A Rite of Passage: Helping Daughters Reach Their Godly Potential

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An honest conversation with a young Christian woman in the United States would reveal the prevalent hurt and fear in her experience as well as her search for meaning and identity. Media and society encourage her to find empowerment in a “Girls Gone Wild” or “Spring Break” rite of passage experience and to allow her peers and the opposite sex to form her meaning and identity. The Christian church negates these ideas, but offers discipleship that is often one-dimensional teaching about following God’s commands. She needs more than that.

So, how do we intentionally empower Christian daughters to become fully the women God created them to be? If their true identity has been exchanged for a lie, extinguished by negative voices or unpleasant experiences, covered by thick shame, or otherwise dismantled, how can it be recovered? And, even if their true identity has not been stolen or lost, how do we intentionally develop the seedling identity in the young? This cannot be accomplished through one-dimensional teaching, but may be facilitated by a Christian rite of passage that refers to her whole being—spiritual, psychological, social, sexual, intellectual, and emotional.¹

Though many American Christians are suspicious of ritual and symbol, we return to them at the most important times of life. Graduation is always full of “pomp and circumstance,” special symbolic clothing, “crossing the stage,” and changing the tassel right to left. Even the most nontraditional pastors celebrate a traditional wedding ritual where participants wear distinctive clothing, are physically given to one another, and adorn their left ring fingers with the symbols of that union. And, when life has expired, we find comfort in a ritual that has the same biblical readings of future hope, the flowers and casket, and the line of cars with headlights on, journeying to the place of rest. These are not the “dead rituals” that provoke the ire of American Christians. No, they are meaningful ceremonies that accompany some important rites of passage in life. In fact, “although rituals tend to be conservative, that is, valuing the past and honoring tradition, rituals can also be innovative, that is, training their participants into a new way of thinking.”²

Graduation and marriage are rites of passage in that they move those involved from one stage of life to another and show transformation as well as an increase in agency. A rite of passage is often called an initiation and may be accompanied by teaching, passing a test, overcoming, or receiving a gift or gifts.³ Not all rites of passage are ritualized; in fact, in North America, most are not. Christian women who have realized their true identity and potential would likely narrate a series of several life experiences that have catalyzed this transformation rather than a distinct ritual. Some may argue that initiation is a daily, gradual occurrence for daughters and happens through gaining more responsibility at home or various “passage activities,” such as “beginning menstruation, getting a driver’s license, reaching drinking age, graduating, moving away from the parental home, or earning an income.”⁴ These are often unritualized.

Though becoming a godly woman who realizes her true identity and potential is a very significant rite of passage, it also does not have an accompanying ritual. It is a mark of Christian womanhood, and ritually nurturing and celebrating it transforms the participants. To mark passage to adulthood, some celebrate a quinceañera or a debutante ball, but most just float through this time as liminal, “betwixt and between,” wondering who they are and where they fit into the unclear societal or Christian scheme. A rite of passage for Christian womanhood can clarify the Christian scheme and provide teaching and experiences that grow Christian daughters.

In 1994, The Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential cited the lack of rites of passage in global society as a problem that results in confusion regarding the marks of age-related social roles and the societal requirements for those roles.⁵ Young Christian women are learning, through the teaching of organizations such as Christians for Biblical Equality (and not merely through societal requirements), that they may realize their true identity and potential without traditional gender restrictions. This wonderful truth may be imparted to Christian daughters through a rite of passage that intentionally marks their capacity to live fully as the people they were created to be.

Why a rite of passage?

It is certainly possible that women may realize all of this without a rite of passage. Rites of passage are not always effective, as explained by Arthur Magida in Opening the Doors of Wonder and Ronald Grimes in Deeply Into the Bone. In the same text, however, Grimes argues that effective rites of passage have certain characteristics that enhance their efficacy. Before investigating these, a brief understanding of rites of passage in general is in order.

