

Mutuality

Spring 2019

Men and women serving and leading as equals



Everyday Sexism

and What Christians Should Do about It

CONTENTS

**4 What If God Was One of Us:
A Call to Uphold the Dignity of Women**
A pastor reflects on men's role in promoting women's equality.
by David Hart

**11 The Fifties Housewife in My Head:
Finding Freedom from Shame and Inadequacy**
Practicing egalitarian theology as we run our households.
by Sarah Judd-Lam

**16 4 Jobs Women Are Expected to Do without Pay,
and How to Balance the Labor Scale**
Society pressures women to work for free. Why that's not okay.
by Rachel Asproth

**22 Choose Your Own Adventure: A Very
Egalitarian Proposal**
This couple bucked tradition and proposed to each other.
by Sierra Neiman Westbrook

26 Book Review: The Gutsy Girls Series
A series of five children's books about Christian women from history
reviewed by Rachel Sheild Gustafson

Mutuality is published quarterly by CBE International, 122 W Franklin Ave, Suite 218; Minneapolis, MN 55404-2451.

We welcome your comments, article submissions, and advertisements. Visit cbe.today/mutuality.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the 2011 revision of the *Holy Bible, New International Version®*, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Advertising in *Mutuality* does not imply

organizational endorsement. Please note that neither CBE International, nor the editor, nor the editorial team is responsible or legally liable for any content or any statements made by any author, but the legal responsibility is solely that author's once an article appears in *Mutuality*.

CBE grants permission for any original article (not a reprint) to be photocopied for local use provided no more than 1,000 copies are made, they are distributed free, the author is acknowledged, and CBE is recognized as the source.



DEPARTMENTS

3 From the Editor
Sexism is Spiritual

27 Reflect with Us
Words of Freedom

28 Ministry News

29 Giving Opportunities

30 President's Message
Centering Truth, Not
Masculinity, in Christian
Discourse

31 Praise and Prayer

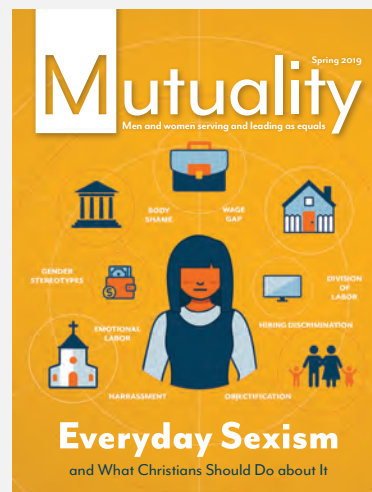
EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor: Tim Krueger

Associate Editor: Rachel Asproth

Graphic Designer: Mary Quint

Publisher/President: Mimi Haddad



Mutuality vol. 26, no. 1, Spring 2019

Cover design by Mary Quint

Mutuality (ISSN: 1533-2470) exists to make egalitarian theology accessible to the non-scholar and to explore its intersection with everyday life.



Sexism is Spiritual: How Patriarchy Cripples the Body of Christ

A few years ago, peer pressure and the excitement of a challenge goaded me into running my first marathon. Except for the last few miles on race day, I loved everything about it. Never before or since have I been so in tune with the world around me or the body I live in.

Hitting the road before dawn for training runs meant I got a front-row seat as the sun peeked over the horizon and the world came to life around me. Before my eyes, frigid spring mornings became sultry summer days and crisp autumn evenings.

Each week, my legs carried me farther than I ever thought possible. Three miles, then five, ten, twenty. I became aware of how interconnected every part of the human body is. I learned that my knee pain had nothing to do with my knees—they were the innocent victims of bad shoes, poor form, and weak hips. A change of shoes, a shift in my posture, and a tweak of my gait, and the pain was gone. My body was free to reach its potential.

I thought often of Paul's metaphor of the church as a body. We, too, are interconnected in ways we rarely see or understand. Weak theology or a bad habit by one body part can cause crippling pain for another—so much that the entire body is hobbled. Our treatment of women (often reinforced by the church) is one example. Consider:

- Even when men do an equal share of household chores, women still tend to carry the burden of responsibility—deciding what needs to be done, coordinating family scheduling, making sure all the logistics are in place for life to run smoothly.
- Women are paid less than men for the same work. There is willful discrimination, yes. But also, women often work part time or flexible schedules to care for their families, putting them last in line for raises or promotions. Men who request the same flexibility to share the load are told “your wife can do it” and promotions go to those more “committed to the job.”
- When a woman is sexually violated by a man, we hesitate to punish him, lest his bright future be forever dimmed. Do we care that her world will never be the

same? We forget that God's forgiveness is inextricably linked with justice.

- Women's health complaints are not taken seriously. This is one reason the US has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the developed world and is one of two developed nations whose rate has worsened since 1990. Over 60% of these are preventable. Race is a factor, too. African American women are three times more likely than white women to die of pregnancy-related causes, for multiple reasons including the idea that black women's bodies are stronger and don't need treatments that they do, in fact, need.¹
- Women are called aggressive, shrill, and bossy when they are assertive and confident. Less competent men are respected and seen as leaders for the very same behaviors.
- Women in church are told to change their clothes or not to breastfeed to keep a boy or man from “stumbling.” It doesn't occur to us that he should be the one to change.

Just as I didn't recognize that my knee pain was actually caused by my feet and hips, we might not see these injustices as spiritual problems, but they are. They are symptoms of a spiritual sickness that has plagued humanity almost from the start: patriarchy.

Patriarchy has crippled the church in ways we don't often realize. We don't know what we can do, because our body has rarely worked at peak capacity. But when properly aligned with God's design, we can. There is pain and exhaustion in the process, but the reward is great.

In this issue, we take a look at a few of areas where biblical mutuality consistently intersects with practical life. I pray that we are all inspired to not just believe the right things about gender, but to fight for a world built upon mutuality, not patriarchy. The goal may seem (and even be) miles off, but that doesn't mean we don't move forward one step at a time. May God sustain us.

In Christ,
Tim Krueger

1. Rachel Jones, “Why giving birth in the U.S. is surprisingly deadly,” *National Geographic*, Jan. 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2019/01/giving-birth-in-united-states-surprisingly-deadly/>.

What If God Was One of Us: A Call to Uphold the Dignity of Women

David Hart

When I was a kid and in elementary school, one of my very best friends in the world was called Chelsea.

I suppose Chelsea looked like most other girls in my school—tall, thin, and lanky, with sandy blond locks that extended well past her shoulders down to her back.

She almost bounced as she walked, slue-footed, through the hallways of the school. Chelsea was smart, jovial, had no enemies, and was so popular everyone knew her by first name. Like Angela, Harriet, Liza, or Cher. Or Madonna.

Chelsea was what our world called a tomboy—a girl who enjoyed loud, noisy, rough activities normally associated with boys. She could run faster, jump higher, and play harder than anybody in the school, boy or girl.

During recess, whenever our male classmates would hurl playground insults like “you throw like a girl,” or microaggressions (of course, we didn’t have the slightest idea what a microaggression was back then) during basketball or kickball games, Chelsea would always

be there, quietly defying them with her intellectual and physical prowess.

While the kids in my school meant “throwing like a girl” as an insult, throwing like a girl in my school meant throwing like Chelsea. She was absolutely the best at everything.

There wasn’t a spelling bee, a science fair, or grammar rodeo Chelsea didn’t win or master. She had the world all figured out, the wind at her back, and every other cliché about life being a crystal stair for her.



And ours was an unlikely friendship. We were from the same working-class neighborhood, but Chelsea and I didn't share a church or any other common social threads.

I would like to be able to say that our friendship was endorsed by every student in our school, and that everyone was swell with a friendship between a black boy and a white girl, but saying that would be a lie.

Even though our friendship was completely platonic—or “not girlfriend, boyfriend”—as we called it back then, there were those who took exception to Chelsea and me hanging out.

There would be questions from some students about how Chelsea could be friends with someone “who was in the oven too long.” There would be calls for us to “stick to your own kind,” and “just stop it.”

Those comments made for some recess periods littered with pregnant silence for us, but somehow we remained friends, undeterred. Best friends. Inseparable. Nothing could tear us apart.

Except death.

One summer before school began, Chelsea was killed by a drunk driver. I had heard that Chelsea and her family were traveling on a two lane highway, and the drunk driver drifted over into Chelsea's family car's lane. I heard that the drunk driver survived.

When my father died from a heart attack five years later, it affected me, but Chelsea's death devastated me in a way that I still seek to process. I remember running far, far away and sobbing uncontrollably when I heard the news.

But, Chelsea taught me my first lesson in gender equality and feminism outside my home, my church, and my community. She also taught me the far-reaching implications of racism in our communities and interpersonal relationships.

My grade school years were full of similar lessons. I was small and black in a time when it wasn't all that advantageous to be small and black.

No. When I was in grade school, hipsters weren't ironically uttering phrases like, “dope,” “baby momma,” or “fo' shizzle.” There weren't YouTube videos of everyone from news anchors to soccer moms “hitting the dab.”

And Justin Timberlake, Taylor Swift, or Gwyneth Paltrow weren't around to buy the bar with multi-platinum, multi-millionaire hip hop artists.

My grade school days were, pardon the expression, dark times. I was one of only a few black students in my school, and as a result I was a convenient target for racial harassment.

There was a small group of white boys who would wait for me every day after school and chase me home. Most of the time, I would be able to run home fast enough before they caught me. Other times, I wasn't so lucky. On the days they caught me, they roughed me up pretty good.

Incidentally, there was also a small group of black boys who didn't care for me much at all. They would also chase me home threatening my life, screeching “Black Charcoal” and “Darkie.” And they were as dark as I was. Sometimes it is our own people with the most hang-ups about black skin.

