

**“Little Women”**  
*God at the Movies, 2020*

**[Bumper Video 3:04]**

Well good morning and welcome to SWFF. You’ve joined us for a unique series here at the church. Every year – usually in the Spring, but you know, COVID – we look to some of last years films in an attempt to understand spiritual truths. We call it *God at the Movies*. And today we come to *Little Women*. Now, there may be some confusion from the trailer we just played. Some of you are saying, “I know I haven’t been to the moves since the pandemic, but that didn’t look high def!”

No, you’re right, that was the trailer for *Little Women*, not from 2019, but from 1949. I decided to use that one at the last minute when I realized that the contemporary trailer featured every single clip I intended to use in today’s sermon. Don’t you hate trailers that show you the whole movie? What’s the point? Besides...you’ve seen one *Little Women*, you’ve seen...easy ladies!

I wouldn’t dare step in that pit of vipers. Listen, we’ve had some controversial film selections so far in this series – and we’ll end with another one next week – so I was looking forward to a break from controversy with this morning’s film selection. I mean, how controversial could a movie based on a

beloved 19<sup>th</sup> century novel about the innocent lives of four precocious New England sisters be? Come on, the opening word of the novel is “Christmas” for crying out loud. Ah, but my male naïveté has led me astray. I have come to discover that the cult of *Little Women* is every bit as contentious as the most heated Star Trek Convention panel on who was the better Captain, Kirk or Picard!

For fans of Louisa May Alcott’s classic, this is *not* neutral territory. I had a fascinating conversation this week at the end of Wednesday morning prayer meeting. There were three ladies and I just asked them as we were wrapping up, “You all read this?” Holding up my copy of *Little Women*. And not only had they read it, they had some very *strongly* held views about it and about the films in particular.

In fact, each one of them *hated* this latest adaptation. It was miscast, it wasn’t as good as the PBS version, but mostly, it wasn’t faithful enough to the original storyline. As one of them charged, “I think the director had an agenda and hijacked the story to make her point.”

Now, as a reader of books *and* a watcher of films, I am sensitive to this argument myself. If you’ve been around here long, you may have picked up that I am a huge fan of JRR Tolkien and his Middle Earth tales.

And I loved Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy – all 73 hours of it! But I hated – *hated* I tell you! – his follow up of *The Hobbit*. Three overly long movies that took a simple tale of a quest and butchered it into what was essentially a video game commercial. I saw them once and never again. In fact, when speaking of it, I actually refer to it as *The Hibbit*. Because I don't know what that was supposed to be, but it sure wasn't *The Hobbit!*

So ladies – and some gentlemen, I suppose – I recognize your passionate protection of Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy. I have no intention of wading into the debate over which Marmee wore it better. But...I will say this. There is a valid conversation about the role of the artist buried in this controversy. I think when we approach adaptations of classic works, we have to remember that there are two kinds of people who interact with them – archivists and artists. The job of the archivist is to keep the object as close to its original condition as possible. And that is a very valuable pursuit. As an historian, I have a great deal of respect for archivists.

But an artist is not an archivist. An artist is attempting to say something. You know, having an agenda is not a bad thing – a *hidden* agenda perhaps – but I have an agenda every time I stand up here and speak to you – as do Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as they selectively tell the story of Jesus' life. If they were setting out to be archivists, there would be no need for four gospel accounts.

We ended our *Little Women* fan-club discussion this week by concluding that movies are like portraits – sometimes you want Olan Mills and sometimes you want Picasso! So I tend to be pretty generous with artists taking some liberties with source materials in order to communicate a truth or an idea. In fact, that's what I *didn't* like about *The Hobbit* film adaptations – it wasn't artistic at all, just crass, tacky commercialization. But I have to say, that is certainly *not* the case with our film today. Director Greta Gerwig is an artist. I've seen several of her films and I appreciate them.

And I think she did a great job with the 2019 edition of *Little Women* – in fact, the greatest robbery of this year's Oscars, in my opinion, was her being left out of the Best Director nominations. I think she made some bold choices, while being committed to a faithful depiction of all the sacred set-pieces of the novels's canon. In fact, I would argue that this film is the most faithful to the author of any yet made. Not necessarily to the *words* the author wrote, or even to the order in which she wrote them...but to the *life* she lived and to the reason why she wrote the words that she did.

