

## BIBLICAL WOMANHOOD TODAY

### PREFACE

I well remember the day I visited a women's refuge in one of our large cities. This home was a sanctuary for women and their children who had been abused terribly. Listening to some of their stories and how they had been abused physically and mentally, and emotionally ill-treated, made my heart ache. If only these dear women had been treated with the dignity which God places on every human being, how different things would have been for them.

I also have to say, again with considerable sadness, that many women have suffered abuse in their spiritual lives as well. They have been made to feel they are second-class citizens amongst the people of God, and often as a result of an unbiblical understanding of those who are responsible for teaching in the church of God.

What is required is for a truly biblical understanding of womanhood, which will have great benefit for both women and men in today's church and beyond. In this short booklet Sharon James, a mother and the wife of a busy pastor, directs us to consider women as the Lord himself sees them. You will find each chapter to be totally biblical, and as a result will be both encouraged and challenged as you are confronted with the teaching of the Word of God.

I am indebted to Sharon who, very willingly, not only wrote this book but also contributed to a series of talks on this subject for the *Serving Today* radio programme designed to help pastors and church leaders.

Derek French

October 2002

---



---

### INTRODUCTION

This booklet outlines what the Bible has to say about being a Christian woman. We see that God made men and women equal in worth and dignity, but also different by design. We see that these differences equip us for distinctive ministries, and that every Christian woman can be fulfilled as she carries out her helper design.

1. God's design for women – equality.
2. God's design for women – complementarity.
3. God's design for women – ruined by sin, restored in Christ.
4. God's design for women – the helper design.
5. God's design for single women.
6. God's design for married women.
7. God's design for mothers.
8. God's design for women in the church: part 1.
9. God's design for women in the church: part 2.
10. Reaching other women for Christ and women in the workplace.
11. The pastor's wife.
12. God's design for women – the beauty that lasts.

---



---

### Chapter 1 God's design for women – equality

Many women today question their identity and wonder about their worth. Sometimes they may be treated as

second class citizens. They may ask, ‘Is my life really significant?’

The Bible answers that question in the very first chapter, where we see that God made both man and woman in his own image:

*“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground’ . . . God saw all that he had made, and it was very good . . .”* (Genesis 1:26-28, 31)

What does it mean that God created both male and female in his own image? It means that God made Adam and Eve to rule over creation on his behalf, to represent him, to be like him. It means that both man and woman were created for relationship with God and with each other. Both were given reason: they could relate and communicate and make choices. Both were given souls that would never die.

There is no hint here of superiority or inferiority. Every single human being has been made in the image of God. Every time we catch ourselves inwardly despising another human being we offend the God who made them. For that reason, wherever Christianity has spread, there has been improvement in the status of women. In the pre-Christian

Roman Empire, infant girls were routinely exposed and killed. Christianity changed that. Without Christianity, cultures tend to favour male children over female.

Every single human being is to be respected, because each is made in the image of God. But there is an even higher privilege and dignity for those who are Christian believers. Paul wrote in Galatians 3:26-28:

*“You are all **sons** of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and **heirs** according to the promise.”*

Thus every Christian is a fellow-heir with Christ.

Paul argues that Jews and Gentiles are equal before God. Rich and poor are equal before God. Men and women are equal before God. All Christians are sons and heirs of God. There could be no higher privilege. So Peter commands husbands to treat their wives with respect because their wives are fellow-heirs with them (1 Peter 3: 7).

So if a Christian asks, ‘Who am I, and what am I worth?’, the answer is the same for men and women. You have been made in the image of God to serve and glorify him forever. You have been united with Christ, and thus you are an heir with Christ of eternal blessings. That is your dignity, your meaning, and your destiny.

