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NOBODY'S MOTHER

Artemis of the Ephesians
in Antiquity and the New Testament



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INTRODUCTION

AFTER MY AGING PARENTS SOLD their home and redistributed their belongings, I ended up with a hand-colored, monochromatic picture of one of my ancestors. I had seen the photo, but until I hung it on my wall, I had never known her name. At that time, I asked some family members about her.

One told me Julia was on my mother's side—probably through her mother. She came from Spain, having fled from there due to religious persecution. What persecution? When? How had she suffered? How did she end up in the Pacific Northwest? My mother and her mother and her mother before her were all courageous women. Was Julia the catalyst?

As much as I wanted to learn about my ancestor, the questions evoked a familiar sense of loss—the same one that has whispered grief to me for more than three decades. Although I'm the fourth of five kids and grew up expecting to have a large family of my own, I have a body that has treated at least eight embryos as a disease. I have never given birth.

I grew up in Oregon's Willamette Valley with two parents who loved me. While all families have their dysfunctions, I had what many would consider the ideal situation—a mom at home and a dad at the office.¹ My homemaking mother embraced what she saw as her calling. She

¹I have told my story in multiple contexts. Readers can find a version of it as the foreword in Sue Edwards and Kelley Mathews, *40 Questions About Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2022).

taught 4-H entomology (children in her club dubbed her “the Bug Lady”). She did YMCA mom-toddler swim lessons with us, following up with chocolate bars “for protein.” And she helped us turn crayon shavings into stained-glass windows. I learned “Jesus Loves Me” sitting by her in church as she sang soprano with gusto. I watched as my mom taught herself watercolor painting. After looking at a mere sample, she could design and make a dress—sometimes even improve it. She was the kind of mom who made me the envy of fellow Camp Fire Girl campers, because while they were lucky to get mail, *I* got a whole care package.

I spent hours in Mom’s and Dad’s laps, listening to a book or hearing a song. From an early age I learned to can peaches, freeze asparagus, and sell pears that fell in our orchard. One night a week our family of seven would watch a TV show and eat popcorn. During the rest of our downtime, the five of us kids used our imaginations. We had a treehouse with real curtains, a log-cabin playhouse, a dog and a cat and some rabbits, a go-cart, and a one-acre garden. Because my mother was the only child of an only child, we even had my grandmother and her mother all to ourselves. Mom would bristle when people described her as a housewife. “I’m not married to the house,” she would insist. “I’m a *homemaker*.”

Don’t worry, I’ll get to the academic part soon. This is relevant: the whole parenting gig looked great to me, seeing in my mother’s vocation all I could ever want. So, by the time I married, I had embraced the roles of wife and mother as a woman’s highest and best calling. Some of my perspective came out of appreciation for the home my parents had built. But some came from the broader culture, which had made *Fascinating Womanhood* a bestseller. The book laid out a vision for young women to marry and become like Amelia, Thackeray’s “domestic goddess.” After we moved to Arlington, Virginia, when I was ten, I heard about “ideal womanhood” at church. Think of Isabela from Disney’s *Encanto* as a mom, and you get a sense of the impossible ideal.

My dad, who worked for the government, had applied for a transfer to Washington, DC, because he wanted to “expose his kids to culture”—at least that’s how it was presented to me. Free Juilliard String Quartets and Smithsonian museums and National Geographic lectures lured my parents on an adventure they thought would last only a few years.

Down the street from our new house in a semiurban neighborhood was a Bible church with a great youth program. Our family attended a mainline denomination, but my parents let me attend worship wherever I wanted. So I joined that youth group. As I learned the Bible, I also absorbed all they taught and modeled about the nuclear family and how the father at the office and the mother at home was God’s ideal distribution of labor.

After my sophomore and his junior year of college, I married Gary, my high-school sweetheart. I envisioned myself as a pastor’s wife, with service to my husband, our children, and the congregation as my vocation. Just when I considered dropping out of college, though, Gary and his dad urged me to finish. Reluctantly, I stayed in school.

After Gary graduated, I again considered dropping out to put him through seminary. But he convinced me to finish while he taught high-school science, math, and biology. After I graduated, we moved to Texas, and I took a job to support him. He always had broader views about what I could do than I had for myself. I felt the need to assure friends and family that I had no aspirations to make a vocation of my work in human resources: I was employed with a financial services corporation only to “put hubby through.”

