refashioned time and time again to serve the ideologies of others, making it a very unattractive term. I try to shed the Stepford Wife image off one arm and peel the desperate rebels off the other like some shrink-wrap covering my body. Both are pretty sticky and hard to remove.

Nevertheless, the word *housewife* is pretty ordinary. For the discussion in this book, I would like to use its most basic definition, “a married woman; a man’s partner in marriage,” or “lady of the house.”¹ The value of this word is in its simplicity. Sure, we could drop the *house* part, and possibly save ourselves from some of those pop culture images, but there is worth in a woman’s connection to the home. And frankly, *homewife* doesn’t have the same ring to it. These days the term has come to mean a married woman without a career—which is a negative

1. “Housewife,” from *The Free Dictionary*, accessed September 26, 2012, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/housewife>; see under the “Thesaurus” section for the terminology used here.

Introduction

definition. It separates women by the question we have been contentiously debating for decades: should a married woman, particularly a mother, work outside the home? I believe this is a big distraction that has prevented us from asking better questions. But instead of tossing out the word altogether, I would like it to be recovered for the uses of uniting women in their common calling and responsibilities as well as helping us to celebrate the beauty of diversity among us. The word *love* has been abused in more ways than I care to imagine, but none of us would want to sacrifice the speaking and hearing of it for the sake of word thieves.

Now that leaves us with the term *theologian*. Perhaps the image of a bunch of old professors with suits and cigars comes to mind. We often think of a theologian in terms of a specialized field of knowledge or study. While this is the more narrow scope of the term, what does the word actually mean? Dr. John H. Gerstner tackles this question in his article “Everyman Must be a Theologian.” He asserts that theology is a necessary vocation for the layman: “A lay theologian is a person who has a true knowledge of God which he understands in nontechnical, nonprofessional, nonacademic terms. However, such a person is truly a theologian.”²

Gerstner refers to John 17:3, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” Although we may have an option when it comes to other vocations, our primary calling in every area of life is as theologians. “The knowledge of God is necessary to eternal life. And if eternal life is necessary for every man, then theology is

2. John H. Gerstner, “Everyman Must be a Theologian,” available online at *The Highway*, accessed September 26, 2012, http://www.the-highway.com/theology_Gerstner.html.

Introduction

also necessary for every man.”³ In saying *laymen*, or *everyman*, Dr. Gerstner is referring to mankind as a whole, not just those of the male gender.

As housewives, we often add to our job titles cook, chauffer, accountant, nurse, maid, and many other things. But have you ever considered being a theologian as a necessary part of your vocation? I have heard many people tell me, “I know that I am a Christian. I have my faith, and that is good enough for me. I don’t feel the need to make it all complicated with theological stuff.” It is heartbreaking and shameful that theology has such a bad reputation. Because of this, I am compelled to investigate such a profound misunderstanding.

Faith is a gracious gift from God, and this faith has content. It is not just faith in faith. When you fall in love with your husband, are you satisfied at that moment to learn nothing else about him? Of course not, the opposite is true; you want to know more and more of him. And your love grows in this way. Now think of our all-knowing, all-powerful God. Can we ever exhaust our learning of him? What a privilege and an honor to be able to know our God!

Knowing is a very intimate thing. We have all heard people say, “I don’t personally know that girl but I know *of* her.” In speaking this, they are recognizing who the girl is, as well as saying that they have no personal relationship. We read in Genesis 4:1, “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.” This is certainly an intimate knowing. As Christians, we have been adopted by our Lord into his family to know him intimately as our Father. Has God not given us everything we need, through his Son, his Spirit, and his Word, to worship him properly and enjoy him forever?