After a few months of running home after school (This was all before helicopter parents. My mother and father demanded I fight my own battles), I got some help from an unlikely place.

My cousin Amelia was fierce and fearless. And I don't mean that the way hipsters and fashion bloggers use the terms to describe a fashion trend or an article of clothing. I mean she was brave and bold and not afraid of anything. Although she was several inches and clothing sizes smaller than me, Amelia literally fought my battles for me until I could figure out how to fight them on my own.



When Amelia would see me running from school away from trouble, she would stand toe-to-toe with my enemies, scuffling and fighting on my behalf.

On one occasion, when a group of kids had me surrounded after school, Amelia literally dove into the crowd of kids to protect me.

My favorite middle school teacher, Ms. S., taught me something about fighting as well. Ms. S. was my sixth-grade teacher, and she was the very first black teacher I ever had. She was strong and poised and intelligent. Ms. S. refused to accept mediocrity from me, and demanded that I be responsible and accountable for my actions.

My experiences with Amelia, Ms. S., and Chelsea helped to lay the foundation for how I would later see traditional gender roles as fluid, and inform my impetus to challenge patriarchal constructs in our world, especially in the church.

Fast-forward to 2008, when I was ordained. I was packed in a small ante room with about a dozen ordinands, most of them women.

A small elderly woman—a pastor—paced into the room slowly, deliberately. She was the face and body of Jesus—humble, sublime, and righteous. She was serious about God and she literally walked the walk and talked the talk.

Her church was an outgrowth of a Bible study she initiated in the early 1960s. She and her co-pastor, another anointed woman, faced considerable difficulties in planting and growing their church. The sitting bishop of their communion refused to fully ordain these women because they were “women preachers.” What’s more, there was an attempt to prevent these women from operating as a church.

However, despite all of the gender-based discrimination they faced, these women

planted and grew what is now a very healthy and robust church.

The small, elderly pastor congratulated us, offered prayer, and impressed upon us the nature of the ceremony we were about to undertake.

At the end of her carefully chosen elocution, the pastor invited the women of the group to join the women in ministry organization within the communion.

She explained that the women in ministry organization existed to encourage and support women who were clergy.

Later in the day, I was talking with another ordained man. Alarming, he questioned the fitness of women for the pastorate. Specifically, he questioned a woman’s ability to preach the gospel, to lead a church, or administer its business and finances properly, “like a man.”

And perhaps even more alarmingly, he questioned the need for the women in clergy organization at all when there wasn’t a similar male clergy ministry. I was so shocked, all I could say was, “You know—history.”

History indeed. The church has a lot of remedial work to do as it relates to women in the ministry. The first Christian woman was not ordained in the United States until 1853, and the first women were not ordained in my communion until the mid-twentieth century, another hundred years. This means over 200 years (and more than that for some communions) of churches in America were led solely by men.

What’s more, there has been a troubling phenomenon of church officials using erroneous readings of certain biblical passages and stories to subjugate women.

Unfortunately, because these untruths about biblical passages have been



repeated so many times without correction, I have to briefly take the space here to correct them.

We all know that if we repeat something enough, even a lie, it becomes woven into the fabric of our collective reality. Like the lie of a white Jesus. Like the lie about Mary Magdalene being a whore. Like the lie that women are not fit to lead churches.

So, it is our duty to unweave the lie from reality.

Feminism (and quite frankly women generally) has always been met with great skepticism and incredulity in the church. Since the beginning of the church, equality of women has always been seen as unchristian, worldly, and radical.

Church father Tertullian noted, in a remark that is the mother of all back-handed compliments, that, “Woman is a temple built over a sewer.”

And Clement, another church father, believed that women, by their very nature were weak, irrational, and good for nothing beyond producing children.

How can the church or its members endorse equality or see women as humans entitled to respect, dignity, and equality when its leaders have spoken against women in this manner?

What’s more, our church fathers have also told us that the Bible and God ordained for women to not lead in church. In fact, we call God a “he” when the Scriptures use male and female metaphors for a God who is spirit and transcends human categories of gender.

Specifically, they have pointed to Eve’s origin as subordinate to Adam, Deborah’s assertion that it was most shameful that she had to step up to lead the Israelites when male leaders faltered, and passages in the apostle Paul’s letters that assert that the

We all know that if we repeat something enough, even a lie, it becomes woven into the fabric of our collective reality. Like the lie of a white Jesus. Like the lie about Mary Magdalene being a whore. Like the lie that women are not fit to lead churches.

husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.

For their part, church leaders have been consistent. When they see or experience cultural phenomena they don’t understand, don’t like, or perhaps fear, they proof text, or pull biblical passages out of context to support their fear and opposition.

Pulling biblical passages out of context may help construct a male-centric agenda, but it does little to discern God’s will as it relates to women in leadership in the church.

If we look at the Scriptures in their entirety, we see a Christian God who values women and their leadership.

If we look closely at the creation story (Genesis 1 and 2), we see that God created men and women at the same time, equally, and in the image of God.

We also see God calling women like Deborah to lead and save their people because of their brilliance and temperament, not simply because there wasn’t a man around to lead.

And really no biblical discussion would be complete without discussing Vashti.

Precious little is written in the Bible about Vashti, and even less is written about her in theological scholarship. However, Vashti really was the consummate biblical feminist.

What little we know about Vashti is found in the Old Testament book of Esther. In Esther, we see that Vashti was a queen to a king who ruled a territory that included modern-day East Africa to India.

For four months, Vashti’s king partied with the kingdom officials nonstop. Toward the end of the party, when the king was drunk on wine and feeling himself, he ordered Vashti to come to the party wearing nothing but her crown and show her body to the king’s guests.

Naturally, Vashti refused to do such a thing with her body for her husband’s entertainment.

The king gathered his officials and consultants to discuss Vashti’s actions. They believed that Vashti’s refusal to allow her husband to degrade her would empower other women in the kingdom.

So, Vashti’s husband banished her from the kingdom forever.

Vashti was never heard from again.

Vashti's banishment is a chilling example of how feminism, and further, women attempting to control their own bodies and destinies, was treated in the ancient world. Yet, the Scriptures lead us a different way.

While the apostle Paul made some specific statements about women designed to address specific issues in specific churches, women preached the gospel and were treated as equals in Paul's ministry.

And the only people to ever minister to Jesus were women. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and others accompanied Jesus during his ministry and supported Jesus financially and spiritually.

As Christians we believe that Jesus is God. God's decision to enter our world through a woman affirms women's sacredness in the eyes of God. But too often, women are not afforded respect in the church.

Men and women in the pew are treated differently from each other. Women who have sexual relations outside of marriage, and especially ones who are single mothers, are generally scorned and marginalized. Pastors and the leadership of churches save their most condemning sermons, admonishments, and private reprimands for them—you know, that sermon or private counseling session designed solely to make women feel guilty about every aspect of their lives, but especially their pasts. The sermon

and counseling session that calls on women to be "chaste," "modest," and "pure," because if they do all of those things just right, they will find a husband that will save them.

On the other hand, men who do the exact same thing—have sexual relations outside of marriage—are praised and groomed for leadership positions. I've seen it happen time and again in many churches. Men never hear the sermon and counseling session women receive. In fact, what men hear is radically different than the call to be pure and chaste. Men hear talks about how "boys will be boys and men will be men," and how, if we as men mess up, it is a woman's fault. In fact, I heard a woman whose male pastor was dealing with sexual issues say that the pastor would not have had these issues if the women within the church wouldn't tempt him with provocative dress and talk.

An organization for women in ministry designed to support and encourage women is necessary and should only be the beginning of how we remediate past discrimination against women in the church.

Now, I assumed that I wouldn't have to explain all this to the clergy with whom I was speaking. He was a black man. We understand what discrimination and marginalization feel like. We know what institutionalized discrimination, packaged to appear perpetuated by *us*, feels like.

God's decision to enter our world through a woman affirms women's sacredness in the eyes of God. But too often, women are not afforded respect in the church.



For instance, I am a member of a historically black Greek-letter fraternity (In all honesty, there is only one. But, I digress). I was at an outing in which I was wearing a fraternity pin. After a woman discovered I was a member of a "black fraternity," she asked me, "why are there 'black fraternities'? Shouldn't there just be 'fraternities'? What if there were 'white' fraternities?"

Yes. That actually happened. To have to explain why there must be organizations that support women in ministry is just like explaining why there are black fraternities. If there were no discrimination and marginalization advanced by the dominant cultures in either case, there would be no need for black fraternities or women in ministry organizations. And further, to blame women for being industrious and organizing to encourage themselves in a male-dominated profession and remedy past and current discrimination is both laughable and unconscionable.

An editor of a newspaper reviewed a shorter version of this text, and told me that I needed to clarify in which churches

women face the kind of marginalization I describe because it did not happen in her (predominantly white) church. Her comments underscore another barrier for women of color who seek to lead: other women don't seem to understand their struggle.

Black women in America have had to fight, scuffle, and scrape for their womanhood and their blackness—often alone, but many times alongside people who have sought to negate both aspects of their identity. Black women have played major roles in both the women's suffrage movement and the Civil Rights movement. However, when it came time to realize the fruits of their efforts, black women and their concerns were repudiated and laid to the side. Rosa Parks was all but muted after her famous refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus in the 1950s. And who can forget the suffragist Susan B. Anthony's declaration that she would just as soon cut off her right arm if she



My closest friends are women and I see them struggling with body image, work-life balance, fashion issues, and sexism in the workplace—issues that I have never had to struggle with. Issues that, quite frankly, we should be alarmed to still be dealing with today.

had to work for voting rights for blacks before women?

So, perhaps the marginalization of women in church doesn't happen in every church, but it does occur. In fact, several black clergywomen tell me that they still feel considerable hurt and pain from this kind of treatment.