We can all know that our lives have equal value and meaning: whatever we look like, whatever we do, whether or not we have successful relationships. Each one of us has been created by God just the way we are, for a reason. As the Psalmist said (Psalm 139:14): *“I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”* We have the certain hope that whatever the limitations, frustrations and inadequacies of our lives here, this life is not all there is. Each of us looks forward to the new heavens and earth when we will have glorified bodies, when we will be free from all the physical, emotional and psychological weaknesses that may afflict us now.

God created men and women equally in his image. God brings men and women equally into his kingdom. Men and women will share equally in the wonder and freedom of the new creation when Jesus returns. Despite the inequities and injustices that oppress so many women still today, we proclaim that in Christ, there is ‘neither male nor female’!

How can we apply this? If women are made in the image of God, as rational beings, we support the education of women. If women are fully in the image of God, women should be respected, not looked down on, whether rich or poor, married or unmarried, mothers or not. Those who are single or those who can’t have children should never be looked down on. We have been created as spiritually equal: there are no second-class citizens in heaven.

---

## **Chapter 2 God’s design for women – complementarity**

In Genesis 2 we learn that God deliberately created men and women to be different, to complete or complement each other:

*“The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them . . . But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.*

*The man said: ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she will be called “woman” for she was taken out of man.’*

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”* (Genesis 2: 18-25)

Adam was made from the earth. He would take the lead in subduing the ground; in Genesis 2:15 God commanded him to take care of the garden. When he was cursed, it was his task of working the ground that was affected (Genesis 3:18-19). Eve was formed from the body of Adam. She would find her main fulfilment in being a helper to her husband and bearing children. When she was cursed, it was marriage and childbirth that was affected (Genesis 3:16).

God created Adam first, because he was to be the leader in the relationship. God gave him the command not to eat of the fruit of the tree. God called him to account, even though both he and his wife had sinned. He was held responsible (Genesis 3:9). In the New Testament we are told that ‘in Adam’ all die – he was the leader of the entire human race (Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 11:3).

But the task of filling and subduing the earth was to be carried out in partnership. Adam could not do it alone. He needed help from one ‘of the same kind’ as himself. God was above him. The animals were below him. He needed companionship with another human. But although woman was one ‘of the same kind’ and perfectly equal in dignity – she was gloriously different. They fitted together.

Some will argue that because the man was designed as the leader that there can’t really be equality. Women must be secondary in importance. No, not at all.

Equality can co-exist with an order, where one leads and another follows.

Within the Trinity, the Son submits to the Father – not the other way round. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son – not the other way round. There is an order, but also complete equality of status. Thus the creation of man and woman, two sexes equal but complementary, mirrors something very wonderful within the Holy Trinity. Both authority and submission are seen within the Godhead as beautiful and glorious. It is Godlike to exercise authority rightly; and it is also Godlike to submit willingly to appropriate authority. We do not only see that in the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit. We also see in

the Lord Christ a pattern of both authority and submission – he is the role model in our various relationships for those who lead and those who submit. To dislike patterns of authority and submission (whether in the family or church or society) implies that we dislike a pattern that is intrinsic to the beauty and glory of God himself.

We also see order and equality in the church. There is absolute spiritual equality between members: all are equally united with Christ. Yet members submit to the leadership without compromising that equality.

And so it is with men and women. We respect each other, as we are equal in worth and personhood. But there is an order in the relationship. God designed men as the leaders, and women as the helpers. The helper design is an exalted one: many times God refers to himself as a ‘helper’ in Scripture.

Imagine that you could draw up two columns, and list the many different strengths and weaknesses of men and women. When you add up the totals it comes to an equal sum. That is the meaning of *spiritual equality*. But when you compare the two lists you discover that the so-called ‘weaknesses’ are precisely those qualities which draw forth the corresponding ‘strength’ in the opposite sex! The totality is more beautiful because of the differences. That is the meaning of *complementarity*.

We cannot do without each other, in the family, the community, the workplace, or the church. Any area of life in which men fail to listen to and learn from women (or vice versa) will be poorer as a result. The Bible gives a

model of male leadership, but also teaches that men need the help and insight of women.