Some expressed concern that my being the primary breadwinner would undermine Gary’s manhood. I wondered about that too. But Gary insisted his manhood was not that fragile, and I noticed in the Scriptures that Jesus and the Twelve were supported by women’s income (Lk 8:3).

Six years after we moved to Dallas, Gary graduated, so we decided it was time to expand our family. A year passed, and then another. I went to the doctor, who prescribed some pills. A third year. Nothing. And then it happened—a positive pregnancy test! I ran to the store to pick up steaks for what I envisioned as the best dinner of our lives. I borrowed a friend's china and set up the table by her pool so I could surprise my husband with the big news. He was going to have a new name: Dad.

But cheers turned to sobs when I miscarried.

“Seven pregnancy losses and an ectopic pregnancy requiring emergency surgery” sums up our second decade of marriage. My fluctuating hormones left me wondering who I really was. Meanwhile, my husband wondered what had happened to his happy wife, as he could barely reach me in my grief. During my final surgery—this one an emergency because of the ectopic pregnancy—I asked my doctor to tie my tubes. I saw my womb as a tomb for embryos and a danger to my health. Following my recovery, we moved forward with adoption.

We had three failed adoptions in three years.

Gary and I stood ready to lavish love on a child, yet every door to parenting slammed shut. Throughout that trauma, the most difficult part was not the losses themselves, excruciating as they were. The worst part was not even the financial, emotional, marital, or ethical crises that came with financing treatment, wondering if procedures would work, discovering how differently my husband and I processed grief, making love by the calendar, or navigating the ethics and cost of high-tech treatment. The hardest part was wondering what God had created me to do. Wasn't motherhood the ideal? If I could not procreate, what was my purpose?

I had come to believe, thanks to Aristotle by way of Aquinas, that a female is an undercooked male. I believed that a wife images God indirectly, through her husband—that her body was made for birthing,

while a man's was made for thinking. Following that logic, my ideal of a woman said I would most fully image God by bearing and rearing children. But I now had no category for myself. Wasn't being a mother what God made wives for? In my own system, I failed to do the very thing for which I was created.

I had a mentor, Elizabeth, who gave me opportunities to teach the Bible. In doing so, I thrived. Beyond teaching women's Bible studies, I mentored wives of seminary students. I loved studying the Scriptures, teaching, and shepherding people. But in a way, thriving as a teacher only made matters worse. The Bible teachers I knew said women who wanted to teach had one outlet: "A woman will find her greatest satisfaction and meaning in marriage, not seeking the male role [i.e., Bible teaching], but in fulfilling God's design for her."²

I had read the commentators. Some said "saved through childbearing" (1 Tim 2:15 CSB) meant women were to channel their spiritual gift of teaching to raising of children. Up to that point I had assumed the scholars were right. But here I was, going through infertility, and I was processing my understanding of the passage considering all the single and infertile women with teaching gifts who were unable to fulfill such a mothering mandate.

Additionally, as a young Christian, I had heard a good sermon series on spiritual gifts. The speaker emphasized that such gifts were intended to benefit the entire body of Christ—not limited to one's relatives or friend groups. Some people had told me I possessed teaching gifts. I did love teaching the Bible, but if teaching my own children was supposed to be *the* outlet for my teaching, where did that leave me?

My husband and Elizabeth—both seminary graduates—urged me to study theology. A few years earlier, when the school they had attended opened its ThM degrees to women, I had objected. Why did women need

²Kelly Williams, "Biblical Conservatism and Women Pastors: A Southern Baptist Pastor's Understanding," *The Christian Post*, August 30, 2022, www.christianpost.com/voices/biblical-conservatism-and-women-pastors.html.

to learn the original biblical languages if not to use in the pulpit? I reasoned that seminary was for a man training to be a senior pastor—a vocation women were not designed to do. Nor did I have any desire to do so.

So, what was I made for? The spiritual wound from my apparent deficiency struck at the core of my womanhood. Wasn't a woman designed to mentor and teach the next generation through mothering? How could I live as an incomplete person?