Gerwig's story starts with Louisa May Alcott's words – not from the novel, but from her own journal – “I’ve had a lot of troubles, so I write jolly tales.” And then we cut to Jo in the office of a publisher attempting to sell one of her stories. Gerwig’s trick is to merge the author into the story she is telling. Jo is Louisa and Louisa is Jo. Gerwig has stated that Jo was the heroine of her youth and Alcott of her adulthood – before she became a director, Gerwig was a successful screenwriter. And when you understand why she’s melding the two figures together – one real and one fictional - then the beginning, and the ending, of the film make a lot more sense. This is all about Alcott. So the movie doesn’t start domestically – around the Christmas tree as does the book – but in the corporate world of men.

For the first 80 years or so after *Little Women* was published there was very little conflict over how to interpret the novel. It wasn’t until 1950 that a comprehensive biography of Louisa May Alcott appeared and the complexity of the author’s life and beliefs shed new light on the story. The novel is loosely based on Alcott’s own biography. Like Jo, she was the second of four sisters who grew up in Massachusetts under the watchful eye of an intelligent and forceful mother.

On the surface, the novel is about navigating adolescence to become a graceful little woman, but

the story itself pushes back against that structure. The character who continually resists conforming to traditional expectations of demure femininity and domesticity is Jo, by all accounts the true heroine. While the character who unfailingly acquiesces, Beth, dies shortly after reaching adulthood. The publisher at the beginning of the film says to Alcott/Jo, “If the main character is a girl, make sure she’s married by the end. Or dead. Either way.”

And life mirrors art. What *we* know as *Little Women* was actually published originally as two separate stories. In fact, at the end of the first, Alcott writes, “So the curtain Falls upon Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. Whether it ever rises again, depends upon the reception given to the first act of the domestic drama called *Little Women.*” There was no guarantee that the story wouldn’t end right there. And at that “ending” Meg was engaged, but all the girls were unmarried.

And that was intentional on Alcott’s part. Especially for her stand-in Jo. But the reception given her little domestic drama was immediately enthusiastic and she was inundated with letters demanding to know who the girls would wind up marrying. The commercial success resulted in Alcott essentially being forced to marry Jo off in the second act, even though she had intended to have her remain a “literary spinster” as Alcott referred to herself, remaining unmarried all her life, choosing her career over marriage and children.

By the way, in that career we have discovered that Alcott preferred to write sensationalist stories about murder and opium addiction – what she called “blood and thunder tales” - which she was forced to do under a pen name. In fact she wasn’t the biggest fan of her most popular work, referring to *Little Women* later in her life as “moral pap for the young”. By the final chapter of *Jo’s Boys*, the second of two novels that followed *Little Women*, Alcott didn’t try to hide her fatigue with her characters writing bluntly that she was tempted to conclude with an earthquake that would engulf Jo’s school “and it’s environs so deeply into the bowels of the earth that no archeologist could ever find vestige of it.”

So for those who argue that this latest adaptation isn’t respectful enough of the original novel, others could contend that it’s perhaps the first one that mirrors the attitude of the author herself. It’s been said that every generation get’s the *Little Women* it deserves. By the way, I happened to search for “Little Women” on IMDB and do you KNOW how many adaptations of this there have been!? But the telling is always adapting to fit the times.

During the Great Depression when audiences were consoled by simpler times, theatrical performances of *Little Women* that idealized the March family’s noble poverty were popular all across America. But by 1949, when the Elizabeth Taylor version was released, consumerism had become a patriotic duty. So the movie’s writers invented a new scene in which the sisters go on a Christmas spending spree with money from Aunt March.

The 1994 Winona Ryder edition gave us the first truly feminist telling in which the center shifts from the usually homey tranquillity to a politically engaged drama in which Marmee and Jo advocate for women’s suffrage and none of the family wear silk because it is produced using slavery and child labor. Then the 2017 BBC/PBS miniseries, returns to double down on the domestic front. One review called it “Alcott as fall-wedding Pinterest board.”

So in 2020, it’s fitting that the main conflict in the movie is the patriarchy itself. The tension that women face between having the perfect career and having the perfect family – I know a lot of you in this church understand how real this struggle is. And so the - admittedly controversial - ending of this film attempts to allow us to have our cake and eat it too. Jo winds up in a very romantic marriage proposal situation, while Louisa gets to be seen hugging her novel – her true romance is with her art.

But this schizophrenic blending of two persons into one reminds us that all of this is a fantasy. And maybe in the modern world, a woman doesn’t – or at least shouldn’t - have to choose between the two. In an interesting example of life imitating art, Greta Gerwig was six months pregnant with her first child when filming ended, and went into labor 48 hours after turning in her rough edit. She hid her pregnancy during filming so well that nobody on-set knew she was pregnant. Perhaps a woman can lead a multi-million dollar enterprise and bring new life into the world at the same time?