God designed men and women with differences so that we would need each other. He wanted us to enjoy that mutual support and help which mirrors something of the mutuality and beauty of the relations between the three persons of the Trinity.

---

### **Chapter 3 God's design for women – ruined by sin, restored in Christ**

We have seen from Genesis chapters 1 and 2 that God created men and women equal and different. They were designed to complete what each other lacked, to work together in harmony and love. But in Genesis 3 we find that sin spoiled the relationship between God and man, and sin spoiled the relationship between man and wife.

The punishment for sin meant that Adam would now find it hard to cultivate the ground: there would be thorns and thistles. When we farm, we have to try to kill the weeds if we are to get a good crop. The punishment for sin meant that Eve would find marriage and child-bearing difficult: there would be conflict in the marriage, and pain in childbirth. This is not the way it is meant to be. Just as we try to kill weeds, so we try to relieve pain in childbirth; husbands and wives should love each other, not fight each other. The curse on the woman in Genesis 3 was the beginning of the battle between the sexes.

*“To the woman he said: ‘I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to*

*children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” (Genesis 3:16).*

Some argue that the words, ‘he will rule over you’, are God’s command to the husband to control his wife. No. This is a curse, not a command, just as pain in childbirth is a curse, and we are to try to relieve it. ‘Your desire will be for your husband’ probably indicates a desire to control. After the Fall, there would be conflict when the wife wanted to control her husband. In response, the husband would seek to ‘rule’ – to assert his power – all too often in an unloving and even sometimes a violent way. This was indeed a terrible punishment for sin.

Thus, sin wrecked God’s original design of loving male leadership, twisting it into oppression. Throughout history men have tyrannised women, whether by wife beating, rape or forced prostitution. Women have been oppressed through history. Often, they are oppressed today. ***God is angry about this.*** He will judge every act of violence, every rape and every angry or lustful thought ever entertained by men. ***Every*** sin ever committed will be justly punished – either in the person of the Lord Jesus on the Cross, or in Hell.

The Bible is realistic about the way men abuse women. It includes uncompromising descriptions of sinful men, such as the evil Nabal who was married to the virtuous Abigail (1 Sam 25) or the vicious rapist Amnon, who wrecked the life of his half-sister Tamar (2 Sam 13). God designed male strength to protect women, not tyrannise them. God designed the sexual drive to be enjoyed within marriage, not to abuse women.

Of course, women as well as men are sinners. Sin has distorted womanhood too. In the book of Proverbs we see pictures of the way that womanhood can be spoilt by vanity, folly, and immodesty. The curse has spoilt manhood and womanhood.

But Christ came to redeem from the effects of the curse. He restores our broken relationship with God. And he restores the relationship between man and woman. We read in Ephesians 5: 31-32:

*“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This [marriage] is a profound mystery – but I am speaking about Christ and the church.”*

Before Christ, the real purpose of marriage was hidden. But now it is revealed. The relationship between husband and wife was designed by God to illustrate the eternal, self-giving love of Christ for the church. Christ’s love is the reality. Human marriage is the earthly shadow.

Christ is a role model for how God wants husbands to behave. Christ lays down his life for the church. His leadership is not exercised in his own interest; he is the perfect servant leader. The church is the model for wifely submission, in her willing, loving affirmation of the leadership of Christ. It is not a passive, unintelligent submission.

Christ empowers men to harness their masculine strengths for the service of others. He empowers women to harness their feminine strengths for the service of others. As Christians our manhood or womanhood is increasingly

restored to what it would have been like before sin entered the world.

---

## **Chapter 4 God’s design for women – the helper design**

Genesis 1 teaches that Adam and Eve were both made in the image of God: they were both to be God’s representatives on earth. Thus, whether we are male or female we need to ask every day, by the grace of God, ‘Am I reflecting God’s character today? Am I becoming more like God? Am I behaving as Christ would?’ That question is deeply humbling, but it is also inspiring. It sets before us a glorious goal. God made us to be like himself. And the humblest, poorest, least noticed Christian, may actually be most like God.