I have been in the called ministry for almost a decade. Unfortunately, conversations and experiences like the one I had with the male clergy after my ordination are all too common.

It is curious to me that women in the pews of many of the churches I have served outnumber the men by a substantial margin. Women, from my experience, were the driving forces that made these churches function properly as well, serving in various lay leadership roles. And these haven't been just any women. They have been among the sharpest, motivated, brilliant people I have ever met. Yet, while women outnumber the men in the church both in the pew and in leadership positions, I have seen a resistance to having women in the pastorate in churches. Even from women themselves.

A close confidant who was a woman in the ministry faced a significant amount of discrimination and sexism within the church at large. She had

church members (some of whom were women) and entire congregations unwilling to follow her because she was a "woman pastor." She was passed over for promotions within the pastorate while she watched her male colleagues receive those same promotions. And my friend was repeatedly admonished and characterized as arrogant, brash, and overbearing for infractions men would have been praised for.

The notion of women not being fit to lead within the called ministry is foreign to me. I grew up in a family with three sisters, no brothers, and a mother who raised me as a single parent after my father died in my teenage years. All of my aunts are strong, intelligent women who lead schools and run their own businesses. And until recently, I never conceptualized supervisors in my professional life being anything other than women.

Yet, I am acutely aware of the privilege I have as a male. My closest friends are women and I see them struggling with body image, work-life balance, fashion issues, and sexism in the workplace—issues that I have never had to struggle with. Issues that, quite frankly, we should be alarmed to still be dealing with today.

I have male privilege.

I have never had to keep my cell phone out in case I had to dial 911 because someone was following me. I have never had to worry about who was lurking in my parking structure after work to get me. I have never feared for my safety in any dark alleyway, first date, or nightclub (although, I probably should have in retrospect).

I have never been eviscerated on social media for what I wore, what I didn't wear, or what I should have worn. My body parts have never been analyzed online, or discussed in a chatroom. I have never had to worry about being "too sexy" on my social media page.

I have never had to go to work, work hard, and get paid less than an incompetent counterpart. I have never had to worry about the right time to tell a job that I was pregnant. I have never had to determine whether I should wear an engagement ring to work for fear of appearing too "high maintenance."

I have never had to pretend that I was dumb in order to sell a product, learn a concept, or "land" a partner. I have never been urged to have children or be seen as incomplete because I do not have them.

I have never been called "whore" or "slut," "thot" or "thottie," "baby momma," or "freak" simply because I exist. I have never been accused of using my body or sex to benefit myself or career.

I can wear whatever in the world I want outside my house and not be judged for wearing it (except by my mother). I can be assertive and aggressive without being a bad person.

I can drink beer from a bottle. I have never had a car sales person ignore me because I am a man. No server has ever thanked my wife for paying for a meal that I paid for. I have never had my meal paid for on a date with the expectation that I would then "put out."

But, simply because men cannot fully comprehend the magnitude of the oppression women face daily does not mean we cannot be allies. Particularly in the church. In fact, it should begin with men.

I can wear the same suit to work (Hey. Only God can judge me, right?) for an entire week, only changing my shirt and tie. Nobody has ever pressured me into wearing skinny jeans, a bra, or make up in the morning. Nobody's called me a bad mom for breastfeeding in public, for not breastfeeding in public, for not attending every single thing my kid does, or for nothing at all.

And, and, and, I don't even know what yoga pants are.

Yes, I'm privileged.

And one day several years ago, after talking with my wife and my friends about all of the privileges I enjoyed which they did not, I decided to quietly attempt to give up all of these privileges for one week. All of them. Not for a gimmick, but to attempt to understand what gender oppression feels like.

I didn't make it more than seventy-two hours. I couldn't handle needing to be aware of my surroundings or caring what I wore for that long. And, what's more, I never truly felt what it was like to be a woman, because the world at large saw my maleness during that time period and treated me the way I was always treated.

But, simply because men cannot fully comprehend the magnitude of the oppression women face daily does not mean we cannot be allies. Particularly in the church. In fact, it should begin with men. We must challenge ourselves to think differently than our fathers and this world about women and gender.

We must tell our sons early that women should be valued and equal in this world *because* of, not *in spite* of, their womanhood. We must bear witness in the presence of those who use off-color names, tell tasteless jokes, or hurl microaggressions about women that we won't stand for further oppression.

We must be ready to stand with women and assist them as they create leadership opportunities for themselves within the church, and not pout or lament "me too" when they do. Do all lives matter? Yes, of course they do. But, right now we have a need to concern ourselves with the ones attached to women who have been devalued for far too long.

Women will continue to fight for equality, humanity, and inclusion in the calculus of the business and leadership of the church. They will continue to fight for the church to see their womanhood as an asset rather than an annoyance.

But, in the same way my young friend and cousin made my fights their fights, men must be willing to do the same for women. We must make their fight for equality our fight as well. All of us. Both men and women.



David Hart is a practicing attorney and lead pastor of a growing church in Madison, Wisconsin. His mom says he's special on the inside.



The Fifties Housewife in my Head:

Finding Freedom from Shame and Inadequacy

Sarah Judd-Lam

“Who does the cooking?” they asked, waggling their eyebrows, as I microwaved my leftovers. I was in the office kitchen preparing to eat lunch along with several older female colleagues when the topic of domestic labor came up. I am newly married, and I think they were trying to make a point. Each time they ask, I explain that my husband and I share housework fifty-fifty. The response is usually the same: a dubious, wide-eyed “how does *that* work?”

These conversations with older women in my sphere happen often—probably once every few weeks. The frequency and the consistent shock they express at the idea of shared home labor indicates a gaping crevasse between the feminist ideals championed by my mother’s generation and their experience of domestic life. And, since most of these women have children my age and still regard egalitarian households as a novelty, I think this is perhaps not the norm for their children either.

By contrast, couples in my peer network tend to share parenting responsibilities and domestic chores to a greater extent than I have observed in any previous

Ecclesiastes 4:9
reads: “two are
better than one,
because they have a
good return for their
labor: If either of
them falls down, one
can help the other
up. But pity anyone
who falls and has no
one to help them up.”

Two *are* better than
one, and marriage
is about being there
to help each other
up, to share the load
so the other doesn't
collapse under too
much weight.

generation. In fact, in most of the Gen Y couples I know, “she” can’t cook and hardly attempts to, but “he” loves cooking and therefore does most of it. Those who have kids do their best to share parenting responsibilities, as much as restrictive labor market dynamics and the social norms of our society allow. Memes mocking the idea that dads “babysit” their own children when mom are busy are a regular feature on my newsfeed. “It’s called parenting!” dads comment incredulously.

I went to empowering girls-only schools and was mostly raised by a highly competent single dad. After leaving home, I lived with friends for seven years. So when I got married, I was already very capable of running a household and anticipated an equitable distribution of housework in my marriage. I made this expectation clear to my now-husband, who grew up with a stay-at-home mom and a maid, and who hadn’t lived long out of his parents’ home. Splitting our domestic labor has been a learning curve for him, but he’s been willing.

Beyond just being the right thing to do, this household ethic fits the Bible’s outline for marriage. Ecclesiastes 4:9 reads: “two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.” Two *are* better than one, and marriage is about being there to help each other up, to share the load so the other doesn’t collapse under too much weight.

It’s easy to intellectually believe this, but it’s *hard* to hold it firmly in my heart. In spite of my egalitarian values and upbringing, I still frequently feel ashamed for not being more of a domestic goddess. It’s like there’s a finger-pointing, 1950s housewife in an apron and heels in the back of my mind, chastising me for not doing enough for my husband. If he walks out of the house with a slightly crumpled work shirt or unconventional lunch, I feel an irrational stab of panic that his colleagues will judge me for neglecting him. I am anxious even though he is a grown man and perfectly capable of ironing (or not) his own shirts and making lunch for himself!

I have yet to work out where this voice comes from, but it indicates that, even as a full-time working, feminist, Gen Y woman, I am still subject to highly gendered social norms regarding housework. And apparently, I’m far from the only modern woman to experience this strangely incongruent sense of guilt. Across the English-speaking world, three themes consistently emerge in current research on this topic.

Are our expectations regarding housework, lifestyle, and domestic routine in line with our professed values? If not, let's rewrite them and commit to keeping each other accountable.

First, no matter how much women in cohabiting relationships do paid work, they still end up doing more housework—and worrying more about housework—than their male partners. Second, women simply care more about an ordered home than men. They internalize responsibility for the state of their homes as a key part of their identity and value—even when they disagree with this idea in principle. Third, this deeply ingrained sense of responsibility for running the household means that when domestic labor *is* evenly distributed between them and their partners, women feel more stressed and guilty.¹

Few Bible passages have been so twisted to shame and pressure Christian women as Proverbs 31. The passage describes a married woman who successfully manages a household *and* runs a business. She is independent, innovative, and hard-working. And yet, she has become the poster-woman of evangelical femininity—a symbol of perfectly manicured homes, delicious home-cooked meals, and endless, saintlike service to others.

The Proverbs 31 woman, with her noble character and fear of the Lord, *can* be a great role model for joyful industriousness. Yet for many Christian women, she's the face of the apron-wearing, fifties housewife in their heads, telling them they should always be doing more. God doesn't want women to feel inadequate or carry heavy burdens. But even when we know that, it can still be hard to shut out the voice that whispers: we're not enough.

So how do we address the gap between women's egalitarian beliefs and their lived experience? How do we deal with the guilt and shame and stress? First, we examine our own thought-life and emotions and expose unhelpful (and unbiblical) patterns of thinking in this area. If we identify beliefs that are incongruent with our egalitarian values, we need to expose them and work through them as we would

with any other schema or self-destructive script—with personal reflection, biblical study, prayer, wise counsel, and potentially even therapy if their hold on our lives is dire and unrelenting.