These are the questions that reside in the realm of feminism. And yes, I already told you that I'm a glutton for punishment, so let's take on feminism. It's an interesting dynamic, even among women. According to a survey by the American Enterprise Institute, more than three quarters of American women support efforts to "strengthen and change women's status in society," yet only a minority, a third at most, identify themselves as feminists.

I think that's because the term can be defined in so many ways. Terms are often like that. In my world "evangelical Christian" is similar. Am I an "evangelical"? If you mean historically and theologically in a way that 1741 Jonathan Edwards would understand, then yes. But if you use it as a 2020 political designation the way you generally see it in the media, well then, no, I don't reflect a lot of that. But it's not a neutral term, is it? And neither is feminist.

So terms need definitions – otherwise you just invent a strawman out of whatever characteristics of the opposition you don't like and then we never get to a place of understanding. And so let's start by doing that. First of all, feminism is concerned with countering sexism.

Here's a fairly generic description: "Sexism is belief that persons are superior or inferior to one another on the basis of their sex. It includes, however, attitudes, values systems, and social patterns which express or support this belief."

So a "feminist" is someone who is opposed to that. Despite its sometimes negative connotation in the public conversation it is simply taken from the Latin word for woman, *femina*. The theologian Elizabeth Johnson defines feminism as "a stance which advocates the flourishing of women as a precondition for genuine human community." Well, I'm all for that and so "feminist" is a perfectly suitable term and one I am happy to be identified with. Call me a "Christian feminist" perhaps.

But again, "feminism" is a moving target. In fact, just like movie versions of *Little Women*, the feminist movement tends to adapt to the era in which it finds itself. Modern sociologists generally sort feminism into four historic movements or "waves" in America. And I say "generally" because you can find debates in academics circles on anything you want to. But I want to give you a quick overview. Because ultimately, I want to show you how the ideas of feminism – in a variety of ages – compare and contrast with the Biblical view of gender differences and all the turmoil that has created over the centuries.

So, **First Wave Feminism** of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries focused on overturning legal stereotypes about the inferior place of women. I want to play you a clip from the film that perfectly captures what First Wave Feminists were up against. And all the clips I am using today revolve around marriage because marriage, and the children that usually follow, is the key to understanding the status of women in any and every society that has existed on the face of the earth since Adam and Eve. So in this scene, the youngest sister Amy, is in Paris pursuing art studies with her rich aunt. But the real reason she is there is to get married and save the rest of her impoverished family. Take a look...[**Amy For Money :50**]

This is what marriage was in most of history - and still *is* in many parts of the world – an economic arrangement. The wife was the property of her husband. This is what First Wave Feminists were fighting for, literally freedom from ownership. Famous names like Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Stanton, the Grimké Sisters. This is the literal time period in which the novel is set.

A major goal was suffrage – the right to vote. Which was achieved in the summer of 1920 with the ratification of the long fought 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution. Which was first submitted to Congress by the way in 1878!

So ladies, a lot of your foremothers worked very hard to win the right for you to vote – so you better go do it. And if you haven't seen it, there is a very cool mural downtown at First and Congress marking the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women's suffrage.

That is also generally regarded as the pinnacle of the First Wave. So **Second Wave Feminism** arose from 1960-1980 to broaden the debate to include cultural inequalities, gender norms and the roles of women in society. So to put it in popular terms, in the 1950's, sure a woman could vote, but she was expected to vote as a domesticated wife and mother idealized by *Leave It To Beaver*. It might not have been the *law* that said you had to wear heels and a dress to vacuum the living room, but that was the societal *expectation*.

But in 1963, a book by Betty Friedan called *The Feminine Mystique* arrived to challenge those notions. Her work is generally considered the spark of the Second Wave. After this, the dominant stream of intelligentsia and conventional wisdom in the 60s and 70s was that men and women's differences were all the result of the environment, that all the differences were the result of conditioning and socialization. Therefore, all differences were socially constructed. Girls play with dolls and boys with guns, because that's how they are *marketed*.

And, she said, therefore, the way in which we can ensure equality and individual freedom and to get over the differences and the conflicts between men and women was simply to change the environment, change men and women. The idea was you raise children *not* as men or women, as male or female, but as simply people.