3. Ibid.

Introduction

I have come to embrace my calling as a housewife theologian. These terms may sound a little old fashioned to you, or even seem like an oxymoron. You might not think of your typical woman as a housewife theologian. It took the whole process of writing this book for me to realize this obvious assumption. While working on revisions, my editor, Amanda Martin, pointed this out. She said, “At one point you mention that you are a typical middle-class family. However, it’s not actually typical for middle-class women to be stay-at-home housewives who write books!” That statement hit me like a Looney Tunes anvil. This is not typical? I mentioned this to my husband, and he replied, “Aimee, you are *atypical*.”

I really wanted to argue this point, but then I understood that Amanda and Matt are right. As I have defined these two terms, you see that they are not the typical way that our culture perceives them. Christians are not called to be representative of the secular culture; we are called to glorify our Creator and Redeemer and to enjoy him forever. In order to do this, we must know who he is. You may not be a stay-at-home mom who writes books, but your vocation as a Christian woman is atypical to the watching world. You may even be single. I want to encourage you that God has called you to be something much more than a typical single woman. Perhaps you are going to school. Do you want to settle for being a typical student? Do you aspire to be just a typical woman in the workforce? (Stay tuned for my revision of these ideas in chapter 6.)

But how does this appear practically in our everyday lives? What is it about us that is atypical? It has to be more than Sunday morning worship, praying at meals, and good morals. How do we affect the culture around us as a result of being housewife theologians? What does our calling look like, and how are we to

Introduction

be successful? These are questions I am asking myself. I began this book endeavor as a thirty-two-year-old married woman with three children. My aim is for it to be used as a tool for myself and other housewife theologians out there, as I am convinced that this is not something we can do well in isolation.

I invite you to embrace your calling as a housewife theologian and wrestle through some of the theological implications I set forth in this book. In this information age in which we live, many women find the conveniences of technology cutting us off from meaningful, mentoring relationships that shepherd us in our unique role. In Titus 2, Paul points out the importance of women teaching and learning from one another.

This book is designed to be used with a journal, to actively engage women in a workshop format in their home church. Each month, your assignment is to read one chapter and complete the questions at the end for use in discussion. You choose how much you want to share from your journal, but the discussion is based on the answers you give to the questions. Ultimately, the workshop will meet monthly for one year concomitantly with the twelve chapters of the book. Of course, if you are a more ambitious, atypical group you can adjust your schedule for biweekly meetings.

Here is your opportunity to invite your neighbor who has been teeter-tottering about whether to go to church or not, your high school daughter's friend, or that co-worker to whom you have had a hard time articulating your faith. I do encourage high school girls to be invited into your women's circle for this one—they can use the mentoring that may develop from your meetings. Besides, this is a great preparation tool for understanding their role in the world. My goal is that we housewife theologians get the help we need to more fully understand our

Introduction

calling, to encourage one another, and to share our successes and failures as we learn how the gospel interrupts the ordinary.

Some of the difficulties of being a housewife theologian are in the title itself. How do one's knowledge and beliefs about God affect our everyday, ordinary lives? This is the age-old question that has challenged the best of theologians. As a lay theologian—a housewife at that—I believe this book addresses social Christian thought from the perspective of the common person. Yet there are different areas to consider, multiple threads that weave together the so-called Christian life.

The first three quarters of the book are devotional, addressing such questions as: How does my knowledge of God relate to my role as a woman; my thoughts on beauty, identity, hospitality, and sin; and my influence on others? How is a Christian's thinking different from an unbeliever's? In the concluding three chapters I address the broader picture of Christ and culture. What is the relationship of the church to the broader culture? The aforementioned devotional aspects weave themselves over and under the realm of the church and the remaining social institutions. As pilgrims waiting for the age to come, are we just filling time, or is there some eternal value to our jobs and relationships in this temporary life?

I Am Woman

A country stop. A glance. And out we went with joy to walk knee deep in heather, to drink with summer, holiness: content to be in Christ together.

—Sheldon Vanauken¹

I have two young daughters. Solanna is eight going on eighteen and Zaidee is six, imitating her big sister's every move. I don't know about you, but it is challenging enough for me to discern what the proper biblical model of a woman in the twenty-first century looks like for myself, much less to endeavor to teach these two precious gems. I feel as if the clock is ticking every day, and I have to properly distinguish how to teach my girls both the value and the responsibilities that encompass being a godly young woman living in our times.