Genesis 2:18 teaches that God created Eve to be a helper. As Christian women we need to understand our helper design. It is an exalted design, because it reflects something of the character of God. God gives and sustains life, and he feels compassion when his creatures suffer. In the Psalms, God reveals himself to be the helper of the poor, the needy, the distressed, the fatherless, the under privileged, the oppressed and the homeless.

*“God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble.”* (Psalm 46:1). *“You, O God do see trouble and grief, you consider it to take it in hand ... you are the helper of the fatherless.”* (Psalm 10:14). *“The Lord is with me, he is my helper.”* (Psalm 118:7).

The God who gives and sustains life has designed women in his image to bear and nurture new life. The God who feels compassion has designed women in his image to feel

deeply for the needs of others, so that they can meet those needs. Women have the biological capacity to have children, but that is not all. We are also designed by God with emotional capacity for motherhood. Women generally have an enhanced capacity for intuition, for compassion, for relationships, for articulating our feelings.

We were designed to be helpers. We can fulfil that design whether or not we are married, and whether or not we have children. We all have relational instincts that we can channel for the good of others and the glory of God. Every Christian woman can fulfil her helper design by being a spiritual mother. When we see others come to new life and then nurture and care for them, that is being a spiritual mother. When we encourage and look out for younger believers, that is being a spiritual mother. In Titus 2:3-5, Titus is told to train the older women to help the younger women. But 'older women' does not just refer to elderly women. It means women who are older in the faith. We can nurture and encourage women who are younger than ourselves in the faith. Those who are single, or those married women who are unable to have children of their own, may have the freedom and opportunity to be even more effective as spiritual mothers.

We must understand that every woman is different: situations and stages of life, personalities and gifts all vary. Whether married, single or widowed, whether a mother or not, whether out at work or in the home, whether old or young – we all have a contribution to make. According to our different situations, women can fulfil their helper design in the home, in the workplace, and in the church.

Many ministries are best performed by women, for we have been gifted with nurturing capacities that are wonderfully suited, for example, to counselling or ministries of mercy. But whatever our situation, every woman is valuable. And every woman can be inspired by understanding that God has given her the special capacity for spiritual mothering. Are you nurturing and encouraging someone else in the Lord, even just one other person? If so, be encouraged that you are fulfilling your helper design.

---

### **Chapter 5 God's design for single women**

There is a perfect balance of teaching in the New Testament: both marriage and singleness are equally valid and equally important. But in church history the balance often becomes upset in one direction or the other. In the early centuries, single people were so highly respected that the church went too far and created two classes of Christians – virgins (first class) and others (second class). Male clergy had to be celibate. There was an order of female virgins. There was also an order of widows, who had to remain unmarried. The implication was that marriage involved lust. If you had to get married you had failed to make it to the top rank of holiness.

Today we err in the opposite direction. Sometimes today the church fails to honour and affirm single people.

The perfect biblical balance needs to be restored. The church as a whole must affirm and value all members, whether married or single. Both marriage and singleness present problems *and* opportunities. Many godly women

are single, and singleness is honoured in the New Testament. In Matthew 19, Jesus said that some would remain single for the Kingdom of God. And in 1 Corinthians 7:34 the apostle Paul wrote:

*“An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world, how she can please her husband.”*

This is presenting singleness as a positive opportunity. Married women have to consider their husbands at every point which may limit what they can do for Christ. But single women don’t have to work at pleasing a husband; they can focus on pleasing Christ. Consider the women who served Jesus: Mary and Martha, for example. They were among his closest friends, and there is no hint that either of them was married. Mary Magdalene was rescued from a life of demon possession, and served wholeheartedly; we never read of a husband. Anna, widowed so early, spent the remainder of her life in single-minded service of God.

