

Trash to Treasure: A Personal Story

by Kimberly Renee Gunvaldson

Late February 2008: “Someday you will write,” Mother said, “and your tears will be the ink you use.” A static cell phone connection, and 190 miles could not mask her deep emotions as she spoke to me. After hours of grief, my eyes were swollen. I was silent. She did not understand I was trying to breathe. “Honey, are you there?”

“Yeah, Mom,” I grabbed my chest, I moaned. “I was just thinking about what you said, that’s all.” I choked back another wave of emotions; the painful despair of a broken heart. “I don’t know why...” I started to heave again. Utterly desolate I had no idea where God was and if he even cared anymore. “Why is this happening to me again?” My knees buckled under the grief and I slid to the floor of my bedroom. I pulled my legs up and wrapped my free arm around them. Barely holding the cell phone, I buried my face.

“Honey,” she said more intensely than before, compelled by mother-love, restrained by physical distance, “Listen to me...are you listening?” I whimpered. “I don’t know why God has allowed these things in your life, but you remember what your name means? You will write with these tears, Kimberly,” she emphasized almost fiercely then, “and God will get all the glory...”

Late January 2009: This conversation took place almost a year ago and was prophetic. It took place only a few days *before* I found my treasure. This treasure would inspire me to write with the tears that had so many times overwhelmed my soul. This treasure showed me those tears would be the ink that drives my pen to declare to the heartbroken, desperate, and forgotten that our God reigns, our God resurrects, and our God RESTORES!

I grew up in a Christian home, and wanted what every “good” Christian girl wants: a Christian husband who would be the head of the home, my high priest. I would be the ultimate helpmate, supportive and stable...we would have a few babies and live in a comfortable home. It was my dream.

I had been taught that women had supportive roles in family life. I had been taught the church family was no different. Equal in Christ, with different appointments, all important; there was no favoritism with my Creator. So to honor God I should seek diminutive ideals. And I accepted it with hardly a consideration.

That was until our church family entered a crisis I barely remember (I was fifteen at the time). A woman had been elected to eldership. Many people left over this controversy. I could not understand why a woman elder caused so much division. What was so holy about an elder that made “maleness” requisite?

The church crisis, long since evaporated from my conscious memory, still haunted me. But being in love with Christ, I ignored the taunts from within. Those musings whispered I was “built by Christ”;

I had Christ’s authority. I should preach and teach and prophesy, write stories that inspired hearts, stand in front of men and women and testify. But as a woman — that was not possible. Instead I went to Bible college to subdue the voices.

Here was where I would learn my place in God’s community, and I would learn to love it. I took a “Christian Womanhood” class. I was sure this class would elucidate me. Fill in the gaps, fine tune my logic. All my suspicions would be scripturally repudiated, proving that I was loved equally and was as important as men; proving that different was equal...it was just different. In my Christian Womanhood class, I was shown how to set a table properly, the correct way to introduce people, how to dress for certain occasions, why it is important to have a husband’s prayer covering, what true wifely submission means, and which offices within the church are appropriate for female leadership. (It should be noted in my entire educational career, this was the only class I ever completely failed.)

After college the voices in my heart were subdued. I was back in the “traditional theological fold” again. I had learned my place in God’s community, but I hadn’t learned to love it. What I had believed since childhood and found reiterated at college was two enigmatic truths: 1) Women were homemakers, and 2) Homemakers needed husbands. The next step was to marry. So I did.

During marriage counseling, our Bible-based curriculum taught that men and women in Christ were equal. However, in the Christian home it was important to realize that “family” needed order, exactly like church family needed order. Therefore God ordained the “order” of the Christian family to follow the sequence of creation. Since Adam was created first, he was the “Head,” the “High Priest.” This particular curriculum included pictures of a house plan: The caption read something like, “God created the woman as man’s helpmate. Therefore the house is a home when the woman acts like the walls and the man acts like the roof. The roof keeps the walls together and the whole house protected.” It made sense, I supposed. I applied myself to this with all my heart. I had met a strong, confident, intelligent, talented, Christian man, and I was determined to be the kind of Christian wife God would be proud of. Yet nothing worked like it should have.

I did all the submitting I could think of and more, but I could not do a thing about the abuse. My first heartbreak. I was told I was worthless, ugly, contentious, disgusting, and idiotic. The epithets he used to assault were numberless. His physical acts began to escalate. I had been told for so long that I was stupid. What was I becoming? I loved him. Why did he hate me so much? I was lost, broken, and so very alone. And yet, against my upbringing, I did the unthinkable; against all I believed, I filed for divorce.