I've noticed that no matter how many TV shows I forbid them to watch, or how carefully I monitor their friendships, conversations, comings, and goings, they are continually picking up mixed messages on what it means to be a woman. And unfortunately,

1. Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy* (San Francisco: Harper, 1987), 197.

I Am Woman

many of those mixed messages may be coming from me. It is of great magnitude that I evaluate myself against God's Word on my calling and proper role as a woman created in the image of God. I truly believe that we women need to support each other in this area. We hear so many different viewpoints on the role of women these days, and some of the Scripture verses about women can be difficult to understand. It seems that many of these verses have been "spun" by various people to meet each social agenda of our day. Where is the truth in all this? As housewife theologians, we need to start at the beginning, with creation.

We need to discuss the most notorious woman of all, the infamous Eve.

Our first lady was made to be a *helper comparable* to Adam. These words describe both her role and her value. In Genesis we read, "And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him'" (Gen. 2:18).

Help Is on the Way

First let's look at Eve's role as helper. In his commentary on Genesis, Bruce Waltke explains, "God creates the woman to help Adam, that is, to honor his vocation, to share his enjoyment, and to respect the prohibition. The word *help* suggests that the man has governmental priority, but both sexes are mutually dependent on each other."² He goes on to say that this word "signifies the woman's essential contribution, not inadequacy."³ It looks like we have a lot of unpacking to do with this word *help*.

Waltke rightly states the implication of man's governmental priority. If you have ever been involved in any Christian circles,

2. Bruce K. Waltke, with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 88.

3. *Ibid.*

I Am Woman

you must be aware of the many differing opinions on male leadership. Unfortunately, there are so many presuppositions on this topic that we have to be keen housewife theologians in our articulation of them. Under the banner of *husband leadership*, I have heard everything ranging from arguments about oppressive patriarchy to derogatory comments about passive women who make no responsible decisions on their own. So where exactly do our responsibilities lie?

First of all, we cannot avoid the plain scriptural language that says that the husband is the leader of the wife. One of my favorite Scriptures on this matter is Ephesians 5:22–24:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Maybe this sounds too challenging, and you are now wondering if I'm just pretending that this is one of my favorite verses (well, I do have a lot of favorites!) so that I sound more holy to you readers. But in the following verses, Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church. What a heavy responsibility this is! Our husbands are to lead with a self-sacrificing love that illustrates Christ's amazing adoration for his bride, the church (see Eph. 5:25–33). As Paul says, this is "a great mystery," but it certainly sheds a light on God's plan for marriage.

I'm not sure what response this stirs up in you, but I'm thinking that my husband's role is looking a heck of a lot tougher than mine! John Calvin has written such beautiful commentary on this passage. He makes the point that the comparison of the

I Am Woman

husband/wife relationship to that of Christ and the church “ought to produce a stronger impression on their minds.”⁴ He continues,

As Christ rules over his church for her salvation, so nothing yields more advantage or comfort to the wife than to be subject to her husband. . . . From husbands, on the other hand, the apostle requires that they cherish toward their wives no ordinary love; for to them, also, he holds out the example of Christ—*even as Christ also loved the church*. . . . Let husbands imitate Christ in this respect, that he scrupled not to die for his church.⁵

Our husbands have been given a very serious responsibility. As Christian women, we are to be helping them, respecting their duty. Many women have told me that they wish their husbands would be leaders. However, they already are leaders. Husbands will be held accountable to God for the way they have led their families. In the same way that Gerstner said every Christian is a theologian, every husband is a leader. The question is whether or not they are good ones. In that case, I love my husband way too much to contribute purposely to his failing before God. I do want to be his helper, easing his role. And if we look at this conversely, whether or not we want to be a helper, that is how we as wives will be held accountable before God.