Once we get a handle on the conflicting messages and expectations that cause us to feel deficient, we need to sit down with our spouses and together review our “rulebook” for household management. What absolutely has to be done? What can we let slide? And who does what, when? The most important question is: are our expectations regarding housework, lifestyle, and domestic routine in line with our professed values? If not, let's rewrite them and commit to keeping each other accountable.

Finally, as in everything, we women need to be kinder to ourselves, reduce our unrelenting standards, listen to those who love us more than those who judge us, and treat ourselves with the same patience and grace as our Heavenly Father.



Sarah Judd-Lam is an Australian woman of faith who loves writing about social issues and is passionate about understanding why we do things the way we do and how we can do them better.

1. Oliver Burkeman, “Dirty secret: why is there still a housework gender gap?”, *The Guardian*, Feb. 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2018/feb/17/dirty-secret-why-housework-gender-gap>; Naomi Larsson, “Guilt over household chores is ‘harming working women’s health’,” *The Guardian*, Feb. 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2018/feb/16/guilt-over-household-chores-is-harming-working-womens-health-housework>; Leah Ruppanner, “Census 2016: Women still disadvantaged by the amount of unpaid housework they do, census data shows,” *The Conversation*, April 2017, <http://theconversation.com/census-2016-women-are-still-disadvantaged-by-the-amount-of-unpaid-housework-they-do-76008>.



CREATED TO THRIVE

MUTUALITY, POWER, AND IDENTITY

CBE'S 2019 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE | HOUSTON, TEXAS | AUGUST 2-4, 2019

Join CBE in Houston, Texas, for “Created to Thrive: Mutuality, Power, and Identity.”

Explore God’s vision for thriving marriages, churches, and communities.

REGISTRATION IS OPEN!

TO LEARN MORE OR REGISTER, VISIT

CBE.TODAY/2019CONF



KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Shane Claiborne
Red Letter Christians



Havilah Dharamraj
SAIACS, Bangalore, India



Cynthia Hale
Ray of Hope Christian Church



Lisa Sharon Harper
Author, Advocate



Eugene Hung
Anti-abuse Advocate



Emily Onyango
St. Paul's University, Kenya

WORKSHOP SPEAKERS

Sarah Ago
Hillside Covenant Church

Linda Lee Smith Barkman
Advocate for Incarcerated Women

Beth Birmingham
NGO Leader

Jodi Chung
Speaker, Ministry Leader

Michael Chung
Scholar, Missionary, Ministry Leader

Rob Dixon
Campus Minister, InterVarsity

Sandra Glahn
Author and Activist

Mimi Haddad
President, CBE International

Sandra Morgan
Vanguard University

Annette Oltmans
The M3nd Project

Jeanne Porter King
The TransPorter Group

Allison Quient
Scholar and Advocate

Mitch Randall
Ethicsdaily.com

Eeva Simard
World Relief

Todd Still
Truett Seminary

LEARN

Be on the cutting edge of the egalitarian movement.

Get the latest in scholarship and advocacy from leaders in the movement, on topics like:

- Gender theology and #MeToo
- How to be a change agent in your church
- What does egalitarian marriage look like?
- The real-world impact of biblical gender equality around the world?
- Theology and biblical studies

CONNECT

Network with scholars, activists, non-profit leaders, pastors, and egalitarians like yourself from around the world.

ADVOCATE

Be encouraged and equipped to embody and share the vision of biblical gender equality in your family, church, and community.

Find speaker bios, lodging info, and registration at **cbe.today/2019conf**.

4 Jobs Women Are Expected to Do without Pay, and How to Balance the Labor Scale

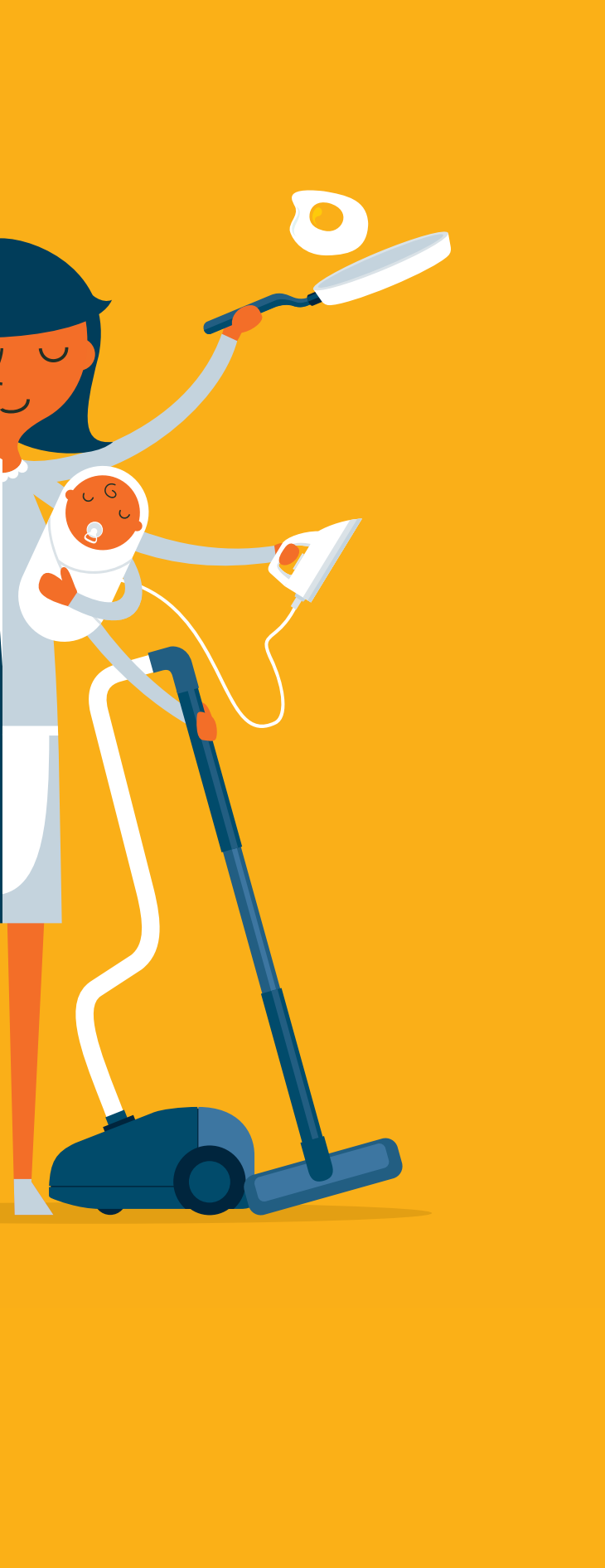
Rachel Asproth

A viral tweet from this past October playfully asserted, “women talk to men using their customer service voice and don’t even get paid for it.”¹ The tweet was obviously meant in jest, a comical dramatization of how women interact with (and placate) men. Still, it highlighted a very real truth: women are expected to perform unpaid work for others—especially men.

One of the most obvious reasons that women regularly perform unpaid work is patriarchy. In men, patriarchy fosters a sense of entitlement to women’s time, energy, and labor and in women, a conditioned willingness to compromise boundaries and grant men whatever they desire. Where history has consistently nodded at men’s work, women’s efforts have often gone unnoticed. Further, women historically have and do perform many kinds of work that aren’t recognized as “real work.” Today, women comprise nearly half of the US labor force and yet white women still make only eighty-one cents to white men’s dollar, and the gap is even wider for all women of color.²

Some Christians still regard work outside the home as the domain of men, and women as trespassers in that space. According to a 2017 Barna study, seventy-seven percent





of Americans are comfortable with women someday comprising more than half the workforce, but just fifty-two percent of evangelicals felt similarly. Further, evangelicals demonstrate the highest discomfort with women in leadership positions such as pastor, president, and CEO of any other group and the lowest acceptance that women face obstacles in the workplace.³

Some churches and Christian organizations don't feel compelled to pay women for their work because they don't recognize women's expertise as legitimate—or they view women's contributions as extensions of husbands. Further, because some churches still hold a traditional view of gender roles, stereotypically feminine work is seen by some as women's natural responsibility and something they should gladly perform without pay. For these reasons, Christians have sometimes demeaned women and not paid or underpaid them for their work.

What does all of this have to do with us? As Christians, we are called to do justly (Micah 5:8). Paying and recognizing others for their work is just and right. Further, women are being asked to bear unreasonable burdens and we serve a God who promises “to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and... break every yoke” (Isaiah 58:6). So let us undo heavy burdens today.

Why Do Women Work for Free?

Most women can think of a time when they weren't explicitly asked but still felt compelled to perform unpaid work. This expectation can be knowingly or unknowingly implied, for example, by a man's glance between the only woman in a room and an empty pot of coffee. Boardroom barista is not in her job description, but she does it anyway. Or, a woman may be asked to host a committee meeting or perhaps a Bible study. No one asked, but she knows she's expected to bake treats for the group.

Sometimes, women do unpaid labor because they know that only *they* will notice there's a gap to be bridged, a church or office floor that needs sweeping, a fridge that needs restocking. And still other times, women are blatantly asked to do a job they do not want and should not have to do without compensation. The person or body asking for their time and energy often has no plan to compensate or credit them. But women have been socialized to “pitch in.” They want to be “team players,” so they don't ask to be paid, or they do but they're told “not know, maybe someday.”

Women's unpaid labor is symptomatic of two problems: 1) men presume that women's time, energy, and labor is less valuable and not worth compensating for and 2) society



devalues women and women's work. Now, let's look at four jobs women do without pay and how we can balance the labor scale.