If you see differences, fight them a little bit. You press the girls to be assertive, and you press the boys to be more nurturing, and raise them just like individuals, as people. Don't raise them in hard categories as men and women. And eventually we'll get over this alienation. We'll get over the oppression, the injustice, the divide. The popular image of the age is Diane Keaton's Best Actress winning turn as *Annie Hall* and her iconic androgynous fashion sense.

I think it's no accident that Jo in our film is often dressed in similar fashion. She and Laurie often share clothing – I mean, even their names...! She's the only one of the sisters who never wears a corset for instance. Jo – in our film at least - is the dictionary definition of a Second Wave Feminist. She has a speech in the film that captures her problem with the romantic ideal of womanhood, but also exposes a tension that would lead to the next phase of feminism. Let's watch...(JO, *Lonely* :53)

You feel the tension. I want to be taken seriously for my talents and my soul...but I still want to be loved. Sociologists discovered that after a generation the whole gender neutral thing just wasn't working. There was a famous Doonesbury cartoon – I couldn't find it unfortunately – where the liberal parents talk about how they got their son a cooking set for his birthday so as not to reinforce gender stereotypes. And as they're telling their friends this, the toddler appears in the room with the pot on his head like a helmet and “shooting” the wooden spoon like a machine gun. Maybe there was something to these differences beyond mere social conditioning.

Does anyone remember the hugely popular book from the early 90's called *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*? It spent more time on the best-seller list than any other book of the decade. Here's a quote from the opening chapter that reveals the premise; “[This book] reveals how men and women differ in **all** areas of their life. Not only do men and women communicate differently, but they think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need, and appreciate differently. They almost seem to be from different planets, speaking different languages and needing different nourishment.”

A complete turn around from the previous view that gender differences were merely societal inventions. Now, popular books never *start* trends. They *ride* trends. And this had been brewing in the academic world of feminist thought for at least a decade. It began in 1982 with the arrival of a book that Harvard press called “the book that started a revolution”; *In a Different Voice* by Carol Gilligan. In that book, and in many other books afterwards, the statement was men and women have different values and different developmental tracks. We have to honor those developmental tracks and honor the peculiar virtues of women, in particular, but men *and* women.

So feminism – in the **Third Wave** – became *feminine* again. You don’t have to dress like a man to get ahead in the world. And you don’t have to dress like a stripper either. There is a feminine ideal that is not at odds with feminist values. And that is where *Little Women* squarely lands. I read an article in *The Atlantic* about our film entitled “Little Women’s Real Feminist Problem”. It says, “[The story] reveals that there was, and is, something powerful about domestic life, and that women are particularly attracted to it.”

I think this is depicted well in the film in a scene in which older sister Meg is about to get married and tomboy Jo tries to talk her out of it. Watch...[**Meg My Dreams :44**].

“Just because my dreams are different than yours doesn’t mean they are wrong.” It’s ok to be a feminine feminist. You can dress like June Cleaver *and* go be a department head like Ward Cleaver!

In fact, Third Wave Feminism grounded these differences in biological science. Another important book, Deborah Blum’s *Sex on the Brain*. She goes through and just shows all of the research on the difference in the way men’s and women’s brains work and emotions work and so forth. She also goes back and shows how the differences between male and female are extremely deep in the animal world as well.

If you study monkeys and fish and sea lions – all kinds of species - though they may actually have differences from species to species as to how the male and female adopt their role, yet in every single species the roles are not interchangeable. The males evolved to do the fighting and the killing for the survival of the species and the females evolved to nurture the young for propagation of the species. And she admits that led to alienation and oppression – male dominance is not ideal - but if we’ve evolved into it, what are you going to do really? Evolutionary adaptation to changing environmental conditions is notoriously slow.

So can you see the feminist dilemma here? Are you pro-women? Are you pro-science? Here's the question; If evolution is the reason for gender differences, not the environment, why should anybody feel we should change it? Not only that, why is anybody upset with it? In fact, let's go further. Why is anybody alienated over it? In the animal world, male and female work together in a harmonious system and from what we can tell, it's not creating a problem. The animals are working together fine in their differing roles.

So here is the big rub between Second and Third Wave Feminism – and this is a huge debate to this day. Are gender differences societal and environmental? Or are they biological and evolutionary? By the way, everybody says we're now in **Fourth Wave Feminism**, it probably started around 2012, not with a book, but with social media. Nobody "authored" the #MeToo movement. But other than mentioning it so you can complete your outline – I told you there were Four Stages – I'm not going to really spend any time on it this morning, because it's complicated and no one has really nailed it down yet. Eventually historians will talk about what it *was*, but it's messy while we're *living* it.