Yet I saw that Paul encouraged some women to remain single (1 Cor 7:8). Were Mary and Martha deficient because they were presumably unmarried (Lk 10:38-42)? Why, if marriage and parenting is the end-all, be-all for a Christian woman, is Priscilla (also called Prisca) mentioned apart from any children she might have had (Acts 18:2-3, 19, 26; Rom 16:3-5; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19)? The merchant of the Thyatira purple company, Lydia—did she even have a husband (Acts 16:14-15, 40)? Kids? Nympha, another house church leader (Col 4:15)—what about her? Where would she fit in an anthropology that equates biology with building the kingdom? And why in the world would Jesus have answered the woman who pronounced, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts at which you nursed!” with, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!” (Lk 11:27-28). The virgins and widows who came after them—like Thecla, Felicitas, Agnes, Catherine of Alexandria, Catherine of Siena, Praxedes, and Pudentiana? What about them? Where did nuns come from if biological motherhood was God's ideal?

I thought I saw in the Bible that marriage is the ultimate outworking of God's male-female dynamic. And I saw the model of male as primary breadwinner and wife as stay-at-home mother rooted in sacred pages. Still, I noticed where Scripture contradicted my thinking. Even Proverbs 31, that passage seemingly describing ideal domesticity, didn't align. In it, the virtuous wife buys and sells merchandise (Prov 31:18), stretches forth her hand to the needy (Prov 31:20), sells belts in the marketplace (Prov 31:24),

and—most shocking of all—teaches the *torah* of *hesed* (Prov 31:26). Aren't those the words for “Pentateuch” and “God’s covenantal love”? Meanwhile, her husband is at the city gate (Prov 31:23). Does he even get paid? Where did my so-called ideal woman fit into such a system?

I had to know: What is a female human and what is God’s vision for her? No less than a foundational biblical anthropology of woman was at stake. What was true, and what had the church picked up from the subculture and passed on to me? I needed to know how first-century authors would have answered this question and to see what they would have said about the idea of a woman created only for home and hearth. Secondary to the question about the primacy of marriage and stay-at-home motherhood was the appropriate outworking of the gift of teaching for a woman. I heard this:

“Childbearing . . . represents the fulfillment of the woman’s domestic role as mother in distinction from the man.” Childbearing, then, is probably selected by synecdoche as representing the appropriate role for women. This rounds out the passage because a woman should not violate her role by teaching or exercising authority over a man; instead, she should take her proper role as a mother of children.³

Also, “When Paul says that a woman will be saved by childbearing, he means, therefore, that they will be saved by adhering to their ordained role.”⁴

The referenced passage falls at the end of 1 Timothy 2. Its words were offered as the rationale for disallowing women’s teaching or exercising the authority of men. Here’s the passage, 1 Timothy 2:8–3:1, in an older and a newer translation, which have key differences:

I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves

³Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 259.

⁴Köstenberger and Schreiner, *Women in the Church*, 260.

in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided [braided] hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman [or wife] to teach, nor to *usurp* authority over the man [or husband], but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she [singular] shall be saved in childbearing, if they [plural] continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety. This is a true saying. (KJV, 1611; with author notes)

So I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or dispute. Likewise the women are to dress in suitable apparel, with modesty and self-control. Their adornment must not be with braided hair and gold or pearls or expensive clothing, but with good deeds, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. A woman [or wife] must learn quietly with all submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman [or wife] to teach or *exercise* authority over a man [or husband]. She must remain quiet. For Adam was formed first and then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, because she was fully deceived, fell into transgression. But she will be delivered through childbearing, if she continues in faith and love and holiness with self-control. This saying is trustworthy. (NET, 1996; with author notes)

Saved and delivered through childbearing. What do these words really mean? I had to know. If the primary outlet for a woman with the gift of teaching is parenting, having a baby should be a big priority. Does that mean a woman should try to have as many babies as possible? Such an idea might seem silly or at least strange. Yet the mother of a friend from Romania birthed sixteen children because her pastor taught that women had to continue bearing children to be saved, based on how he interpreted the verses above. I wondered, How have others understood the passage? Has the church through the centuries understood Paul to connect salvation with having big families?

All of this raised textual questions: Did the author of this influential document intend a universal application for every woman everywhere and always? Or did he intend a local application based on a timeless truth? Does his observation that the man was made first root a practice of female silence in the creation order, predating the fall? If so, does that make it a principle of creation order, rooted in the ideal state? And does it follow that men speaking with authority and women remaining silent is the for-all-time ideal? If so, how do we reconcile this principle of creation order with the Spirit filling women to prophesy in the church at Corinth (1 Cor 11:5)? Indeed, why did God call women to prophesy in every dispensation in which he called men to do so? Why was it a sign of the Spirit—instead of being a mark of male failure—on the day of Pentecost when both men *and* women, including girls, prophesied?

