

# TRUE IDENTITY: The Bible for Women & STRIVE: The Bible for Men

Reviewed by Joanne Nystrom Janssen  
& Arlyn Janssen

Do the new TNIV Bibles for women and men really counter myths about gender?

The new TNIV Bibles for women and men promise to help Christians gain an identity and maturity in Christ: the women's Bible, entitled *True Identity: The Bible for Women*, includes the cover description, "becoming who you are in Christ," and the men's Bible, entitled *Strive: The Bible for Men*, says, "becoming the man Christ wants you to be."

While defining oneself in relationship to Christ is biblical and important, the extra features in these particular Bibles suggest that this happens in drastically different ways for men and women—which

propagates restrictive ideas about who men and women are and who they might become, rather than encouraging them to develop their identity in Christ.

These concerns about the men's and women's Bibles do not include the translation of the biblical text itself, which is valuable and noteworthy. The Today's New International Version (TNIV) translation is a more accurate and readable revision of the New International Version. In addition to updating language in general, it also eliminates generic uses of masculine nouns and pronouns when referring to human beings. Using a gender-accurate translation seems especially appropriate for Bibles like these—aimed at men and women in their twenties and thirties—since people in this younger age group would be less apt to interpret gender-specific terms as inclusive.

Designed for lay readers, the Bibles also have a noble purpose. The preface to the women's Bible claims that it was created "to help women deal with life issues by defining their true identity in Christ through his Word." The men's Bible expresses a similar goal: to be "a resource especially for men

who are weary of a ho-hum existence and who want to intentionally pursue God and the good life he offers." To that end, the Bible includes 30 profiles of biblical women or men, responses to myths of the world, discussion questions about specific biblical passages, and notes connecting Scripture to life issues or God's nature.

The problem, then, exists in how the editors have decided to apply their goals. The title of the Bible for women—*True Identity*—suggests that the Bible and its features will affirm God's view of women as unique, individual, and

gifted for ministry. The Bible's features, however, imply that women's interests and activities center on dating, marriage, and having children. The men's Bible does not focus as extensively on equivalent issues of relationships and parenting, but instead focuses on money, career, and sexual temptation. Especially when the Bibles are viewed together, the editors' perspective becomes apparent: men and women not only face different issues in our world, but are fundamentally different.

The Myths—which are the Bible's most extensive feature—provide examples that illustrate the point. In the women's Bible, over 30 of the myths relate to relationships and motherhood. Only a few address the possibility of women in the workplace, such as #6, which indicates that nothing "is inherently wrong with a woman who's climbing the corporate ladder," but

encourages women to "take a good hard look at the price of corporate success." Myth #71 also acknowledges that some women will work rather than staying at home with their children, but it implies that only women who cannot afford to stay at home have a valid excuse.

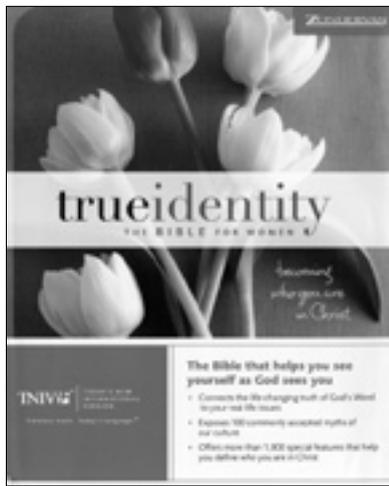
Few myths address women in church leadership, and those that do seem to walk the fence regarding women in these roles. For example, Myth #25, "I can never play a truly important role in church," acknowledges the debate over gender roles, but offers vague advice for women desiring to serve in restrictive churches: celebrate and respect differences, think through the issue, be inspired by the stories of biblical women, and don't become disillusioned.

Myth #55, "I should never say no to a ministry opportunity," is also ambiguous. The advice states, "God's calling on your life is first to love him and then to love those he's placed in your immediate circle of care (your husband, children, parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.). You should not serve

outside that circle if you are neglecting time with God or those closest to you." While the text acknowledges the first priority of loving God, the writer seems to indicate that taking care of one's "circle of care" takes precedence over some opportunities to serve him. Other myths also seem to place the family ahead of other ministry opportunities, such as Myth #40, which

advises women, "Put your children first."

While the men's Bible also encourages men to become better husbands and fathers, the majority of the Myths (which are not numbered or indexed in the men's Bible and therefore much more difficult to locate) instead focus on work, finances, and sexual



desires. None of the Myths communicates any messages overtly offensive to egalitarians, but they also rarely affirm mutuality; instead, because of vague language the Myths often fail to take a stand on many important issues. For example, the Myth entitled “Raising the kids is mostly my wife’s job” acknowledges the debate over traditional gender roles, but ambiguously states, “The Bible implies that both parents have something vital to contribute.” Later the text notes that fathers should discipline their children and instruct them about God and life.