Arnold van Gennep coined the phrase “rite of passage” as a descriptor of his research into coming-of-age rituals in indigenous tribes at the turn of the twentieth century. At that time, it was typical to observe only male rituals as the archetype for both genders, and he found that the ones he observed had three stages: preliminal, liminal, and postliminal—or “rites of separation, transition, and reincorporation.”⁶ The rite of separation separated the boy from his mother and physically moved him to another place in the “bush” where he would undergo various trials.
and learn skills that he would need for the next stage in life. This training was a liminal (i.e., on the threshold of maturity) stage, where the no-longer-a-boy-but-not-yet-a-man would be in special nonhierarchical community with others like him.\(^7\) Having learned skills and passed the test, he would be reincorporated into the community as a man with new social status, responsibilities, and expectations. Gordon Dalbey wistfully describes a Nigerian ritual that follows this pattern in *Healing the Masculine Soul: God’s Restoration of Men to Real Manhood*, and he suggests that Christians follow an adapted pattern to call boys to manhood.

Traditional rites of passage for women, however, are different from those for men. Humanities and religious studies professor Bruce Lincoln found that traditional women’s rites follow a basic pattern of “enclosure, metamorphosis (or magnification), and emergence.”\(^8\) Thus, often at menarche (puberty), a girl is separated from others and isolated or enclosed. At this point, she magnifies the skills she already has and may identify with a cosmic or mythical heroine through the stories she is told. Then, she emerges as a woman, one who is able to create and sustain life. However, since there was no higher social status for women in the cultures Lincoln studied, he states, “women’s initiation offers a religious compensation for a sociopolitical deprivation. Or . . . it is an opiate for an oppressed class.”\(^9\) Christians who believe in equality for men and women would have difficulty wistfully describing this type of women’s rite and adapting the pattern. In fact, psychologist Abigail Brenner writes, “While this [enclosure, metamorphosis, emergence] may be true for traditional rites of passage, women today are finding the “male” structure of the ritual—departure, journey, and return—to be both powerful and true to their own process.”\(^10\)

However, is rejecting the entirety of the traditional female pattern in order to embrace the entirety of the male pattern the best solution? Further, how much of another culture’s rituals should be transplanted into a non-ritual society? Grimes would argue against ritual fantasizing and wholesale borrowing. To think of another culture’s rites as idyllic is simply not realistic, and to borrow them wholesale is to “cannibalize” them and take “spiritual booty.”\(^11\) And while the female process does not sound equal, there is merit in enclosure and magnification that should not be lost. Why not seek to learn from both? The male process is accomplished in a community of peers, while the female is individual, but a combination of individuality and community may be the most effective.

Simply combining these ideas, however, does not necessarily form an effective rite of passage; Grimes found that the effective ones have three characteristics. First, they function to draw attention to the passage—“spiritually, psychologically, and socially,”\(^12\) and I add intellectually and emotionally. Second, they have the purpose of transformation, as from a caterpillar to a butterfly. Finally, they require much from the individuals going through the rite and their communities. “Ritual knowledge is rendered unforgettable only if it makes serious demands on individuals and communities, only if it is etched deeply into the marrow of soul and society.”\(^13\) Thus, an effective rite of passage functions as an attention-giver, has the purpose of transformation, and requires much from individuals and their communities.

My dissertation, “Rites of Passage for Women in Evangelical Christianity: A Ritual and Theological Analysis,” investigated four Christian rites of passage and evaluated them according to both Grimes’s three characteristics of effective rites and the four core values of evangelicalism: biblicism, conversionism, crucicentrism, and activism. Based on this analysis, the conclusion of the dissertation had a short section that suggested principles for forming rites of passage for women today. The remainder of this article will outline the manner in which a rite of passage may intentionally nurture a woman’s true identity and godly potential as a strong daughter.