Honoring His Vocation

In our day, honoring a husband’s vocation as part of a wife’s role may sound downright chauvinistic. But is this actually offensive? Does it merely mean that we are to revere his job as a

4. John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 21, *The Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 318.

5. *Ibid.*

I Am Woman

mailman, lawyer, or construction worker? Earlier in Genesis we see an account of God giving man his vocation. The theological term for this is the Cultural Mandate:

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Gen. 1:27–28)

Many people have this picture of Adam and Eve before the fall eating grapes and purposelessly lollygagging around in paradise. In her book *Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey explains,

The first phrase, “be fruitful and multiply,” means to develop the *social* world: build families, churches, schools, cities, governments, laws. The second phrase, “subdue the earth,” means to harness the *natural* world: plant crops, build bridges, design computers, compose music. This passage is sometimes called the Cultural Mandate because it tells us that our original purpose was to create cultures, build civilizations—nothing less.⁶

This gives much more significance to our careers and our daily tasks. Part of the privilege of being made in the image of God is to be creators in a community.

Today families are going in many different directions. The husband has his career, and the wife has a career of her own. Life can be very difficult when both partners in a marriage get

6. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004, 2005), 47. I will argue later that while Adam’s original purpose was nothing less than this, it was also much more.

I Am Woman

caught up in the “my job versus your job” scenario. To be sure, we sacrifice for each other. But everything we do should fall under the pinnacle of our common high calling in the Cultural Mandate. As Pearcey emphasizes,

In eternity, we will continue to fulfill the Cultural Mandate, though without sin—creating things that are beautiful and beneficial out of the raw materials of God’s creation. This means that every valid vocation has its counterpart in the new heavens and new earth, which gives our work eternal significance. . . . In our work we not only participate in God’s creative activity today, we also foreshadow the tasks we will take up in cultivating a new earth at the end of time.⁷

This quote from Pearcey is what got me thinking about how this looks for a Christian housewife as a helper. We must certainly show forth our Lord God’s beauty in this awesome task. And for us to do this properly, it is imperative that we are functioning appropriately in our role.

The Cultural Mandate was given to both Adam and Eve, but Adam carries the governmental priority as his responsibility. Another indication of this is that he named *woman* (Gen. 2:23). Notice Adam names his wife in connection with himself, yet the fact that he was the namer points to his governmental priority in the relationship.

Enjoying God Forever

Next we come to sharing in our husbands’ enjoyment. We all know that joy cannot be just a selfish emotion. When we feel joy, the first thing we want to do is to share it with someone

7. Ibid., 86.

else, which intensifies our joy. Joy is relational. And joy is deeper than what most today call happiness. People often say, “I just want to be happy,” but happiness is a situational emotion. Circumstances can change our happiness on a whim. Joy, however, is rooted and long lasting. It is supernatural. In the most severe circumstances, a Christian still has joy in the Lord. Westminster Shorter Catechism question number one asks, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer is, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

As Christian men, our husbands’ enjoyment is the same as ours. This is good news for sure! We find our enjoyment in God, in glorifying him in all that we do. You can see now how the above discussion on our proper roles in the relationship will have much effect on our joy together. Fulfilling our roles appropriately enables our husbands to enjoy successfully fulfilling their tasks in the Cultural Mandate for the glory of God.

Respecting the Prohibition

Earlier I mentioned my two daughters. I also have a two-year-old son, Haydn. And oh, how I wish that my children would help each other in respecting the prohibitions their father and I give to them. I do not know how many times I have told one of them not to do something only to see another arrogantly doing the same because, after all, I did not mention his or her particular name in my declaration. Unfortunately in their childishness, they love the opportunity to flaunt a particular liberty in front of their siblings.