1. Chief Family Executive Officer

This is the daily job of many women, and especially overburdened and under-recognized wives and mothers. Typically, when we think of the division of household labor, we think about the actual chores men and women do. Statistically, women perform far more household chores than men. There's also a lot of pressure on women in Christian churches and communities to singlehandedly oversee this type of "traditionally feminine" work.

However, there's another role that women are expected to fill in both secular and Christians homes—chief family executive officer. This person is responsible for *recognizing* that work needs to be done and *ensuring* it gets done. She is supervisor of the household, not only physically doing most household chores but also organizing the home, keeping track of schedules, and predicting and meeting the family's needs. The technical term for this burden is the "the mental load." According to the 2017 Modern Family Index, women are two times more likely to be managing the household and three times more likely to be managing their children's schedules.⁴

Many women aren't even *asked* to do it, they simply do. Whether because women have been performing this

supervisory work for so long and believe it is expected or because men believe women are supposed to do it, men have often been excused from their share of the mental load. They don't need to think about what they'll need for a day at the park, because women will. They don't need to plan a meal when parents come to town, because women will. They don't need to think about a color-coded calendar, because women will.

But the burden of running a household shouldn't fall to women alone. A household is a shared responsibility, a promise to work, build, and plan together. Men aren't exempt from that. Further, research indicates that marriages and families are healthier and happier when couples share domestic work.⁵ With just a few simple practices, men could ensure that women are not only celebrated for their hard work, but also that they equally share the mental load of a household with their wives. To balance the labor scale:

A. When your spouse plans, schedules, or simply announces a need she's noticed in your home, let her know you appreciate her attention to detail and ask what can you do to share equally in the work.

B. Spend a few minutes each day thinking about the needs of your home. Each week, notice and make a list of tasks that need doing or events that need planning. Communicate to your spouse that you're on it.

[Men] don't need to think about what they'll need for a day at the park, because women will. They don't need to plan a meal when parents come to town, because women will. They don't need to think about a color-coded calendar, because women will.

C. Apologize when you don't pull your weight. If your wife has been carrying more of the load, let her know that you know it's not okay or sustainable. Make a plan for how you're going to pull your weight. Ask your wife how you can be a better partner.

2. Public Educator/Free Consultant

The expertise of women is often judged valuable enough to make use of but not valuable enough to compensate for. This happens in many fields. Women who work as paid educators and consultants are routinely asked to work for free as either a public service or favor. They are invited to weigh in on an organization's problems with racial diversity or difficulty finding women for leadership positions. In one study, women lawyers said that the committee work they are typically assigned is not seen as labor that should be compensated.⁶ But no matter the field, requests for free education/consulting indicate a disrespect for women's expertise, time, and energy.

This also happens in churches. They want to benefit from women's gifts without recognizing women themselves, without giving them titles, and without paying them. This phenomenon is epitomized in the unofficial position of "pastor's wife." She may perform domestic work for the congregation at large, offer emotional support and pastoral care to others, and even assist her husband in crafting sermons and shaping church vision. But for all of this work, she still holds no official title but one that extends from her husband's position. Church leader Kay Bonikowsky put it this way:

[My husband's] official position [as elder] lent credibility to my unofficial one. How could I now justify all the roles I'd filled before? I wasn't a pastor, although I counseled in the place of one. I wasn't a deacon, although I served in every function required of a deacon. I wasn't an elder, although my advice was sought at every level.⁷

In other cases, women professionals may be asked to volunteer or "unofficially consult" on an issue/project for the church. Their labor is often solicited carefully, strategically. But they know that "would love your insight on this" doesn't mean "would love to pay your regular professional fee." Instead, it means "would love to benefit from your expertise at no cost" or "would love for you to volunteer to perform work that we would *pay* a man to do." As Bonikowsky explains it:



Something shifts when a woman asks that her work and calling be formally recognized in these spaces. The leadership and direction she previously provided (often for free) and without objection... becomes unacceptable.⁸

It's not okay to ask women to volunteer their labor as a favor or public service. If we value what women do, we show it. To balance the labor scale:

- A. Ask women what they charge for their expertise and happily pay it. Or let them know you're not able to and thank them for offering those services.
- B. If a woman volunteers her time, let her know that you recognize she is qualified and could charge for her service. Thank her for waiving her fee. If you're able, *still* ask if she would like to be paid.
- C. Don't presume that women's ingenuity and time is yours. When a woman asks you to do your research on your own, don't ask her to instead educate you herself. Do the work.

3. Community Therapist

According to a 2018 UN Report, women do more than two and a half times the amount of unpaid emotional work that men do.⁹ Women are used to listening to other people talk about their problems. We do it for people with whom we're in relationship. But we also do it for strangers—performing emotional labor at the expense of our own wellbeing, needs, and boundaries.

It's good to be kind and empathic. Scripture encourages us to make our ears attentive and to incline our hearts toward

understanding others (Proverbs 2:2). However, women are often expected to provide an unreasonable amount of understanding and emotional support. And, that level of empathy and care is rarely returned when women have their own struggles. In these situations, they are community therapists—friendly shoulders to cry on for the world-over. These aren't equal exchanges of support and understanding. No, women are serving as emotion receptacles for girlfriend problems, in-law struggles, money shortfalls, and work frustrations.

Women are often expected to provide an unreasonable amount of understanding and emotional support. And, that level of empathy and care is rarely returned when women have their own struggles.

Often, this type of unpaid therapy work is justified by gender stereotypes.¹⁰ Women are naturally better listeners. They're more empathetic. They're better communicators. They care more about others' problems. "So, why shouldn't I talk to them about my problems?" one might ask. "I always feel so good when I talk to women about my feelings. I'm not *forcing* them to listen to me. They could tell me to stop." Except many women won't tell you to stop. And you won't have to *force* them to listen to you, because it is what they have been socialized to do: to put your problems, emotions, struggles, and trauma first.

Women are expected to develop emotional competence young but men aren't always encouraged to do the same. Naturally, talking to women can be emotionally healing. It's easy to crave that positive experience without considering the corresponding costs to women. It can also be hard to think of these interactions as laborious, as work women may feel obligated to perform. It's important to ask 1) whether you take advantage of women's tendency to do disproportionate emotional labor and 2) whether you're creating reciprocal relationships in which women can share their struggles with you. To balance the labor scale:

A. Before soliciting a woman's listening ear, ask yourself if you make space for her struggles too. If not, don't ask her to perform emotional work.

B. Recognize that listening and empathizing with others is *work*. Even when your spouse is doing it, it's a gift and a service and it should not be taken for granted. Express gratitude to those who listen and love you well.

C. Be aware that women don't always feel comfortable saying, "I don't have the time/energy to talk to you." Check in with women about what they want to give and respect their boundaries. Make it safe for women to say, "I can't/don't want to talk to you about this right now."

4. Everybody's Administrative Assistant

Frustratingly, women are expected to perform menial tasks outside of their job descriptions all the time.¹¹ Research routinely shows that women are more likely than men to volunteer for "non-promotable tasks" such as office housework (cleaning, taking orders for food, answering the phone, etc.) and the gender difference only widens in groups containing both men and women.¹² Many women report fearing to perform any traditionally feminine or administrative assistant-type work because they may be expected to always do that task.



Sometimes, this kind of unpaid work is framed in a positive light, as if women are just naturally more competent at “feminine” or assistant-type tasks than men. Other times, men rely on strategic ignorance to situate certain undesired tasks as “feminine.” But women aren’t naturally better at making coffee, taking notes, or wiping a kitchen counter—and men aren’t incapable. They just haven’t been asked to do it.

Think about how you perceive others’ competencies and how you subtly—or blatantly—communicate those beliefs to others. Do women in your office tend to pick up slack in keeping the kitchen clean? Do they refill the paper towel roll when it’s empty? Do you generally assign “secretary tasks” mostly to women? To balance the labor scale:

A. Demonstrate to other men that there is no such thing as “women’s work” by doing tasks often relegated to women. Let no task be too menial or “feminine” for you and encourage the men around you to have the same attitude.

B. Vocally encourage women in your office to set boundaries and never transgress those boundaries by asking them to perform tasks men aren’t asked to do.

C. Show appreciation if a woman performs a traditionally feminine or assistant type-task, but also let her know that she is not expected to do so. Assure her that if she ever feels pressured to do that, she can come to you.

We’ve Got Work to Do

The epidemic of women’s unpaid work is a serious problem and it’s one that should concern us as Christians. Whether by implication, necessity, or demand, women aren’t being credited or compensated for their work. They are often taken less seriously as professionals and expected to take sole responsibility for housework and other traditionally feminine kinds of work. Not all labor—such as household work—is the kind of work for which we give and receive a paycheck. But it remains that for much of history, patriarchy has ensured that all of women’s work—official and unofficial and paid and unpaid—is seen as less than, and that women’s labor can be taken for granted.

We need to both pay women (equally!) for their labor and stop expecting them to perform inordinate amounts of work for free. We also need to make sure that women’s expertise and efforts are welcomed and compensated in our churches. Let’s balance the labor scale in our homes, churches, and communities and show respect for any and all work completed by women’s hands.



Rachel Asproth is editor and communications specialist at CBE International. She’s the recipient of two Evangelical Press Awards in poetry and editorial. Rachel has a BA in reconciliation studies and English literature from Bethel University. She lives in Minnesota.