But I do want to deal with this tension between Second and Third Wave Feminism. Let's call it the Jo vs. Meg paradigm. Are gender differences environmental or are they evolutionary? There are two things going on, and each of those views cannot account for both of them. The one is, there *are* gender differences that are real, that are persistent, that cannot go away. We can't get rid of them.

But on the other hand, we also believe there's distortion. There's something too often wrong about the way in which men and women relate – patriarchal sexism. Neither the environmental view nor the evolutionary view can account for them. But I believe the Christian view can.

How do you like that? We're 2/3 the way done with the sermon and I'm just now getting to the theology! *God at the Movies* is a mess. But let's do this. The Christian view can account for what we see, and here's why. The Christian view says, on the one hand, gender differences are created by God, but on the other, gender differences are distorted by sin. I don't know, unless you believe that, how you can account for both. You're going to find yourself with one view, the environmental view or the evolutionary view. You're going to be able to account for one part of the phenomenon but not the other part.

But I believe the Christian view will help us find a synthesis that will in fact lead to female flourishing in creation. I believe it makes sense with what we see. First of all, the Bible says, if you look carefully - and it's very nuanced here - the gender differences are very, very inherent, they are deep, they are profound, and they are good. It rests on one extremely important verse, **Genesis 1:27**, "*So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*"

The Bible says when God created human beings, He created them male and female to reflect the glory of God. He made them in the image of God. The phrase "*imago Dei*" is a profound one and it has to do with being a mirror. Men and women *together* reflect the glory of God. *Together* they reflect God's attributes and God's qualities and God's characteristics. But there is some way in which they reflect them in a complementary way. They are not interchangeable anymore than a bass voice and a tenor voice are interchangeable in making a harmony. Each of them are fine as a solo, but only together can they make a harmony.

The "image of God" designation is the basis for all human dignity – male *and* female. So this is not about a lack of equality. I believe men and women are absolutely *equal* in the site of God – and they should be treated as such on earth, but that doesn't

mean they are the same. By the way, a year ago exactly I went over all this in greater detail in our marriage series in a sermon called "*The Structure of Marriage*" (Oct. 20, 2019) if you want to go online and do a deep dive.

So, that established, what does the Bible say those gender differences *are*? What does the Bible say men are good at versus women, and women are good at versus men? Tread carefully. The Bible insists that there *are* gender differences, that they are inherent, they are profound. They're not just environmental. They're not just socially constructed.

But the Bible also insists, by way of omission, that the differences are *mysterious*, because the Bible never delineates them. Where does the Bible actually say, "Men are better at math"? Where does the Bible say, "Necessarily, women are kinder"? "Sports are a male thing and decorating is a female thing"? It doesn't.

When Paul lays out the character distinctions of a born-again follower of Christ, he says, "This is the way God wants *human beings* to be..." Be loving, be patient, be joyous...He doesn't say, "Look, ladies you're naturally more kind, guys don't sweat it, we'll come back around to you." No.

When the Bible says, Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Meekness. Faithfulness. Self-control. See? There are tough traits and there are soft traits in all of those things. But it's not, "Here's one set for men; here's one for women." When the Bible gives the Fruit of the Spirit - things it wants human beings to do and be - it is not gender-specific. Why? Because while there may be differences in the human flesh – come on, you took anatomy class – there are not to be differences in the human spirit.

I don't know why all the studies demonstrate that when girl babies crawl up to an obstacle they go around and when boy babies crawl up to an obstacle, they knock it over. And when those girls babies and boy babies grow up to be CEO's – and they both should – that they will lead the organizations through obstacles in the same divergent ways. I don't know, except to say that *God* faces obstacles both ways. And when you look at both a female leader and a male leader, you're getting closer to the image of God than you can with just one or the other.

But I know that if you have an all-male board of directors – for instance – you will *never* have the full mind of God in your organizational decision making. You can't. Because you are missing one whole half of the image of God. You need *both* those voices at the table. See what I mean by Christian feminist? Here's the important thing. When we were created in

the image of God, some of the glory, some of the majesty, some of the mystery of God went into the other gender in a way...I don't know, *differently*. It's reflected differently.

As a result, there's an attraction for something in the other that completes or complements us. But remember, the "image of God" means that while we each reflect something of God's nature, we *only* reflect it. We are not the thing itself. We reflect God but we are *not* God. And that means that the attraction that we have for our complementary gender is always going to be incomplete. The fallen nature of human beings means there is always going to be a tension in gender relationships.