Similarly, Eve distorted God’s words. She lost sight of her helping role when conversing with Satan about what God *really* said. Satan challenged her on God’s prohibition. We are not told all the thoughts going on in Eve’s head at the time. But

I Am Woman

I'm wondering, was she thinking about the consequences this discussion would have on her husband? As a helper, we always need to remember that we represent our other half in all that we do and say. Likewise, our husbands always need to consider our interests in all that they say and do. This is a double-edged sword because our husbands should always want what is best for us. Sometimes we make it hard for them to be able to discern between what is truly good for us, and what gives us that momentary "happiness" that carries serious consequences in the end. We need to keep this in mind in our own temptations.

As we see in the example of the first married couple, Eve didn't have her theology right. After Satan challenged what God really said, Eve responds, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it nor shall you touch it, lest you die'" (Gen. 3:2-3). Eve actually adds to God's prohibition in claiming that he forbids them to touch the tree. Here we have, as Waltke states, Satan cunningly engaging Eve "into what may appear as a sincere theological discussion, but he subverts obedience and distorts perspective by emphasizing God's prohibition, not his provision, reducing God's command to a question, doubting his sincerity, defaming his motives, and denying the truthfulness of his threat."⁸ These are serious character accusations against God! This should be a significant wake up call for us to better know our God through his Word.

Many messages are flung at us every day that are contradictory to Scripture. What are we going to believe? As we can see from the story of Eve (and should know from our own experience) there are severe consequences for mishandling the Word

8. Waltke, *Genesis*, 91.

of God. Even within the church we are constantly flooded with false teaching. Are we jealous to protect the truth of God's Word?

Women of Worth

While husbands and wives have different roles in marriage, in no way does this belittle our value. The account of creation gives us several implications of this. First of all, it was not good that Adam was alone. Eve was given as a helper *comparable* to him.

Being made in the image of God, one thing that we show forth about our Creator is the community of relationship. The Bible teaches us that there is relationship within the Trinity, the theological term that articulates the fact that God is one in being and three in persons. Throughout the Bible we see the splendor of the Father's love for his Son, the Son's full submission to the Father's will, and the Holy Spirit's submission to both the Father and the Son. We see God's plan being carried out by all three persons of the Trinity. Although there are different roles within the Trinity, there is no difference in value. So we can see that when Adam was alone, he was not yet reflecting God's image in relationship.

Before creating Eve, God paraded the whole animal kingdom before Adam (Gen. 2:18–20). This was not because God seriously thought an animal would be a suitable helper. There is no learning or "Plan B" for God. In his wisdom, God was building up to this wonderful creation of woman, teaching Adam of her value, which is comparable to his own. Imagine after seeing all the wondrous animals God created so perfectly, how Adam must have felt about this grand finale!

Before allowing Adam to meet his wife, however, God actually puts him to sleep for this creative operation (Gen. 2:21–22). God could have created Eve out of the dust, as he did her husband.

I Am Woman

But for her, Adam has to sacrifice. A piece of Adam was actually taken to create Eve, and not just any piece. It came right out of his middle, his side. God could have used Adam's pinky toe—that would have sent a completely different message. Or he could have used a piece from Adam's head, sending yet another message.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the awesome example of oneness given from this illustration. Eve had a part of her husband! And yet, immediately, Adam had to realize the diversity as well. In naming her, Adam proclaimed, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Gen. 2:23). The first thing we hear from man's mouth before the fall is beautifully poetic, celebrating the value of his wife.

What Went Wrong?

You've heard it said, "Women—can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em." If we are honest, we can certainly see the humor here. Adam himself may have been thinking of something similar to this old adage after the fall. I have been spending a lot of time here on studying the creation narrative, but there is more to the story. It is very important for us to see how things were fashioned so that we can see the serious devastation caused by the fall. After the fall, the marriage relationship was tainted. There was punishment for Adam and Eve's sin. In fact, God said to Eve, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). Ouch!