-
1. Twitter post. Oct. 28, 2018, 1:21 pm. <https://twitter.com/sadgirlkms/status/1056612033897095169>.
 2. “America’s Women and the Age Gap,” National Partnership for Women and Families, Sept. 2018, <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/fair-pay/americas-women-and-the-wage-gap.pdf>.
 3. “What Americans Think About Women in Power,” Barna Group, Mar. 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/americans-think-women-power/>.
 4. “New Research Shows the ‘Mental Load’ is Real and Significantly Impacts Working Mothers Both at Home and Work,” Bright Horizons Family Solutions, Dec., 2018, <https://www.brighthorizons.com/about-us/press-releases/mental-load-impact-working-mothers-study>.
 5. Theresa E. DiDonato, “Are You an Egalitarian Couple?” *Psychology Today*, Apr. 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/meet-catch-and-keep/201804/are-you-egalitarian-couple>.
 6. Joan C. Williams, “Sticking women with the office housework,” *The Washington Post*, Apr. 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2014/04/16/sticking-women-with-the-office-housework/>.
 7. Kay Bonikowsky, “How Planting a Church Made me Reconsider My Beliefs about Gender Roles,” *Mutuality* vol 25, no. 4 (Winter 2018), <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/mutuality/how-planting-church-made-me-reconsider-my-beliefs-about-gender-roles>.
 8. Ibid.
 9. Ariel Scotti, “Women are doing double the ‘emotional labor’ of men—and still aren’t getting enough credit,” *NY Daily News*, Feb. 2018, <https://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/women-double-emotional-labor-men-article-1.3834039>.
 10. Rose Hackman, “‘Women are just better at this stuff’: is emotional labor feminism’s next frontier?” *The Guardian*, Nov. 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/08/women-gender-roles-sexism-emotional-labor-feminism>.
 11. Joan C. Williams, “Sticking women with the office housework.”
 12. Linda Babcock, Maria P. Recalde, and Lise Vesterlund, “Why Women Volunteer for Tasks That Don’t Lead to Promotions,” *Harvard Business Review*, July, 2018, <https://hbr.org/2018/07/why-women-volunteer-for-tasks-that-dont-lead-to-promotions>.

Choose Your Own Adventure:

A Very Egalitarian Proposal

Sierra Neiman Westbrook

"I'm dead set against being proposed to at a restaurant," I informed my boyfriend.

"I'd love a glass of champagne on the house," I continued, "but it's just too public. Too cliché."

Justin and I had been friends for several years but we had only just begun to date a few months before. I felt bold in broaching the topic, but his response was just one more affirmation that I had found my life partner.

"Well, since we're talking about it," he said, "I don't want to be the only one proposing; I'd like to be proposed to and wear an engagement ring as a symbol of my commitment, too." Be still, my heart.

Over bowls of ramen, we decided June would be the perfect month to get married. After we left the restaurant, we skipped—literally skipped—down the sidewalk. Only then did it occur to us that we needed to actually *get engaged* before planning our wedding. So we picked a "mutual proposal day" and began dreaming up our plans.

I knew exactly when Justin would slide a ring onto my finger (and when I would do the same for him), but we kept our engagement almost a complete surprise from our friends and families. There was one exception. As the date approached, I sat down with my parents and told them Justin and I were talking about getting married. When I was a teenager, my father

expressed how honored he would be a young man asked him for my hand in marriage someday (though I always knew Dad would say the choice was mine). Recalling this, I preemptively told my father that Justin wouldn't be asking for his permission. I don't align with some of my dad's traditional views, and at thirty-five years old I was hardly fresh out of my parents' home. Still, I didn't want to ignore my dad's desire entirely. I wanted it to be clear that although Justin and I were stepping toward marriage without soliciting permission from my father, we respect and love my parents. They were understanding and happy for us.

We arbitrarily split our proposal day in half: Justin was responsible for concocting surprises for me during the first half of the day, and I would plan surprises for him during the last half. That morning, Justin arrived at my apartment and we set out to follow his plan. He took me to a series of locations that had been important to us. At each place, he gave me a small gift symbolizing something he valued about us as a couple and something he hoped we would carry into the future.

For one stop, we visited the "peace trail" that encircles our church, where we had several significant conversations early in our relationship. At each of the twelve peace poles along the path, we stopped and Justin reached into his bag, pulled out a gift, and told me what it meant. A dreamcatcher because we support each other's dreams. A handful of small charms that said "Go Team!" because we're in this together. An "O Captain, My Captain" poster from *Dead Poet's Society*, because he believes in me as a professor and is willing to move for my pursuit of a PhD. The pilgrimage culminated at the trail's prayer labyrinth. In the

very center—where we as individuals and as a couple had promised to keep God at our center—he got down on one knee and proposed. I wept with unmuted joy.

After a celebratory brunch, Justin and I embarked on the next leg of the adventure. Since I am just as inclined toward symbolism, each element of my plan was also imbued with relational and/or spiritual meaning. We took a walk at a wildlife refuge where I had given him a homemade “Choose Your Own Adventure” book, and told him I was ready for the dating chapter of our story. In that same spot, months later, I gave him a photo album highlighting the adventures we’d since been on. At a paint-your-own pottery shop, I told him I wanted to create things with him for the rest of our lives.

Knowing that our life together would be marked by both bliss and struggle, I endeavored to encapsulate both themes. I had planned for us to stand together inside a tornado simulator at the science museum, but it was closed. As it turned out, however, heavy traffic made us late for our blissful foot massage appointment, so we were able to squeeze in some practice at weathering storms after all. At the end of the day, I rolled out a picnic blanket in a vineyard and got down on one knee. Actually, I got down on two knees at first because I was so anxious and excited that I forgot the one-knee tradition. I proposed to Justin and slipped a ring on his finger after his tearful “yes.”

Justin and I were as intentional with our engagement as we hoped to be in our marriage. Admittedly, our proposal day was elaborate. With activities stretching from morning coffee to a late-night dinner after we had both said “yes,” our engagement was probably more extravagant than many people’s. That doesn’t make ours



Who proposes
to who?



Who pays for the
first date?

Who
says “I love
you” first?



Who asks who out?



Who makes the first move?



better. Importantly, it fit who we are as individuals and as a couple. We're both deep-feeling, meaning-making, symbolism-loving romantics, so our proposal day was a reflection of the steps we want to take as individual dancers in our marriage pas de deux.

As a professor at a Christian university and a spiritual director, I meet many people who desire Christ-centered, egalitarian partnerships. Yet they often aren't sure how to build that desire into the early stages of their relationship. They may have mentally sketched out an image of shared household chores and child-raising tasks, but have given little thought to what those convictions look like in action and in major moments such as becoming "official" with a significant other, a marriage proposal, or a wedding. This is no surprise. In both Western Christian and secular culture, there are few models for when a man and a

On an ideological level, mutually agreeing upon the date of our proposal and splitting the day in half allowed us to practice our commitment to sharing power and responsibility in our marriage.

woman get engaged that include anything other than a man "popping the question" to a surprised woman. But it doesn't need to be this way. We are free to embrace traditions that fit us as individuals and as couples. We can also forge new paths and practices. I offer our proposal story as one example of an alternative way forward. Naturally, people have asked questions about our unconventional engagement.

"Didn't you feel sad that Justin didn't surprise you with his proposal?"

When Justin got down on one knee—on the day we chose months before—and opened the box to reveal the ring we picked out together, I didn't feel a rush of dumbfounded amazement. But I didn't miss that at all. The joyful expectancy of our special day was a tremendous gift—as was the chance to pour my energy into creative expressions of my love for Justin. He and I also kept our plans a secret from each other, so surprise still marked the day.

On an ideological level, mutually agreeing upon the date of our proposal and splitting the

day in half allowed us to practice our commitment to sharing power and responsibility in our marriage. One can argue that the Western tradition of a man proposing to a woman is about giving men an opportunity to shower the ones they love with lavish affection. But this tradition can also imply that men have the sole power to determine if, when, and how proposals happen (which can also set a precedent for the couple's future decisions). We chose to share in that agency.

"What was the point of proposing if you already knew you'd both say yes?"

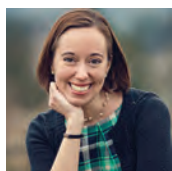
Good question, but let's think about the alternative. I wouldn't want someone to propose to me if he didn't already feel confident I'd say yes. If he had to persuade me, or if I needed time to think it over, I'd probably conclude that either he wasn't the right person for me, or he and I weren't on the same page concerning timing. Justin and I each knew we wanted to be married to each other and we knew we were ready. Our proposal was about affirming and celebrating the love we had grown and intended to keep growing together.

"Did you feel masculine when you got down on one knee and proposed to him?"

We are free to embrace traditions that fit us as individuals and as couples. We can also forge new paths and practices. I offer our proposal story as one example of an alternative way forward.

I don't make it a goal to feel "feminine" and neither does Justin strive to be "masculine." We just want to feel like ourselves. When I was down on one knee, telling the love of my life how much he meant to me, I felt like myself. Like an exploding-with-excitement-and-gratitude version of myself.

Living with intentionality is difficult. It is easy to become zombies on treadmills, going through the motions of life without actually considering why we are doing what we are doing and whether we want to be doing those things. Granted, seeking to saturate each moment with purpose will likely rob of us of the delights of spontaneity. Further, guilt about not living "well enough" (or egalitarian enough!) could fester into shame. So we must choose where we will press into intention and where we will give ourselves grace. During our season of dating and considering marriage, Justin and I decided that our engagement would reflect our commitment to equality. This was where we chose to press into intention. For those dating couples who long to deviate from the more traditional proposal model, I hope our story gives you inspiration and courage to blaze your own trail.



Sierra Neiman Westbrook, MDiv, is an adjunct professor of Christian studies at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. She is also a certified spiritual director, providing spiritual direction and spiritual formation opportunities through www.edenspiritualcare.org. She and her husband, Justin, have been married since June 2017.

For those dating couples who long to deviate from the more traditional proposal model, I hope our story gives you inspiration and courage to blaze your own trail.

Can't get enough *Mutuality*?