Praying (1 Cor 11:5). Prophesying (1 Cor 11:5). Being an apostle (Rom 16:7).⁵ These actions and gifts all involve public speech. So why would God raise up women prophets like Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah, whose public proclamation included saying “thus saith the Lord” to men—even when good men were available? Add to these Junia, Elizabeth, Anna, Mary, and Phillip’s daughters. What about the women in Corinth, whom Paul assumed would pray and prophesy in the assembly?⁶ Why would Paul, only one chapter after saying what women should do with their heads when praying and prophesying, rank prophesying above teaching (1 Cor 12:28)—yet elsewhere prohibit all women from teaching (the lesser gift) while acknowledging that women will prophesy (the greater)? Didn’t both involve public speaking in the church? Wasn’t a “thus saith the Lord” of prophesy more like preaching than teaching?

⁵A full exploration of women in public ministry is beyond the scope of this book. For more on that subject, I recommend Sue Edwards and Kelley Mathews, *40 Questions About Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2022).

⁶See Miriam (Ex 15:20), Deborah (Judg 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Junia (Rom 16:7), Elizabeth (Lk 1:41-45), Anna (Lk 2:36-38), Mary (Lk 1:46-55), Philip’s daughters (Acts 21:9), and female prophets in Corinth (1 Cor 11:5).

It seemed that I needed answers to fundamental questions about what it meant and means to be saved through childbearing: Is the passage saying women should refrain from teaching truth in the presence of men because a woman's role of quietness is rooted in creation order as God's original ideal? Did "she will be saved through childbearing" (1 Tim 2:15 NRSV) relate to women in all churches throughout time? Or were the words to a specific recipient about his context, but with global ramifications—that is, handle false doctrine by silencing false teachers, but let them learn?

I needed to know. As I prayed about what to do, I did apply to seminary and was accepted. Yet I still worried: Was I pushing my way into a vocational world God intended only for men?

On the way out the door to my first class, I dropped to my knees in front of my couch, and I begged God to stop me if I was wrong. To my surprise these words from Jesus came to mind: "Mary has chosen what is better" (Lk 10:42 NIV). I thought of the story in which Jesus' quote appears, in a narrative I had barely thought about for months. Its context fit perfectly. Martha thought her sister was wrongly neglecting domesticity to learn theology, but Jesus had a different view of Mary's priorities.

I stood with confidence that day, and I walked out my front door and into the classroom. I had no idea where my seminary education would take me. I knew only that the first female seminarian was not feminist Betty Friedan's idea, but Jesus Christ's.

While at seminary, as I learned Greek and Hebrew, I saw many places where the human writers of Scripture had women in view, but I had missed their presence because translations had de-emphasized these women. For example, I had memorized, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful **men**, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2 KJV, emphasis mine). Seeing that the Greek said *anthrōpōis*, or "people," I realized Paul had faithful *people* in view.

Then there was the passage that seemed to suggest I was undermining my husband's role of provider by putting him through seminary—the passage that says men who fail to provide for their families are worse than unbelievers (1 Tim 5:8). I was surprised to find the language was similarly inclusive. If someone (*tis*, τῖς) fails, *that person* is worse than an unbeliever. The word was broad enough to include both men and women. A few verses later, in the same context, the author even says a believing *woman* (*pistē*, πιστή) is to provide for her relatives (1 Tim 5:16). I double-checked with my Greek professor to make sure I was reading that correctly.

Observations such as these reinforced the big question: Was childbearing really the main spiritual outlet for a woman with the gift of teaching? What if that was a misinterpretation? If so, what did the author mean by “saved through childbearing”?

Answers to these questions would help answer the bigger questions about what God had made me—and other infertile women, single women, widows, and actually *all* women—to be and do. My anthropology of women was rooted in what I had thought was faithful exegesis. But the more I read in Hebrew and Greek, the more I saw how my anthropology of women had flaws.

Some people said to forget about the guy who wrote the words “saved through childbearing.” He was confused, they said. But Paul was a brilliant scholar, theologian, and rhetorician. Two thousand years later, people across the world still marvel at his mind. It seemed unlikely that he would contradict himself within three chapters of a letter (1 Cor 11, 14).