Jesus placed family loyalty in second place to the kingdom. He warned that the gospel would divide families (Luke 12:52): *“Five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.”* He said that if our family opposes our Christian faith, the kingdom must come first. To place Jesus first may mean accepting rejection from our earthly family, it may mean remaining single rather than marrying a non-Christian, it may mean that our spouse rejects us. This is what Jesus means when

he said that in comparison with love for Christ, we are called on to hate our family.

*“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – he cannot be my disciple.”* (Luke 14:26)

He is making a strong contrast. Clearly we are to love our family for as long as we can. But if it is a choice between family and Jesus, we choose Jesus.

Jesus also put marriage in perspective: it is for this age, not the age to come:

*“The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die: for they are like the angels.”* (Luke 20:34-35).

Single people should never be treated as second class in the church, because marriage is, after all, only a temporary illustration of an eternal reality. The eternal reality is the love of Jesus for his bride the church. Whether married or single, all Christians equally are participants in that reality. We will all sit down at the great marriage supper of the Lamb.

Many single women do long to be married. They are fully committed to the Lord. They have handed their lives over to him, and trust in the sovereignty of God. Why does it seem that God has not answered their prayers?

At that point I have no easy answer. We could ask equally why are so many women ‘condemned’ to suffer bad

marriages, or ill health, or poverty, or (in many countries) persecution. We live in a fallen world. The bottom line is that we are here to serve and glorify God, and we have to leave it to him to choose the circumstances in which we glorify him. Would we really say that if we were on the throne of the universe we would organise things better?

But many single women – whether never married, separated, divorced, or widowed – have testified that their singleness has enabled them to rely on the love of God in a wonderful way. They really do ‘delight in the Lord’ as the ultimate good. A God-centred perspective enables them to experience genuine joy even in circumstances which they may never have chosen for themselves.

A woman who has spoken openly and honestly about her singleness is the missionary Dr Helen Roseveare. In the darkest days following a terrible experience of being brutalised during civil war in Central Africa, she testified:

*“God came to me in a very special way, and gave me such a warm experience of his loving presence that I understood in a new way Isaiah 54:5, ‘Your maker is your husband.’”*

Similarly, a teacher, Margaret Clarkson, wrote in her retirement:

*“I sometimes wonder if God has withheld marriage from me so that my whole heart may be centred in love for him. If so, I have the ‘better part’; for to know him is the truest satisfaction in life. Not that married people may not or do not know this; many of God’s greatest saints have been married. But I can’t help*

*noticing the amazing heights reached by certain unmarried women and wonder if a special fullness of joy and achievement may not be reserved for the unmarried woman who seeks to give herself soul and body, to the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Even if a woman is married, death can strike at any moment, and she finds herself widowed. If that is your situation, remember that the Bible contains numerous references to widows and orphans: emphasizing that in their very vulnerability and grief they are close to the heart of God. God describes himself as the *“father to the fatherless, a defender of widows.”* (Psalm 68:5). Responsibility to protect widows from exploitation and injustice is a theme running through the Old Testament. Jesus castigated the religious hypocrites who abused widows. He always treated them with tenderness and understanding. Approaching Nain, for example, he came upon a pitiful funeral procession. A widow had lost her husband (her protector and the family breadwinner), and her son as well – her last remaining hope for the future. Luke’s comment is telling: *“When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her.”* (Luke 7:13).

Concern for widows is a command for the church, not an option. One of the very first things the early church did after Pentecost was to organise a proper scheme of aid for widows. Help for widows and orphans is held up as *the* litmus test for genuine Christianity in the book of James (James 1:27).

Other wives, tragically, may find themselves abandoned. Maybe that is your situation, and maybe you are hurting

because deliberate infidelity was involved. We may be sure that if God describes himself as the ‘defender of widows, and the father to the fatherless’, this applies to those women and children who have been abandoned by their husband and father, as well as to those who have lost a husband and father by death. And God himself knows what it feels like. The book of Hosea is a cry of agony as the prophet’s pain at his wife’s infidelity mirrors the Lord’s pain at his people’s faithlessness.