Based on the analyzed rituals, the dissertation concluded that mature Christian womanhood is realized through relationship; the rites emphasized relationship with God and with others:

This may reflect a common reading of Genesis 1–2 and an implicit understanding of male and female as created in the image of God. Since God is Trinity, and thus in eternal relationship, relationships among humans, whether family, peer, or marital, display the image of the Trinitarian God. This would be the shared interpretation of Genesis 1:27, “So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (TNIV), and Genesis 2:18a, “The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (TNIV). Though this is specifically referring to the man, Adam, it may be generalized to humans; the idea that it is not good for humans to be alone is reflected in the definition of maturity as relational.\(^14\)

Though the rites themselves specifically emphasized relationship with God and others, some also implicitly emphasized a relationship with self and hinted at a relationship with creation. I believe that the true identity of a woman (or a man) is realized through developing relationship with God, self, others, and creation:

These relationships are not completely separate categories or compartments. The dividing lines are more like buoys on rope in a swimming pool dividing the water than like thick walls; each is mixed with the others. Humans are unified beings, who cannot separate body and soul/spirit. . . . Humans are also complex beings; we are physical, social, sexual, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and relational, and these aspects of our being also flow into one another like water flows beneath the buoys on rope.

The role of a rite of passage into . . . womanhood is to create opportunities for girls to gain knowledge, skills, and a
disposition that seeks maturity and development in these relationships. Though a relationship with self is not clear in Genesis 1–2, relationship with God, others, and creation is. A relationship with self, or knowing and caring for oneself becomes clear in the biblical injunction to love one’s neighbor as oneself.\(^{15}\)

A distinctively Christian rite of passage that develops these relationships provides opportunity to pay attention to the passage into womanhood, cultivate transformation, and allow both the individual and the community to invest.

Rites of passage are culturally defined. For that reason, Grimes argues against importing a rite from another culture into one’s own. Even Christians residing in one particular country (e.g., the United States) are not a homogeneous culture; therefore, a rite of passage into Christian womanhood in New York City may not look the same as one in a small Midwestern town. The core principles would be similar, but some of the practical applications of that core may be different, even if both Christian communities affirm “the biblical truth that all believers—without regard to gender, ethnicity or class—must exercise their God-given gifts with equal authority and equal responsibility in church, home and world.”\(^{16}\) Below, I will delineate the core principles for a rite of passage and then give examples of their practical application.

**Core principles for inventing the rite**

As stated above, divisions in one’s relationship with God, self, others, and creation are artificial, since they flow into one another. For practical purposes, however, the categories can be helpful. Consider the keywords in the quadrants in Figure 1. These lists are not meant to be comprehensive, but serve as a starting point for delineating areas of development for Christian daughters.

Since adult Christian women reading Figure 1 may consider their development in these quadrants as incomplete, a journey motif for womanhood is also a core principle. The women who lead the rite of passage and seek to help others develop these relationships have not completed the journey of womanhood, for it lasts a lifetime; they are simply further along. A rite of passage invites daughters to journey together with “older sisters” who offer wisdom in these areas and are continually growing.

In addition to understanding the journey motif, participants concentrate on developing two habits that many adult Christian women lack: asking for help and investing in themselves. A personal mentor is foundational to the rite of passage, and the participant herself must ask for that relationship. Grimes states that a rite of passage requires investment by the community and, thus, individuals in the community of women in a local body of believers (this need not be limited to one church) may invest as mentors to daughters in the community. The participant must also choose to invest in herself by financially contributing to this process and committing her time.

Possibly the main function of a rite of passage is to create space to talk about being a Christian woman. Though churches may nurture one’s relationship with God and with others, it is often in a generic human sense rather than in a gender-related sense. Individual women’s preferences and personalities vary, and we cannot determine whether gender differences are nature or nurture, so it is important to “move beyond [the nature or nurture debate] and to examine the [gender] differences as we see them and what might be valuable about them.”\(^{17}\) Christian women relate to God, self, others, and creation in ways that are often similar to others of their gender. A rite of passage creates space where daughters are not simply taught to be Christians, but to be Christian women.\(^{18}\)