While I am focusing on only part of the curse here, I want to particularly address the aggravation introduced into the marriage relationship. Theologically, we learned that the governmental roles in marriage are to represent Christ and the church. Because of the effects of the fall, our roles can easily be subverted. Instead

I Am Woman

of joyfully serving in the vocation God has given us, our relationships become a power struggle of sorts. We want what we don't have. Women become envious of their husbands' leadership and men distort their responsibilities to a dictatorship or resign themselves to passivity.

Thankfully, our gracious God does not stop at this juncture. He provided redemption for us through Christ, his Son. And he even proclaims this gospel message within his curse of punishment (Gen. 3:15).

The Good News

While Adam and Eve did not represent mankind very well, Christ did in his perfect obedience on earth. And on the cross, he bore the curse for our sin, which was imputed to him. Christ's perfect righteousness was accredited to the believer's account! News this big, this glorious, a love this grand, has given us not only an example of how to love one another, but also true power to live a godly life. While sin is not removed from us yet, and it is still a battle, God gives us a modified role in his Cultural Mandate.⁹ And if we have been made right with God, of course we can love our husbands rightly. Our God has provided his Word, his Son, and his Holy Spirit. The beautiful passage I quoted from Ephesians above shows forth the restoration of our marriage relationship through our new life and relationship in Christ. We just cannot discuss any aspect of the Christian life without the gospel.

No doubt, Eve wasn't the easiest person to live with on that day. And we still suffer the consequences of sin. We struggle as we try to fulfill our vocation in the Cultural Mandate.

9. In chapter 11 I will show how this modified form of the Cultural Mandate was formally established in a covenant with Noah.

I Am Woman

Likewise, so do our wonderful men struggle in line with the curse upon Adam for his part in all this. We argue with our husbands, we make many mistakes with our children, we burn dinner. We are constantly aggravated in our attempts to live the way we should. Yet God did not punish us by taking away our vocation. And despite Adam's excuse, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (Gen. 3:12), God did not give him a new helper. Can't live with her, can't live without her.

God didn't start over with everything. He is our Redeemer. To the Christians in Corinth Paul wrote:

The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. (1 Cor. 15:47–49)

Reigning with Christ

Too often when there is trouble, we have the tendency to want to throw in the towel and start all over. You especially see this in small children. When there's a mistake with an art project or homework, they immediately want to crumble it up and begin anew. Have you ever had a child restart a game with you because he or she was losing? Well, God is never losing. And God does not make mistakes. As a matter of fact, believers benefit more from God's grace after the fall than Adam and Eve would have before the fall. Before, Adam had his own righteousness—that is, the righteousness of a man. Now, after the fall and the redeeming work of Christ, those of us who have

union with Christ are accredited with Christ's righteousness, a supernatural righteousness.¹⁰

Our spiritual life can be somewhat analogous to that of a child. Newborns come out un-potty-trained, unable to talk, walk, or even eat anything solid. Nonetheless, my helpless infants were still marked with my last name. Even in their immaturity, they are still Byrds. They are totally dependent on their parents. Unlike the child who eventually grows to be independent, we are always completely dependent on God for our sanctification. God is transforming his own to Christ's likeness. Just as children are most often unaware of their own helplessness and much of their sinful behavior, we tend to view ourselves in a much better condition spiritually than we really are. This is another reason why it is so important for us to be in God's Word. It is there that we see his holiness and our sin.

As painful as the sanctification process is, God does not ever give up on something he initiates. In fact, many times it is through our suffering that we learn about the wonderful grace and love of God. His gift is so much more valuable than any self-righteousness we might have attained if we were not soiled by sin in all that we do. "For if by one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17). In a culture that is well acquainted with accumulation, we can especially appreciate having received an *abundance* of grace. Our American do-it-yourself way of thinking may make it more difficult to understand the *gift of righteousness*. Grace is undeserved. We could never have earned our own righteousness. Yet God's grace is overflowing.