Other women, for whatever reason, may have left or divorced their husbands. Some have done so because their spouse was behaving in abusive and destructive ways. This too is very painful, but continue to follow him as best you can.

There is a touching moment in the Gospels, when Peter says to the Lord: *“We have left everything to follow you!”* (Mark 10:28). Jesus reassured him:

*“. . . no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age . . . and in the age to come eternal life.”* (Mark 10:29-30).

The great reward is found in eternity. But even in this life we can enjoy the brothers, sisters, mothers, and children of the Christian family. And positively, if we believe the teaching of Jesus and Paul, we have to believe that sometimes singleness does present unique opportunities for single-minded service. In heaven we will find that many godly single women have, by the grace of God, borne

multitudes of spiritual children. Such godly single women are building up great treasure in heaven.

---

## **Chapter 6 God’s design for married women**

Marriage is God’s idea. The Creation account culminates with the first marriage, and with the simple words:

*“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”* (Genesis 2:24)

‘Leaving’ describes the beginning of a new family unit; ‘cleaving’ describes the unity of the new husband and wife. It is an exclusive relationship. The sexual relationship is only for the married couple, not to be shared. It is a lasting relationship. The couple vow to remain together until death divides them, and should be able to experience security, stability and trust. It is a publicly recognised relationship. The vows are made publicly as a declaration of commitment which has public as well as private consequences.

Satan hates happy marriages, because they vindicate God’s design. In the Garden of Eden he attacked the woman’s trust in God, but he also attacked her trust in her husband. And thus the Fall into sin introduced marital strife: a reality throughout history and through all the world.

All too often, marital strife and tension leads to divorce. When Jesus was asked about divorce, he referred back to the creation account saying:

*“So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate . . .*

*Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.”* (Matthew 19:6,8)

Because we live in a fallen sinful world, in extreme situations divorce is allowed (marital unfaithfulness, abandonment, cruelty). But we must remember that God says that he hates divorce – it represents a breaking of covenant commitments (Malachi 2:16).

God created two sexes, male and female. Neither could fulfil all the functions necessary for the smooth running of family (or community or church) alone. Leading and nurturing are complementary responsibilities. Marriage as God intended it involves interdependence. Each partner depends on the other. The husband is the servant leader, the wife the helper lover. He leads, she nurtures. There is a genuine mutuality and equality:

*“The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to himself alone, but also to his wife.”*  
(1 Corinthians 7:4)

But mutuality and equality do not mean sameness.

In our day, some Christians have proposed a new remedy for marital unhappiness: the ‘roleless’ marriage. They argue that many of the strains in marriage have been caused by the unfairness of having the husband as the ‘head’ in the relationship. They say that references to the husband being ‘head’ in the Bible are only there because the Bible was written within a ‘patriarchal’ context. In the modern day we can enjoy marriages where there is

equality: each can take turns in leading, each must submit to the other. This view is an understandable reaction against repressive interpretations of the Bible. But the Bible teaches that husband and wife have distinctive and honourable callings.

***Marriage as an illustration of Christ and the church:  
duties of husbands***

Ephesians 5 teaches that every marriage is supposed to reflect something of the relationship between Christ and the church.

Because of sin, husbands tend to ‘rule’ harshly. Now, instead, they are told to love their wives, even to give their lives for them, even as Christ loved the church and gave his life for her (Ephesians 5:25). Christ-like leadership is not about making decisions that always suit the husband best! It is taking the initiative to make family life work. He may delegate all manner of responsibilities to his wife, who may be more competent in many areas. But at the end of the day, if things are going wrong, it is his responsibility to face up to that and get things back on track. His leadership is to be exercised for the benefit of the family as a whole. Taking responsibility involves exercising authority. In the church and in Christian marriage authority is not exercised for the benefit of the leader, just as Christ did not exercise authority for his own benefit. The husband is to use his strength to protect his family and provide for them. Christ gives gifts to the church, and the husband should ensure that his wife’s gifts are developed. He will want her to be the best woman she can be, both in terms of natural gifts, and in terms of spiritual development.