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**Figure 1: Keywords for Relationship with God, Self, Others, and Creation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship With:</th>
<th>God</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Creation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal relationship with God</td>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>Revealing the beauty of creation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling/vocation</td>
<td>Beauty</td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>Creating a positive physical atmosphere (e.g., in a home)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Body image</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Giving life (babies and gardening, cooking, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual gifts</td>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Caregiver</td>
<td>Creativity (think broadly)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Perseverance/endurance</td>
<td>Nurturer</td>
<td>Stewardship of creation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance by God</td>
<td>Intellect</td>
<td>Connecting</td>
<td>Care for the earth’s resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance in Christ</td>
<td>Desirability/sense of worth</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Learning about the earth’s resources and their use/misuse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security in Christ</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Verbal processor</td>
<td>Protecting/preserving creation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical knowledge and study</td>
<td>Valuing menstruation</td>
<td>Intuitive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal/group Bible study</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation in corporate worship</td>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>Career</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>Ethnic heritage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skill in biblical interpretation</td>
<td>Sexual purity</td>
<td>Career</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consistent spiritual growth</td>
<td>Hygiene</td>
<td>Care</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being created in the image of God</td>
<td>Care for appearance</td>
<td>Nurturer</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quiet meditation</td>
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Finally, the rite of passage is enhanced by rich symbolism. Symbols have power, but that power is often regulated by the community that uses those symbols. Purity rings have been an important symbol for Christians, because they connect to the wedding ring and because they are tangible, everyday reminders of one's commitment. Though symbols used in a rite of passage may vary greatly according to the local community, symbols must be carefully planned and used.

Symbols, creating space to talk about being a Christian woman, the journey motif, learning the skills of asking for help and self-investment, the four relationships—these are underlying principles for a rite of passage that empowers Christian daughters to realize their true identity and godly potential. The rite must also adhere to Grimes's three keys of ritual effectiveness and keep the tripartite male and female processes in mind. Lest the reader think this is all too complicated, vast, and theoretical, the following example will apply these principles to possible portions of a rite.

**An example rite**

*Beginnings: Menarche*

A woman experiences her rites of passage in distinct physical ways. Menarche, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause physically move her from one stage to the next. Although pregnancy and childbirth are celebrated, menarche and menopause are often associated with shame and either dirtiness or deterioration. It would be of great benefit to Christian women to pay positive attention to these two passages; the focus for our daughters is menarche.

Although guiding girls to realize their true identity begins as early as possible, it should become more intentional at the time of menarche. Young adolescent girls, though often rejecting the guidance of more mature women, still need that guidance, especially as they experience this physical change that affects all the aforementioned relationships. Sociologist Lisa McMinn, in *Sexuality and Holy Longing*, laments the devaluing of menstruation in Western society, stating:

> The collective shame and hate of menstruation that women share has emerged partly out of a long-running history of considering femaleness inferior to maleness. Many cultures considered female sexuality not only as being dangerous but as causing women to be frail, irrational, and illogical. By the time humanity reached the Victorian era, Western women had long accepted femaleness as a curse to be borne but not celebrated. 19

A close look at Genesis 3 shows that God did not curse the man or the woman, but rather cursed the serpent and the ground. That women would have pain in childbirth was a result of the fall, not a curse from God. Still, Christian and non-Christian women alike refer to menstruation as “the curse” and are ashamed of it, while pharmaceutical companies regularly offer effective ways to avoid it. When seeking to grow strong daughters, menarche is an opportunity to teach young girls to bless their bodies rather than curse them and to celebrate that they are uniquely created to give life.

A woman can give life in a way distinct to her gender. She is able to carry a child for nine months and bear the excruciating pain of labor for the joy that comes after it. A Christian woman can identify with the Virgin Mary—the one whom God chose to partner with in bearing Jesus, who was God. And, even if a woman does not have the ability or opportunity to bear a child, perhaps she can identify with Jan Meyers in her conversation over coffee with her friend Brent Curtis:

Suddenly, he became very earnest. When Brent got earnest, he would slightly cock his head, and it would shake with a small tremor as he waited for a response. He asked me, “How are you?” He really wanted to know. My threshold wasn’t especially high that day, and I teared up. I tried to explain the difficulty of continuing day to day as a single woman, especially as I give of myself in the counseling office, fighting for other people’s marriages.