Myths in both Bibles portray sexuality as a potent and dangerous thing, but their approach is gendered: the men’s Bible addresses sexual temptation in the form of impure thoughts and images, whereas the women’s Bible addresses it within the context of relationships with other men. Both Bibles encourage same-sex friendships as important for stemming sexual desire and for creating accountability. For example, the women’s Bible states, “Men need other men; women

need other women” (Myth #58) and, “Close male-female friendships after marriage do not work” (Myth #66). While men and women certainly have a responsibility to guard their sexuality, these Bibles seem to indicate that all male-female relationships are a breeding ground for infidelity. They also ignore the beauty of the body of Christ—that all of God’s children are gifted in different ways and can therefore serve and encourage each other, regardless of gender.

Interestingly, both Bibles include little commentary about difficult passages about women and men. The women’s Bible includes a note about Ephesians 5:21–33—the passage that states in part, “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord”—reminding the reader that “submission is God’s call to wives and husbands to yield to each other in love.” Later, however, the text states, “Your role differs from your husband’s, but it’s equally valuable.” Other difficult passages about women and the church, such as 1 Corinthians 11

and 1 Timothy 2, lack any commentary—a conspicuous absence, especially in a Bible for women. The men’s Bible is similarly silent about these passages, only including a discussion question about 1 Corinthians 11 that asks, “Are husbands supposed to submit to their wives? Why or why not?”

The developers of *True Identity: The Bible for Women* and *Strive: The Bible for Men* lost a valuable opportunity. Instead of communicating to young men and women that they are gifted for service to God and joined as partners in that ministry, they reinforce stereotypes of women as focused on marriage and family and men as interested in career and financial security. The extra features also do not take advantage of the additional research invested in the TNIV, incorporating no information or commentary that couldn’t be included with any other translation. While the Bibles’ features do not necessarily contradict egalitarian views, they also do not contain enough that affirms them.

## Little-Known Bible Facts

### World’s First Words

The first human words in the Bible are a love song, sung by the first man for the first woman:

“This is now bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh...” (Gen. 2:23)

### Bibles for the Blind

The New York Asylum for the Blind issued a New Testament with raised letters in 1836, almost 20 years before the development of the Braille system.

SOURCE: *The Bible: A History*, by Stephen M. Miller & Robert V. Huber (Good Books 2004), pg. 190.

### Master or Fool?

A German Bible from 1580 included a suspicious error in Genesis 3:16, the passage where God describes how Eve’s relationship to her husband would change after the Fall. The text should have read: ‘Und er soll dein Herr sein,’ meaning ‘And he will be your master.’ However, the word ‘Herr’ was replaced by ‘Narr,’ making the revised phrase read: ‘And he will be your fool.’ Some historians suspect that the printer’s wife made the change.

SOURCE: *The Bible: A History*, by Stephen M. Miller & Robert V. Huber (Good Books 2004), pg. 238.

### Baby Bibles

Bibles and other books printed before 1500 are known as *incunabula*. The term was coined in 1639 to describe volumes produced in the infancy of printing. It comes from the Latin word for ‘cradle’ and is an etymological ancestor of our modern word ‘incubator.’

SOURCE: *The Bible: A History*, by Stephen M. Miller & Robert V. Huber (Good Books 2004), pg. 163.

### Song of Songs Fans

The Song of Songs (also known as the Song of Solomon) was a very popular book in medieval monasteries—some claim that it was read even more frequently than the four Gospels. For example, Bernard of Clairvaux (12th c.) wrote 86 sermons on the first two chapters and a little bit of the third. When’s the last time you heard a sermon on the Song of Songs?

### God So Loved the Universe?

The Bible has been translated into thousands of languages from all over the world—and even one that’s out of this world. Here’s John 3:16 in Klingon—the artificial language spoken by Klingons in the fictional universe from the Star Trek TV series: “toH qo’ muSHa’pu’qu’mo’ JoH’a’, wa’ puqloDDaj nobpu’ ghaH’ej ghaHbaq Harchugh vay’, vaj not Hegh ghaH, ‘ach yln jub ghajbeH ghaH.”

SOURCE: The Klingon Bible Translation Project (<http://www.kli.org/wiki/index.php?Klingon%20Bible%20Translation%20Project>).

### Shortest Chapter Says it All

Not only is Psalm 117 the shortest chapter in the Bible, it’s also in the exact middle of the Bible’s 1,189 chapters:

<sup>1</sup>Praise the LORD, all you nations;  
Extol him, all you peoples.  
<sup>2</sup>For great is his love toward us,  
And the faithfulness of the LORD  
endures forever.  
Praise the LORD. (TNIV)