I was a divorced woman. How could God use me now? Where was my covering? What would I do? I had lost hope. Worse still



were that those closest to me implored me to reconcile with my ex-husband, because it was what God wanted for me. I had not “sweat drops of blood, like our Savior had, [had I]?” “Things were not so bad that God could not heal. Where there is life there is hope.” “Marriage is hard, it is learning to give and take, to submit to Christ and love your husband.” For a time, family and friends withdrew. And one day, alone in my parents’ home, I fell to my face and groaned through my brokenness to God, “Am I imagining this, Lord? Have I made up the violence? Do you love me still? Am I crazy Lord? You know! Please help me!” I will not forget the thought that exploded through my mind: Malachi 2:14–16.

In essence it said, “I am a *witness* between you and the wife of your youth...I see the violence...I hate divorce but I hate a man who covers himself with violence...” All I could do is cry, unhindered tears of release. God had seen me. I was not crazy, lazy, worthless, ugly, and useless. Everything I had been told. The curses over me were noted and rejected by the God I loved. He loved me and showed me that I was not forgotten.

The culture of Christian tradition, however, is not easily swayed. I was not worthless, but I was still a woman. In the singleness that followed I should have learned to lean on Christ. But pressure mounted in the darkness of that in-between time, as I was told I needed to have a husband; my infant daughter needed a sibling; I needed to make a home. Taught that women in general, divorced women in particular, had remedial roles in the body of believers, I sat on edge of belief. How easy it would be to simply run away from the religious rules I couldn’t agree with and obviously couldn’t obey. So I ran. For several years I played church, but I made very destructive choices. If I couldn’t be a really good Christian woman, then at least I knew I could be a really bad one.

June 2007: An old friend I hadn’t seen in years approached me at church. He explained that God had given him a vision of me. I was scrounging in a garbage heap. It looked to him like a dump or a huge mound of trash. There I was, digging through the filth.

He went on: God said I believed with all my heart I was unwanted, useless, and as unnecessary as all the trash I was pilfering through. I was everything I had been told I was, worthless just like the garbage. But in his vision, I stopped and bent over; I uncovered a large priceless jewel. It was shining and beautiful and very precious. He said to me, “Kim, God wants you to know that you are that jewel!” I smiled and thanked him, saying all the niceties you say when a stranger tells you your darkest fears. But I wanted to run then — run from God and from all that I knew. With that I moved to Portland, prophecy forgotten.

Portland was not what I expected. Things went from really bad to unbelievable heartache, and a trajectory of pain continued until late February 2008.

Late February 2008: I did the only thing I could think of as I felt my spirit crumble. I called my mother. She told me about my tears. She reminded me about my name: Kimberly Renee, “Royal Fortress Reborn.” Only a few days later I decided to move back to my hometown. A weight was lifted from me. I was finally doing the right thing, going back to where God wanted me. And I could not get “home” soon enough.

Early March 2008: It was a sunny day, and I needed to take the trash out. As I was dumping my load, I noticed in the dumpster a large box filled with books. I was intrigued. So I scrounged around, and retrieved several books which looked interesting enough. One especially caught my eye. I had not heard of the author, but his book’s title kept me riveted. *Beyond Sex Roles*, by Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian. I consumed it. The book declared that women in Christ are partners in the body and responsible to their God for the gifts he gives them. To spiritually descend to the consent of the subservient was an affront to what Christ had done on the cross. Women were joint heirs with their male counterparts, equal joint heirs with Christ Jesus. Paradise restored. Nothing was beyond our reach, in Christ. We were to submit to Christ and each other, uniformly, with no equivocations. I started to hope again, I started to breathe.

Present day, 2009: One year later after having moved home, I found and read Dr. Bilezikian’s book again, its meaning even more fantastic than the first time I read it. I am a priceless creation to my Father. He has a glorious plan for my life, and I am not a first-class citizen of heaven with a second-rate purpose. I am gifted with talents he requires I share. It is a heavenly mandate religious tradition cannot steal. God views me as competent, intelligent, trustworthy, and priceless. The revelation that there is nothing I am prohibited from in his kingdom has set me free.

Only a few weeks ago did the Holy Spirit remind me about the vision of the trash heap. I found God’s ideal for me in such a place, at the depths, beneath all the things the world discards. With tears of *joy* I write how I found out who I am in Christ, and I found out what I really mean to Jesus. I am that priceless jewel. And I am supposed to shine.

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We praise God for restoring Kimberly, and thank him for you, our generous supporters, who provide funds to send egalitarian resources like *Beyond Sex Roles* all over the world. Will you make a contribution today so that we can reach many more women and men who long for God’s healing? Visit www.cbeinternational.org. Thank you!