Brent listened and leaned forward, and with simple focus, he said to me, “Jan, I’m so sorry that you are having to give life this way.” He knew my longings for marriage and children.

“But one thing is sure,” he said. “You will have a very special place in heaven.”

God gave women the capacity to bear the weight—the heaviness and the pain—and the waiting—the time—in order for God to give life to the Redeemer, partnering with the life-giving woman. And this giving life, as attested above, is not simply for biologically giving life, but also for giving life to nieces, nephews, others in the community, a business, new recipes, plants, children—the list is endless! Menstruation can be a time for a woman to come away, reflect, and remind herself that God wants to partner with her in giving life to redeem others. 21

The traditional stages in both male and female rites of passage may be combined at menarche. It is a rite of separation from childhood and an entrance into liminality. It may also include enclosure. When a girl is nearing the age that she may menstruate, a group of women of various ages can gather her and several others her age to chat about the upcoming physical change. The women can give each girl a menarche “kit” with items she will need when she begins to menstruate and teach her to celebrate this monthly process through telling stories of how the women give life. This is the community aspect. When each girl actually begins her cycle, the women can celebrate her individually with a chocolate party, thus welcoming her into their company as one who is like them in this respect. She joins the company of the women and then also welcomes those who follow her. This celebration acts as a rite of separation from girlhood and may include a symbol or action that designates the change.

Although in some cultures this physical change means that the girl is a woman, in North American culture, womanhood is reserved for later in life. Rites of passage are culturally bound, and, in this case, should reflect the best of North American...
Christianity. Thus, menarche is when the young person enters the stage of liminality, no-longer-a-girl-but-not-yet-a-woman.

Continuing: Concentration and consummation

While daughters begin menstruation at differing dates, a local community can choose a particular age or life stage to concentrate on her passage to womanhood. It is important to choose a time when the larger society and the church can actively recognize that she is no longer a girl, but now a woman. The rite of passage into womanhood, called “Woman” at Nyack College, is accomplished in the student’s last year, and the final ritual, “crossing over” into womanhood, is tied with graduation, a consummation in itself. Even communities that have not begun their daughter’s journey with a menarche celebration can choose to celebrate a young person’s womanhood. A yearlong process with a distinct beginning, middle, and end follows the traditional three-part rite of passage and can be contextualized for the local community.

Budget, meeting dates, mentors, and symbols are best determined and communicated before the participant commits. At Nyack, in order to participate in the rite of passage, participants must complete an intake survey and interview, choose a mentor, and pay a fee. After these tasks are accomplished, Woman begins with a rite of separation—an initiation. Because the initiation is a separation from “normal” life, participants are surprised and somewhat uncomfortable with the ritual process, symbols, and gifts they receive; it seems mysterious. It brings them together with the small team of leaders and the peers with whom they will journey closely in this concentrated time. Their mentors hold them accountable for attending all meetings and completing the reading and the tasks assigned throughout the journey.

The participants are journeying to a final ritual where they embrace and define the name “woman” and to which they invite people in their community. This final meeting is also ritualistic and has symbols and gifts; the women create and present projects that signify what becoming a woman means to them, and they receive the symbol of womanhood. The initiation meeting is semi-formal, while the final meeting is formal; a woman needs to be able to dress appropriately for differing situations. Between these two, several less-formal meetings unfold where the women develop their relationship with God, self, others, and creation. While the number, format, and length of the meetings may vary, below are brief suggestions for developing the four relationships.

Relationship with God—Fundational to Christian womanhood is knowledge of God. Christian daughters must realize that their Creator is neither male nor female, but that those are categories God invented and that God, the inventor, is thus outside of them. Women are special creations of God and bear God’s image. Lisa McMinn writes of six characteristics they, therefore, have:

1. Our daughters are immortal and spiritual beings with souls that have the potential to respond to God . . . 2. Our daughters have a rational ability to reason, to take in information and draw conclusions, to be self-aware and self-reflective . . . 3. Our daughters are intrinsically relational, as God is (as demonstrated by the Trinity), and are intended to be in community . . . 4. Our daughters are responsible moral agents who have a sense of “oughtness” about their lives and their world . . . 5. Our daughters are creative and able to create what is good and useful. . . . 6. Our daughters possess an office of rulership and have been charged to be stewards over creation.