Others wrote off Paul as a misogynist. But his greetings in Romans 16 are the opposite of those that would come from someone who devalues women. Phoebe was both a deacon of a specific church and his benefactor (Rom 16:1). Rufus's mother was a mom to him (Rom 16:13). Junia served jail time with him for the gospel (Rom 16:7). He mentions six more:

Prisca (Rom 16:3),⁷ Mary (Rom 16:6), Tryphena and Tryphosa (Rom 16:12), Persis (Rom 16:12), Julia (Rom 16:15), and the sister of Nereus (Rom 16:15).⁸

Some said to disregard New Testament teaching about women's silence, because Paul couldn't help himself, living as he did in a culture steeped in patriarchy. Yet Paul also had vision of a different world (2 Cor 12:2). He had a highly developed eschatology. For him, the crucifixion and resurrection overturned the kingdoms of this world, and the change in male-female partnership served as a harbinger of things to come. To him, celibacy whispers of a world when procreation is unnecessary—no one dies. He himself chose to live without a loving partner to pursue his calling as the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13). Instead of setting up male-power structures, he chose words for influential people that are as devoid as possible of power: guardian (*episkopon*, ἐπίσκοπον; 1 Tim 3:2), servant/slave (deacon; 1 Tim 3:8, 12), and widow (1 Tim 5:9).⁹

I could not look at Scripture without addressing Paul. Others told me Paul was a product of his time and that he was simply trying to get the church to align with the culture—which rewarded women for having

⁷“Priscilla” is the Roman diminutive form of “Prisca,” and the form that New Testament writers usually use when referring to Prisca (see Acts 18:2, 18, 26; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19).

⁸Lucy Peppiatt observes that “many of Paul’s fellow workers were women. . . . He was happy with women as leaders of house churches (Lydia in Acts 16 and Phoebe in Rom 16:1). We know of Priscilla and Aquila, who were both leaders and who both disciplined Apollos in the faith (Acts 18:26), and Phoebe, who led a church at Cenchræe (Rom 16:1). Paul refers to his friend and coworker Junia as an apostle (Rom 16:7). Furthermore, he is clearly happy with women prophesying and praying in public in Corinth, and obviously approving of Phillip’s four daughters, who were known as prophets (Acts 21:9). Given the way in which he describes the gift of prophecy as being that which edifies the *whole* church, and given that he elevates the gift of prophecy above the gift of teaching (1 Cor 12:28 is expressed in terms of priority and precedence: *first* apostles, *second* prophets, *third* teachers), it would seem strange for him to implement a contradictory practice that women should stay silent. This poses an immediate problem for the verses on silencing of women.” Lucy Peppiatt, *Women and Worship at Corinth: Paul’s Rhetorical Arguments in 1 Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 12.

⁹The church where Timothy ministers has so many widows (or man-less women—the term *widow* could refer to more than those bereft of husbands) that Paul advises him to divide their number into three groups. The neediest “actual” widows, were to go on “the list” and double as staff, providing they met qualifications. The requirement for widows on “the list” (or “enrolled,” 1 Tim 5:9) to have been the wife of one husband parallels the requirement for a male overseer to be the “husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2). Paul did not advise marital or character requirements for general feeding of the hungry (Rom 12:20). See Sandra L. Glahn, “The ‘Widow’ in the Early Church: Marital Demarcation, Office Title, or Both?” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Fort Worth, Texas, November 18, 2021, www.wordmp3.com/details.aspx?id=40733.

children—for the sake of the church’s witness. But Paul knew how to exegete something as basic as Genesis 1 and 2, and he could see past his own cultural context if he was going to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

I knew I needed to discern the difference between content written for an immediate audience—like avoiding meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8)—and that which is applicable in every context for all time. I’ve never seen American Christians greet each other with holy kisses (2 Cor 13:12), and I can’t take Paul’s cloak to him in Troas (2 Tim 4:13). So how *do* we know when something is culturally bound?

I knew I needed scholars to help me understand—scholars who held a high view of Scripture, a fair view of Paul and his perception of gender, and whose explanations of 1 Timothy 2 accounted for all the interpretive factors which, to that point, looked like someone had tried to shoehorn them into fitting.