10. See James Montgomery Boice, *Romans*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 590–91.

Working It Out

So what does this look like for the twenty-first-century woman? What does a submissive wife do, or not do? How do we live our lives here on earth, saved by grace, clothed in Christ's righteousness, yet still struggling with the sin in our lives? Well, one thing is for sure, we are not all going to be cookie cutout replicas of one another. God has created us in diversity, which is part of our beauty. We are gifted differently. We have different personalities. Some of us are leaders and some of us are followers. Some of us are introverted and some of us are extroverted. We are going to need to understand that submission and leadership roles are not going to look exactly the same in every marriage relationship—but the fruit is recognizable.

We have been through many presidents leading our country. Some have been good leaders; some have not. If you were to compare some of the better leaders of our country you would certainly see differences in their governing. The president holds the primary responsibility for much of the economy, public education policies, foreign policies, national defense, and the list goes on and on. However, he delegates different people to help in all these areas. He even has help writing his speeches. Surely we have not found some magical formula on how to be the perfect leader of the United States of America. But there are some principles that we know to be true. A good leader needs good help. This good help is not someone who is going to constantly try to usurp his authority, but rather someone who shares his vision and can be trusted to operate accordingly.

Governing the home is obviously different from governing a country, but there are similarities. My husband holds the primary responsibility for our finances, education, witness to others, safety, and the list goes on and on. He needs a good

I Am Woman

helper. Of course, my finances are different from yours. My children are different from yours. My neighbors are different from yours. My husband, Matt, and I both have strong personalities. This has proven, especially in our earlier years of marriage, to be a challenge in our home. Matt very much has a leader-style personality, but has often faced obstacles put up by my strong opinions. This is where it gets tough. He values me as his wife. He sacrifices himself for me. But he has the awesome responsibility to lead me in a godly way. This involves listening to what I say, weighing it against God's Word, and making the decision that he believes would be most pleasing to God. One important way for me to be a good helper is to make sure that I am not just serving myself in my strong opinions, and to always have a respectful *disposition*¹¹ to his leadership. The bottom line is, I'm not just submitting to my husband, I'm submitting to Christ.

Our Ephesians verses referred to above explain that Christ gave himself for the church "that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:26). As Paul is revealing this mystery of our relationship in marriage as parallel to Christ's with the church, we can see the important role that God's Word plays in our marriage. By leading us in the Word, our husbands are aiding our sanctification. If we are in God's Word together, we will be on the same page in life much more often than not. This has really been a blessing to my family. In our biggest arguments, Matt and I know that we both have the same Authority, and all our matters fall under

11. This is a very helpful word that John Piper uses to describe biblical submissiveness in his book co-edited with Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991, 2006), 36.

I Am Woman

this. When examining ourselves under that light, we usually both find where we fall short.

A good leader is a good delegator. Submissiveness does not equal inactivity or disengagement of your mind. God gave Matt a mind, and God gave me a mind. We do not have the same brain! We do not have the same gifts. Nor do we have the same thoughts. Fulfilling my vocation as a housewife should be complementary to my husband. My mind should sharpen his mind. Matt knows what my strengths are, and depends on my help in those areas. There are many daily decisions that I need to make without Matt around. Whenever I decide or do anything, I should be thinking of how this represents my husband and questioning if he would approve. And he trusts me to do this.

For example, I am aware of our budget. I do not feel comfortable making any big purchases without running them by my husband. One reason is that we do not have a lot of extra money for big purchases, so it would impact our future spending. Another reason is that we enjoy discussing those things together. I respect Matt way too much to sink a large portion of our budget into something he would be unhappy with. And I am pretty confident that if Matt strongly disagreed, he would ask me to return the item. Don't get me wrong, I have definitely had my moments of overspending (particularly with clothing for the kids). I have sometimes been tempted over the line of acceptability and I have had to fess up and be honest with him.

My point is that I know my husband well enough to be able to carry out many of the family responsibilities by representing the both of us. This is the same way our knowing of God should be. For example, the Bible may not have said in black and white, "Thou shalt marry Matt," but it did tell me what type of man to marry. So by knowing the character of God and his precepts, I could make a

good decision about whom to marry and be confident that I was in God's will. Likewise, while I am mindful of my husband's governmental role, it is not a restrictive dictatorship, but rather a freedom to grow fruitfully the way God has created me (and us) to be.