Our daughters must realize these truths.

The main dispostion for a strong daughter who knows her true identity and realizes her godly potential is that of consistent growth in her relationship with God. Activities that develop this relationship may include learning biblical interpretation skills, prayer, spiritual gifts inventories, and reading and discussing the stories of women in Scripture. A woman’s relationship with God is enhanced through examples of biblical women as well as these other activities.

Relationship with self—Most Christian churches seek to grow their members’ relationships with God and with one another; in fact, exalting Christ (relationship with God) and loving people (relationship with others) is sometimes the mission statement of churches. However, it seems that many people, young ones especially, do not really know themselves. Self-knowledge acts as a basis for one’s relationship with others: truly knowing oneself helps one truly know those around her. In my experience guiding women through a rite of passage thus far, I notice their relationship with themselves is the area that needs the most growth and to which I give the most attention. Rather than loving the person made in the image of God, they tend to berate and disparage her.

In today’s world of smart phones, Skype, electronic games, and texting, young people rarely spend enough time quietly alone to learn about and respect or value themselves. Various historical rites of passage have emphasized times of silence and solitude, and McMinn tells the story of a more modern vision quest at her menarche for a young woman named Sarah, who spent time alone in a deserted cottage and was transformed. This is a delightful combination of the male rite pattern of separation and the female pattern of being enclosed: “All writers on the spiritual life uniformly recommend, nay command under penalty of total failure, the practice of silence.” Thus, silence and solitude not only increase one’s relationship with self, but also with God. Therefore, it is important for the participants in a rite of passage to spend time alone and in silence.

Solitude and silence connect the participant to her inner self. The television show “What Not to Wear” is a poignant example of how our tangible, visible self is related to our inner, intangible self; the participants often tearfully realize that their outward lack of style reflects their inward attitude of shame and self-hatred. The outward transformation during the show parallels the in-
ward transformation to self-acceptance and self-love and is often a beautiful rite of passage. Our spirits are in bodies; we cannot separate body and spirit, and what we do in our bodies affects our spirits, as what we do in our spirits affects our bodies. Abusing our bodies, then, whether tangibly (e.g., eating disorders) or intangibly (e.g., calling ourselves ugly), has spiritual effects. Therefore, paying attention to one's physicality and sexuality are important spiritual disciplines. In addition to spending time alone, then, another focal area for relationship with self is body image.30

Many Christian daughters receive conflicting messages about body image. The world teaches them to flaunt sexuality and their physical bodies, and the church teaches them not to explore sexuality until marriage. These two contradictory ideas reflect a common theme when it comes to outward adornment in particular—women dress for others rather than dressing and acting in ways that are true to their personal identity and personhood. The world teaches our daughters to dress in order to attract men, and the church teaches them to dress in a way that does "not cause a man to stumble."31 Now, I am not suggesting that we teach daughters never to think about others when they adorn their bodies, but rather to think about their own true identity more than the unpredictable thoughts of others when they dress. In a Christian "What Not to Wear," after discussing body image, the women state a positive mantra about their bodies, and then we take their body measurements during one of the Woman meetings. We personalize the principles in Bradley Bayou's The Science of Sexy: Dress to Fit Your Unique Figure with the Style System that Works for Every Shape and Size to teach them how to adorn their bodies well. We want our daughters to dress with confidence and beauty in ways appropriate to varying situations and to show respect for themselves and others.32 This develops a positive body image and is supplemented by discussing and enacting good habits in the areas of nutrition, exercise, and self-care.