And nowhere is that more evident than the marriage relationship. That's at the heart of Louisa Alcott's story because it's at the heart of *our* story. Here's why. Not long after the first marriage, Adam and Eve sinned. The Bible explains that sin is a desire to be your own god. If you look carefully in the book of Genesis, as soon as Adam and Eve decided to be their own god, the first thing that happened was they were alienated from the other gender...first thing. They were ashamed and they covered up their nakedness. What does that mean? It means they covered up their sex. They didn't want the other gender to really see them. They hid. They hid from one another and they hid from God.

Every human being, according to the Bible, senses that they're not right with God and knows there's something in God that alone will complete them. But we hate that knowledge, because we want to live our own lives. We want to be independent. We don't want to know that we need God to complete us. And as a result, we go off into the world looking for something else to save our soul and complete us and cover the nakedness we feel. And the most likely thing in the whole world that could counterfeit or substitute for God would be the other gender.

But the other gender is not the thing that really, truly completes us. It's just a reflection. The attraction we have to the other gender is a signpost, the Bible says, for the fact that we need closure with God Himself. Jesus Christ lived here on earth as a single man. He never got married, but he was complete. Why was he complete? He had a perfect relationship with the Father.

And so we try to replicate that in gender relationships and they fail – because they have to fail. Because an image is not the real thing. I can see the image of a pizza on TV, but the image will not cure my hunger. And so when the image fails us, we hate it. This is one of two possibilities for the way in which we can use the other gender to justify ourselves and cover our nakedness, and to try to save ourselves.

The one thing you can do is actually hate the other gender and become very self-righteous by looking down your nose, by being condescending. “I'm better than you. I'm superior. Men are from Mars, and Mars sucks! Women are from Venus, and Venus is stupid! Marriage is for losers.”

But the more likely way to do it is to look at the other gender and say, “I don't know why, but I feel like this will complete me if I have the love, if I have the affection, if I have the adoration of someone of the other sex.” That's the reason people go back and forth between hating and being enslaved to the other gender. See, in the book *Jo is too afraid of marriage* – she'll *lose* herself - and *Meg* is too desirous of it – it's the only way to truly *be* herself.

The Bible can account for the reality of gender differences. The Bible can account for the distortion. As far as I know, other views of the world can't make sense of that. That's the reality. That's how the Bible answers both the dilemmas of feminism – environment and evolution. And the only way I know for anybody to overcome the dilemma...for you possibly to get away from either being afraid of the other gender or being enslaved to the other gender...is for some other mysterious person to come into your life who is like the other gender.

Jesus was the perfect embodiment of the human spirit – all the fruits of the Spirit perfectly – Jesus was not enslaved to his societal and cultural limitations of gender. Was he assertive? He could command the waves to be still and they obeyed. Was he nurturing? He healed the sick and cared for little children. Jesus was always defying the stereotypical gender norms of his day. And only if he comes into your life, and only, according to the Bible, if you become his bride - whether you're male or female - are you actually liberated from slavery to gender.

Guys, you're liberated from the need to be very masculine. You have to look masculine all the time. You would never want to look weak. Why not? Paul said he boasted in his weakness. You're justifying yourself. You're covering your nakedness. Do you see? You'll only feel like you have self-worth if you're a macho guy, or if you have women falling all over you.

Women can do the same thing back. The feminists are absolutely right about the Cinderella Syndrome - "I need to have a man taking care of me." But what's the alternative? Do you want to do what many people have done, and that is to hate the other gender? That's just as self-justifying. You need somebody in your life. The true Spouse. The true Partner.

You know, I'll tell you something. Singles, if you need to be married, or if you're scared of being married, you shouldn't be. You have to actually give it up before you'll ever be ready for it. Do you know what? Giving it up means to know I don't have to be married to be complete as a human being. My suggestion is you go to the One who says, **(Revelation 22:17)** "*The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'*" That's fifth to last verse in all the Bible.

Jesus Christ says all of history is coming together into a moment in which he will come down, we will come to meet him, and there will be a wedding feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb. That's the wedding feast, and those are the arms, that we *have* to have if we're going to move out into the world amongst both men and women without fear, without enslavement. Jo had it right, "I want to be loved!" The Bible tells us that every good romantic relationship here on earth, if it's not going to be enslaving or alienating, has to point you toward the one Person who can give you the real love, the real completion that you need.

Let's pray...