After earning my ThM, I went on to get my PhD with a focus on first-century backgrounds, especially as they relate to women. I also looked at history, tracing women and their contributions to the church for two thousand years. I found that the singular story I had been told about women (that is, “men have always held all the clergy roles”) was incorrect. I found the widows and women deacons referenced in the church fathers and ecumenical council records—not to mention funerary inscriptions. I found the wives of male Reformers teaching, preaching, and burying the dead as expressions of the priesthood of all believers. I found Black women learning Greek and Hebrew alongside Black men in traditionally Black colleges—following in the tradition of Paula, Jerome’s translation partner—long before White seminaries opened their doors to female students. Betty Friedan, a feminist impulse, or capitulating to culture had not started this after all. It was rooted in the design for gender parity, in imaging God himself.

* * *

Nobody's Mother is the book I wish I had had to help me address key questions about motherhood and teaching based on what it means to be saved through childbearing in 1 Timothy 2. But why the subtitle, *Artemis of the Ephesians in Antiquity and the New Testament*? What does Artemis have to do with it? In the quest to open doors for women in public ministry, some scholars in the past had said Paul's reference to childbirth was due to the influence of Artemis, an Ephesian goddess whom they associated with motherhood and fertility. But the view of Artemis as mother/fertility goddess had flaws. So, many scholars eliminated the "Artemis explanation" as an option. Yet in doing so, they lost other important background considerations relating to Artemis unrelated to her fertility or mothering—considerations that do help us better understand Timothy's world and Paul's concerns.

This book is for the reader who wants to avoid sacrificing a high view of Scripture while working to reconcile conflicting narratives about God's view of women. It's for the reader who sees Paul describe Priscilla as a fellow worker (Rom 16:3), notes that he says a wife has authority over her husband's body (1 Cor 7:4), and suspects the apostle has been misunderstood. It's for the person who looks at the history of the church and knows huge parts of the narrative—namely, the one about men and women partnering to do ministry—have gone missing. Or maybe they've seen that the Roman Catholic Church prohibits women from serving the Eucharist while having no major issue with women preaching. Meanwhile, Protestant rationale tends to be vice versa,¹⁰ with women more likely to serve Communion than to preach. Why the difference?

This book is for the person who sees God giving spiritual gifts to women for the maturing of the body of Christ and has a hunch they're supposed to use them far beyond the nuclear family, important as that is.

¹⁰William G. Witt, *Icons of Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Theology for Women's Ordination* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 19–40.

Even though I did not want to make women my go-to topic, I have heard from many who have found this research life-giving. So now I'm passionate about the subject, helping people—men and women alike—find answers to the same questions I had. Since the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements, I've encountered even more people asking about women in public ministry, at the root of which is having a clear understanding of “saved through childbearing.” Many confess that they have guarded the church doors against any form of feminism while leaving the back door wide open to misogyny.

I realize that I take a risk in sharing my journey at the beginning. The reader may say, “Your experience has led you to see the text a certain way.” To which I would answer, “Of course. As has yours!” Everyone looks at the text through the grid of personal experience.

Nevertheless, it's true that we must always view our experience through the grid of the biblical text, not the other way around. Kathy Keller notes, “Unfortunately, I have often found that there is little theological reflection to follow the stories of personal journey.”¹¹ Fair point. What follows my story, then, is chapters of theological reflection. My hope in sharing my own narrative is that it will put a human face on the questions we will explore in the pages to follow, expanding contemplation of the text to reach the realm of application that affects real people.

The issues considered in this work assume the inspiration of Scripture, but they question the validity of some *interpretations*.¹² The wideness in the range of interpretive options among those who love Scripture is exactly why my journey has taken me where it has.

So let's start at the very beginning. Woman was created in the image of God (Gen 1:27) and is ontologically equal to, rather than inferior to,

¹¹Kathy Keller, *Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles: A Case for Gender Roles in Ministry*, Fresh Perspectives on Women in Ministry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), loc. 637, Kindle.

¹²Some who believe the Scriptures urge women to public ministry are also among the strongest defenders of the authority of Scripture. A few who come to mind are F. F. Bruce, Gordon Fee, N. T. Wright, and Craig Keener.

man. In creation, woman was necessary as man's indispensable companion before God could pronounce the world to be "very good" (Gen 1:31). Whether she is single or married, divorced or widowed, with or without biological or adopted children, a woman has the same highest calling as every other human: to glorify God and multiply worshipers—that is, to do the will of God (Mt 28:19-20). This is what she was made for. This is a biblical anthropology. And this is the grid through which our interpretation will begin.

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