Relationship with others—Christians would agree that one's relationship with others is important for the development of true identity and godly potential. It is important that women realize that they are neither fully independent nor dependent creatures; they are created to be interdependent.33 Rather than believing they can do all things on their own, becoming “better together” and seeking relationships with other women (and men) of all generations enhances women's lives. In Woman, not only do participants seek out a mentor, but they also contact four older women whom they respect and interview them about their journeys of womanhood. Though the participants find this challenging, they also learn to connect their own stories with other women's stories, and sisterhood is formed.

Reflecting on a woman's relationship with others must include relationship with the opposite sex, not only in the romantic sense. Here, she must realize the truth that she is equal to a man in essence, that her access to roles in the church and society are not limited by gender, and that she and a possible future spouse will be mutually submissive.

Relationship with creation—Similar to the relationship to herself, a woman's relationship to creation is seldom developed by the church. Although humans were formed from dust and placed in a garden to take care of it, many people today are not connected either to creation or to creativity. It is essential for the humanity of our daughters that they reconnect to creation. Rather than defining the earth as something to subdue and control, daughters can define it as “sacred space, God's creation that we are to care for, preserve and conserve.”34

Activities that develop the relationship to creation may include hiking, gardening, cooking, or other kinds of creativity. The participants may remember that God is Creator, and, as those made in God's image, they partner with God in gardening or create through cooking or painting. Furthermore, they can assess their carbon footprints and learn how to protect and preserve creation.

Conclusion

We want Christian daughters to realize their true identity and godly potential, and a rite of passage can facilitate this realization. Ritual theory offers much by way of process and effectiveness, written resources are available, and the core principles above form a solid foundation. It is important to keep in mind, however, that rite-of-passage meetings are generally not time for an academic lecture, but rather a time for women to develop relationships with Christian daughters and create space to talk about being a Christian woman. While no rite will necessarily touch on all the keywords in the four relationship quadrants, our daughters will absorb them as we live our journey of womanhood with them.

Notes

1. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list.
2. Gail Ramshaw, Christian Worship: 100,000 Sundays of Symbols and Rituals (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 36.
3. For a list of what may accompany a rite of passage, see Ronald L. Grimes, Deeply Into the Bone: Re-inventing Rites of Passage (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 106–07.
4. Grimes, Deeply Into the Bone, 94.
5. As cited in Grimes, Deeply Into the Bone, 91.
9. Lincoln, Emerging from the Chrysalis, 105.
14. Amy Davis, "Rites of Passage for Women in Evangelical Christianity: A Ritual and Theological Analysis" (PhD diss., Drew University, 2010), 298.
15. Davis, "Rites of Passage," 306.
17. Lisa Graham McMinn, Growing Strong Daughters: Empower-
18. Rites of passage for women in traditional societies are mediated by women. Men have a supportive role because, in the same way that men call boys to manhood, women call girls to womanhood.


21. Though I do not intend to pass lightly over the painful subject of the limitations women experience in this area, I do think that all women are created to give life in a way unique to their gender, even when they are physically limited. And certainly, menopause does not stop a woman from giving life. A deeper discussion of these questions could be the subject of another article.

22. I choose North American Christianity because that is my culture; however, the principles already stated are not necessarily culturally bound.

23. Some alumni and seminary students have also participated in the rite of passage. While this time makes sense in the local college community, it does not intend to exclude from womanhood those who have not been to college.

24. At Nyack, not all mentors meet with the larger group of women. The core leaders are three, and the mentors support from afar.

25. The explanations concentrate on relationship with self because the length of the article prohibits complete elaboration on all the relationships.


30. Two other areas of importance are confidence and voice. The length of this article prohibits elaboration on them.

31. A rite written by Chuck Stecker and the True Love Waits rite, two of the rites studied in my dissertation, had such a statement.

32. For further study, Michelle Graham’s Wanting to Be Her: Body Image Secrets Victoria Won’t Tell You (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005) has interesting insights for the areas of beauty and self-care, and Lisa McMinn’s Growing Strong Daughters has a chapter for physical essence and another for sexual essence.


**Posterity** will serve him; 
**future generations** will be told about the Lord.

They will proclaim his righteousness to a **people yet unborn**—

for he has done it.

— Psalm 22:30–31

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