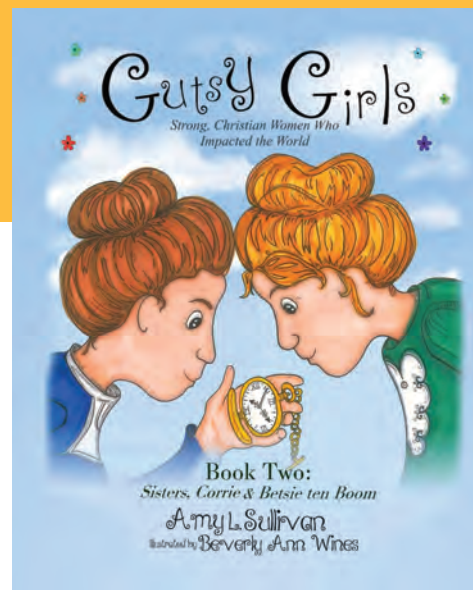
Subscribe or renew your print subscription today!

cbe.today/subscribe

Book Review

The *Gutsy Girls* Series

reviewed by Rachel Sheild Gustafson



The *Gutsy Girls* series, written by Amy L. Sullivan and illustrated by Beverly Ann Wines, is a collection of children's picture books highlighting five Christian women from history to present day. Gladys Aylward, the Ten boom sisters, Fanny Crosby, Sojourner Truth, and Dr. Jennifer Wisemen are each featured, though it should be noted this reviewer did not receive a copy of the volume featuring Sojourner Truth. In each story, the character is introduced as a child or youth who grows into her vocation as a strong, Christian woman. Their personalities, motivations, and cultural contexts are unique, meaning many different types of boys and girls will be able to relate.

The books feature women from a variety of social, historical, and professional contexts. My daughters, aged seven, eight, and ten, appreciated that there were women represented in ministry, in science, in art, and in business, each one making a significant difference in her own field. What I noticed was that the humanity of each young woman was made clear. They disliked school, played outside, watched TV, or were considered "average. Plain. Ordinary." My girls could imagine themselves in the lives of these girls. As a result, while reading their individual processes of hearing and responding to the call on their life, inspiration takes root in one's own life.

There are a few limitations to the series, not the least of which is the fact that the majority of the books feature protagonists who are white and from Western cultural contexts. There are some people of color represented in

illustrations, but in the book about Fanny Crosby, there is a drawing of a member of the "Eel Clan of the Onondaga Indian Tribe" dressed in a way I'm not certain is accurate for this particular tribe. Additionally, some readers may find problematic the depiction of Gladys Aylward, a missionary to China. Chinese people are depicted without much nuance or individuation while Gladys is depicted as a singular figure who brings reform. As an adoptive parent, I was especially aware of the story of how she "rescue[d] children by taking them into [her] inn and adopting them." In missions and adoption, there is a justifiable concern about anything that resembles a savior complex, especially across racial groups and cultures.

Admittedly, it is never easy to elevate the stories of historical figures without engaging the troublesome cultural and historical contexts in which they existed. Though there were some areas of the book where it did not seem every consideration was given, when it comes to gender, the books are thoughtful. As mentioned already, the women represent a variety of professional and vocational pursuits and, in their youth, the girls are engaged in activities which avoid gender stereotyping: They play with turtles and bugs, climb trees, drive space ships in their imagination, and trek ominous landscapes alone. The personalities of the characters are also crafted without gender clichés. While it's true that young Corrie Ten boom is pictured dreaming of a future involving marriage, babies, and a

nice home (this reviewer can't speak to the accuracy of that depiction), she is also portrayed as assertive, competent, and strong. In fact, these adjectives might describe each of the young women represented in the series.

Overall, though the author doesn't avoid every pitfall associated with writing about historical figures and events, the series was appreciated by my family. My girls are interested in some of the professional fields represented by the characters, and representation matters. In our home, books like these—picturing girls like mine growing into the women they aspire to be—are a valued empowerment tool. In particular, there aren't many books for children which portray Christian women and girls while avoiding gender stereotypes. As is most often the case with media we ingest, we discussed some of the potential weaknesses of the book and the conversation only became richer.



Rachel Sheild Gustafson has worked for nearly two decades in public policy and advocacy. She has an MFA in creative writing from Seattle Pacific University and an MPH in maternal and child health from the University of Minnesota.

Words of Freedom

I offer you the words I was offered
in the Book we have both read.
They are wrapped in tears of joy
and tied together with ribbons of freedom.

They are words of equality. Of liberty.
They are transfusions from my blood,
donations of my marrow.

They are words of sweat as we work
together in one body, not a body in pieces.
Once we were none. Now we are many.
These words say we can be one.

They are a feather prophesying flight.
A scale promising protection.
A leaf encouraging growth.



Partnering with Local Pastors to Expand the Movement



Top left: Teens and young adults learn about biblical gender equality.



Top right: Children crowd around to see men cook—something most have never seen.



Bottom left: A woman reads the Bible aloud for the first time.

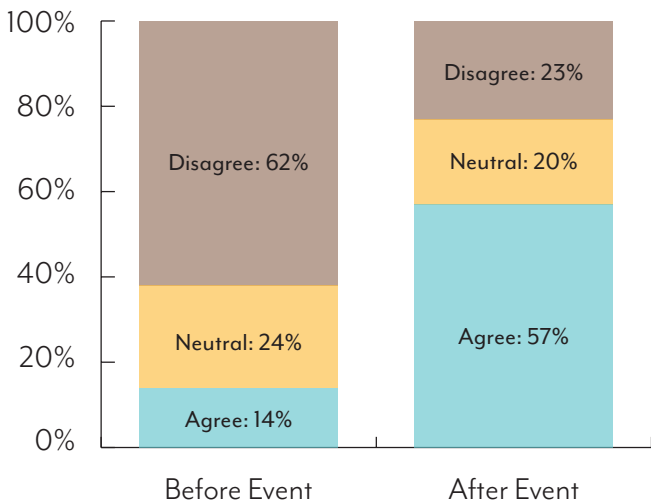


Bottom right: A woman reads a Luganda translation of *Still Side by Side*.

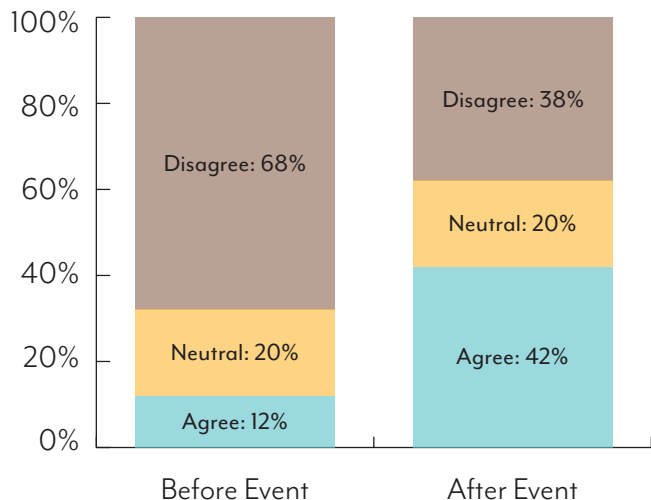
Throughout 2018, CBE collaborated with African pastors to fight gender-based violence and promote the Bible’s call for gender equality. They have worked hard to spread the word to adults and youth alike. Program results were assessed via surveys administered before and after each event. With over a thousand responses collected, we’re thrilled to report truly amazing impact.

Using gender surveys adapted from NGOs, the data measures understanding and commitment to biblical gender equality. With a maximum possible score of 60, adults and youth scored an average of 26.4 before programs. After, scores averaged 40.3, an increase of 52%! More specifically, before events, only 25% agreed that both men and women were made in the image of God. After events, agreement more than doubled to 64%!

Women should NOT tolerate violence for the sake of their families.



A husband and wife should make all important decisions together.



This remarkable change in attitudes and understanding is incredibly exciting to see. Still, CBE and our partners recognize there is much work to be done. Together, we will host programs in 2019 and collect data to measure how biblical gender equality education challenges gender-based violence and empowers women and men, and boys and girls. We look forward to what God will do for this movement in 2019.

Help CBE inspire a new generation of leaders!

“It’s where feminism meets Christianity and where cultures come together!”

“An event where people come to learn about true freedom in Jesus, what the true Word about women is, and a great place for networking.”

That’s how guests described CBE’s 2017 conference in Orlando. CBE’s 2019 conference, “Created to Thrive,” promises to be even more powerful! The CBE community will gather in Houston, August 2–4, to learn, connect, and advance the movement.

It’s also a unique opportunity to equip future teachers, pastors, and activists. CBE believes so strongly in the life-changing impact of our conferences that we subsidize many of the costs in order to keep registration low.

Yet even with our best efforts to defray costs, the registration fee is beyond what some can afford. So CBE’s goal is to offer 55 full or partial scholarships at a cost of nearly \$12,000. Here’s how you can help:

- Give securely online at cbe.today/conscholarships or mail a check with “scholar” noted in the memo.
- Host a fundraiser—CBE set up a template fundraising page and it takes just a few clicks for you to customize. Visit cbe.today/fundraise to learn more.
- Refer new leaders to CBE’s scholarship application at cbe.today/2019conf. Applications will be accepted until May 1.
- Pray that God provides the means for all who yearn to be equipped and encouraged at CBE’s conference



Thank you for joining with CBE to inspire a new generation of egalitarian leaders!

Give securely online at **cbe.today/conscholarships** or mail a check with “scholar” noted in the memo, or by phone (612-872-6898).



Centering Truth, Not Masculinity, in Christian Discourse

Turn on cable news or open a web browser and you will be inundated with conflicting views on current events. Politicians and media figures obscure the truth in order to elevate one philosophy or another. Anything one disagrees with is “fake news.”