Saved by What?

Earlier I mentioned the difficulty in understanding some biblical passages on women. The end of chapter 2 in 1 Timothy is among them. Let's skip right to the doozy at the beginning of verse 15: "Yet she will be saved through childbearing." Did this one ever confuse you? Is there another way to salvation other than faith in Christ alone? Can we acquire heaven by giving birth?

In the preceding verses, Paul is discussing submissiveness of women in reference to male eldership and pastoral authority in the church. He appeals to Eve's being deceived by Satan. Remember, before the fall Adam was to be the leader, and here we have Eve taking up this supposed theological discussion all on her own. Did she adequately represent her husband in her radical decision to disobey God? Paul's argument is not chauvinistic, rather it is lovingly showing forth the relationships God has ordained.

In saying that women are saved through childbearing, he is saying that we don't have to be stuck in the frustration of the curse. Through our union with Christ, we can again exercise proper relationships in the home and in the church by fulfilling our appropriate, God-given roles. This is why the second part of verse 15 adds "if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control." These are all works and fruits of the Spirit.

Why am I mentioning all this? These days the distinctions between men and women have been blurred. In many instances it seems the goal is to make men and women out to have no differences at all. Are we really immature enough to believe

I Am Woman

that it would be most ideal for us to be the same? God's beauty is magnified in our diversity. In their book *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, John Piper and Wayne Grudem quote theologian Emil Brunner: "Our sexuality penetrates to the deepest metaphysical ground of our personality. As a result, the physical differences between the man and the woman are a parable of physical and spiritual differences of a more ultimate nature."¹² Women have something to offer that men do not, and vice versa. We complement one another, all to the glory of God.

Journaling Questions

Remember, the workshop discussions related to this chapter will come from the material you record in your journals. Take your time and put effort into your journaling. Be honest and even creative in answering your questions. Some of you may be moved to add artwork or poetry to your answers. Others of you may feel led to look up related Scriptures or add some wisdom from another book. Don't hold back. You do not have to share everything in your journal with the group, but it will benefit you to go the extra mile in self-examination and application on these questions. And what you do share will benefit others. So, pour a cup of coffee, and reflect . . .

- Would you be embarrassed to be called a housewife? Explain.
- Have you ever thought about the importance of theology before? How did Eve's theology affect her conversation with the serpent? Can you think of a similar experience of your own?

12. Emil Brunner, *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen* (Tuebingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr, 1933), 358; quoted in Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 173; quoted in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 34.

I Am Woman

- What does it mean to honor your husband's vocation? If you are married, what would this look like in your home?
- How does your vocation as a housewife fall under the Cultural Mandate? How do any other jobs you may have outside the home fall under this Mandate, and your vocation as a housewife?
- Do you have a hard time with biblical submission to your husband? Do you think that you may have or have had wrong presuppositions about what this means?
- Do you find that you are respectful of your husband's (and your own) prohibitions, or do you tempt him to give you immediate gratification? Do you often seek happiness over joy?
- How often do you rely on your own righteousness for your spiritual growth?
- Are you a good helper? How well do you represent your husband (and God) when he's not around? Are you forthcoming with him about your decision making, or do you have the *better left unsaid* mentality? Are you keeping any secrets?
- What are some effects from blurring the gender roles God has given us in creation? What is the value of being created male and female?
- What do you appreciate about men, particularly the man in your life? What do you admire about some of the other men in your life, such as your father, brother, pastor, son?
- Why is it important to understand our roles as linked to creation, not with the common misconception of linking them to the fall?
- Write an "I Am Woman" poem. Think of both your strengths and weaknesses, challenges and rewards.

► This book is for women—for all women who want to explore beneath the superficial and get to know God, and themselves, better.

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