This pattern is not new. In the church, patriarchy has long been fueled by an obscured, partial vision of the truth. Church culture wrongly obsesses over the masculine in its theology, language, and the heroes it celebrates. This prevents the good news of Jesus from taking hold. It is not just women who are hurt, but the church and its ability to recognize and embody Christ.

Theology

Male leaders throughout the centuries have devalued women in their theology. Chrysostom called women “weak and fickle.” Augustine said that male rule over women was the natural order of creation. John Knox said that women are naturally weak, fail, and foolish, and that women’s place is beneath men. John Piper claims that Christianity is meant to have a masculine feel. Such ideas are said to come from Scripture, but is this true?

In the Old and New Testaments, God calls his people to do better than the patriarchal world around them. Even more, women play an instrumental role in carrying out God’s work and leading God’s people. Jesus celebrated a woman for learning at his feet, which contradicted gender norms for women. He entrusted the good news to the Samaritan woman—the first Christian evangelist. Paul celebrated women deacons, co-workers, teachers, and apostles.

Any theology that elevates men over women on the basis of sex falls short of the biblical standard.

Language

For too long, language in churches has wrongly centered men. Some leaders are so concerned with enforcing a masculine Christianity that they make God out to be masculine because God is called “Father.” They forget that the Bible uses a rich variety of images and metaphors for God—a mother, a she-bear, a hen, a woman looking for a lost coin. Many male theologians, including Clement of Alexandria, Chrysostom,

and Anselm have followed Scripture’s lead and used feminine imagery for God.¹

Even Bible translations are skewed. Where the original language refers to groups of men and women, some insist that we use the masculine in English—men, brothers, sons, and so on. This obscures the meaning of Scripture in favor of masculine language. What’s more, traditional translations use words like “helpmeet” or “head” that convey a different meaning in English than the original languages suggest. Such errors undergird the “biblical” case for patriarchy.

Our language must be accurate, whether or not it supports our gender agendas.

Heroes

When was the last time you heard a female leader in Scripture, history, or church work celebrated? Too many Christians are unaware of the female heroes of the faith. For example, just 2% of all the history material published by the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) in the past 30 years focuses on women. Compared to just 29 ETS articles or presentations on women’s history during that time, 137 were on Jonathan Edwards alone!²

It is time we recognized women. Esther, Deborah, and Jael saved their people. Huldah gave God’s word to the king. Mary gave birth to the Christ. Phoebe was a deacon, Priscilla taught Apollos, Junia was an apostle. Jerome gets the credit for creating the Vulgate, but it was a team effort with Paula. Saint Nino, Teresa de Avila, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, and others were leaders in the church. Early evangelicals like Katharine Bushnell worked to end poverty, slavery, and sexual abuse. Women have always been a vital part of God’s story. We cannot fully know God or appreciate God’s work until we see and celebrate them.

In a world where the lines between truth and fiction have become blurred, it is more important than ever that we treat our theology and our faith with the utmost respect. That means learning about and from women, using gender-accurate language, and remembering the legacy of faithful men and women. This is not fake news, but good news.

1. See Clement of Alexandria, *Christ the Educator* (especially chapter 6); Jennifer P. Himmel, “God is our Mother”: *Julian of Norwich and the Medieval Image of Christian Feminine Divinity* (Salzburg, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 1982).

2. Chesna Hinkley, “‘Acknowledge Those Who Work Hard among You’: The Absence of Women’s Work in Complementarian Seminary Curricula” in *Eyes to See and Ears to Hear Women* (Minneapolis: CBE International, 2018), 37.

Praise

- We are excited to welcome several new board members! We know they will offer crucial insight and wisdom in the coming year.
- CBE recently launched a book club and the CBE community's response has been very enthusiastic. We look forward to many great conversations.
- CBE and our partners in Africa have been working hard to advance biblical gender equality. Praise God, we're seeing measurable changes in attitudes about gender roles and female dignity!

Prayer

- Our 2019 conference in Houston is fast approaching, and registration is now open! Pray that God will inspire many of our regular attendees to invite their friends, family, and community members to join this movement. We hope this will be our best conference yet!
- CBE has once again entered a number of articles in the Evangelical Press Association's annual award contest. Pray that our work will receive recognition and garner positive feedback from the judges.

CBE INTERNATIONAL

Mission Statement

CBE International (CBE) exists to promote biblical justice and community by educating Christians that the Bible calls women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world.

Statement of Faith

- We believe in one God, creator and sustainer of the universe, eternally existing as three persons in equal power and glory.
- We believe in the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.
- We believe that eternal salvation and restored relationships are only possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.
- We believe the Holy Spirit equips us for service and sanctifies us from sin.
- We believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.
- We believe that women and men are equally created in God's image and given equal authority and stewardship of God's creation.
- We believe that men and women are equally responsible for and distorted by sin, resulting in shattered relationships with God, self, and others.

Core Values

- Scripture is our authoritative guide for faith, life, and practice.
- Patriarchy (male dominance) is not a biblical ideal but a result of sin.
- Patriarchy is an abuse of power, taking from females what God has given them: their dignity, and freedom, their leadership, and often their very lives.
- While the Bible reflects patriarchal culture, the Bible does not teach patriarchy in human relationships.
- Christ's redemptive work frees all people from patriarchy, calling women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership.
- God's design for relationships includes faithful marriage between a man and a woman, celibate singleness and mutual submission in Christian community.
- The unrestricted use of women's gifts is integral to the work of the Holy Spirit and essential for the advancement of the gospel in the world.
- Followers of Christ are to oppose injustice and patriarchal teachings and practices that marginalize and abuse females and males.

To learn more about CBE's values, history, and ministry, visit cbe.today/info.

ONLINE RESOURCE LIBRARY

CBE is proud to offer all of our digital resources for free online! Find every *Mutuality* article ever published, the full archive of CBE's academic journal, *Priscilla Papers*, hundreds of book reviews, and hundreds of video and audio recordings of lectures given by world-renowned scholars like N.T. Wright, Gordon Fee, and more!

Find it all, for free, at cbeinternational.org!

ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP

CBE memberships are available to churches and organizations, and include copies of CBE publications, discounts to CBE conferences, discounted advertising and sponsorship opportunities with CBE, and more.

Visit cbe.today/orgmembers to learn more.

CBE SUBSCRIPTIONS

Print subscriptions to *Mutuality* and *Priscilla Papers* are available to libraries and individuals.

Visit cbe.today/subscriptions to learn more.

GET CONNECTED WITH CBE

Connect with CBE online to learn more about us, enjoy the resources we offer, and take part in our ministry.



Visit our website, cbeinternational.org, to find over a thousand resources—articles, book reviews, and video and audio recordings.



Follow our blog, *Arise* (cbe.today/blog).



Follow us on Twitter @CBEInt (twitter.com/cbeint).



Find us on Facebook (facebook.com/cbeint).

CBE International
122 West Franklin Ave, Suite 218
Minneapolis, MN 55404-2451

Forwarding Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Jefferson City, MO
Permit No. 210

cbeBookstore

providing quality resources on biblical gender equality

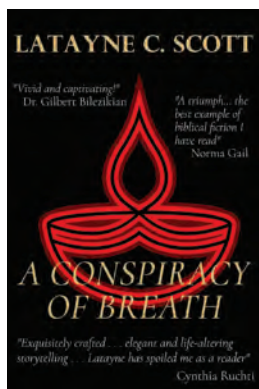


Recommended Resources from CBE!



Gutsy Girls Series
Strong Christian Women Who Impacted the World
Amy L. Sullivan

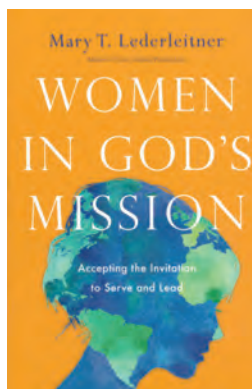
Girls need heroes. Why not introduce them to women who are smart, bold, courageous, and who love Jesus? *Gutsy Girls: Strong Christian Women Who Impacted the World* is a children's picture book series based on the lives of real women. Thoughtfully written with delightful illustrations, the stories of ordinary women who did extraordinary things will challenge and inspire girls and boys to live courageously and do extraordinary things.



A Conspiracy of Breath
Cynthia Ruchti

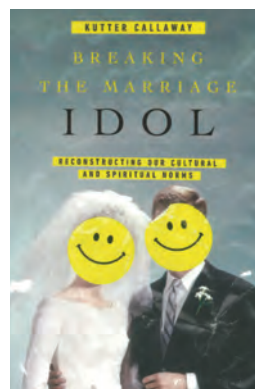
In a critically-acclaimed, controversial, and provocative literary work, award-winning author Latayne C. Scott examines: What would it have been like to be a woman, a Gentile, and someone onto whom the Holy Breath moved—to produce what became the mysterious Epistle to the Hebrews in the Bible?

"A fresh and engaging approach, which balances vivid imagination and extensive research."—Jeff Miller, editor of *Priscilla Papers*.



Women in God's Mission
Accepting the Invitation to Serve and Lead
Mary T. Lederleitner

Women have advanced God's mission throughout history and around the world. But women often face particular obstacles in ministry. What do we need to know about how women thrive? Real-life stories and case studies shed light on dynamics that inhibit women and also give testimony to God's grace and empowerment in the midst of challenges. Women and men will find resources here for partnering together in effective ministry and mission



Breaking the Marriage Idol
Reconstructing Our Cultural and Spiritual Norms
Kutter Callaway

Should all Christians be married? In *Breaking the Marriage Idol*, Callaway considers why marriage, which is a blessing from God, shouldn't be expected or required of all Christians. Through an examination of Scripture, cultural analysis, and personal accounts, he reflects on how our narratives have limited our understanding of marriage and obscured our view of the life-giving and kingdom-serving roles of single people in the church.