Husbands are to lead lovingly, not to dominate. Violence to wives is sinful. If a woman is in danger from an abusive husband, the church should confront that man with the evil of what he is doing, and provide help and refuge if needed for the wife.

***Marriage as an illustration of Christ and the church:  
duties of wives***

Because of sin, wives tend to want to usurp the leadership. ‘Your desire will be for your husband’ refers to the desire to control him. Now, instead, wives are told to submit to their husbands’ leadership even as the church submits to Christ.

*“Now I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God . . . A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man, neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.” (1 Corinthians 11:3, 7-9)*

The order of creation implies an order in the relationship between man and woman. A wife brings glory to her husband when she respects that order. Biblical submission is not mindless or degraded, it is affirming our husband’s calling to give leadership.

*“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so*

*wives should submit to their husbands in everything . . . Each one of you must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” (Ephesians 5: 22-24; 33)*

*“Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord.” (Colossians 3:18)*

*“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands, so that if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over . . . when they see the purity and reverence of your lives . . . This is the way the holy women of the past used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands . . .” (1 Peter 3:1-6)*

This submission is voluntary. The husband is never told to make his wife submit. It is between her and God, just as submission in other areas of life (children to parents, citizens to government, church members to leaders) is something for which we answer to the Lord. We can choose to or choose not to – but we must answer to the Lord for that.

It is common to hear that a wife’s *role* is to submit. Probably it is more accurate to say that the wife’s role is to love and nurture her family, and her response to her husband is submission (affirming him as leader). Think of the model wife of Proverbs 31. Her primary calling was to love and nurture her husband and children, but she also had a wide sphere of benevolent and economic influence. We see that she affirmed her husband gladly as leader in the family and community, in that she took the burden of managing the household and estate so that he could play

his part as a community leader ('at the gate'). Her *response* to her husband was one of submission (saying 'yes' to his leadership).

A godly husband and father takes responsibility, and takes the initiative to see that things are the way they should be. As wives, we affirm that. We want them to be the men God wants them to be. When we see submission as the Christian wife's *response* to her husband, it becomes positive and attractive.

Many godly women lament the failure of their husbands to be spiritual leaders in the home. What do they do if their husband is not a Christian at all, or if he is a passive Christian and never initiates family prayers, or prayers with his wife?

The wives addressed by Peter were in this position (1 Peter 3:1-6). But they were still to respect their husbands as leaders. Similarly in Romans 13:1-6, Christians are told to respect the governing authorities, whether or not they are doing a good job.

Genesis 2:18 tells us that God created Eve to be 'a helper' to Adam. We have seen that the 'helper design' especially equips women for nurturing relationships, and the wife and mother is often the one who holds the family together. Husbands should respect and value this capacity in their wife. And as far as is possible, husbands should seek to take the greater burden of economic provision for the family, so that the wife may fulfil her nurturing, homemaking role. Of course, wives may work outside the home, and it may be necessary to do so. But when we look at the ideal wife in Proverbs 31 we see that although she

did spend time in business concerns, she had the time to manage the home front as well: "*She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.*" (v27). She organised the food (vv14-15), the estate (v16), the clothes (v21), the furnishings (v22) and the moral education of the household (v26). Her husband fulfilled his very public calling (v23) because she was managing the domestic front.

Titus is told that older women should teach young wives to 'be busy at home' (Titus 2:5), which probably included economic productivity as well. And Paul exhorted the young widows in Ephesus to remarry and 'manage their homes' (1 Timothy 5:14). The implication is that it is the special responsibility of the wife to keep the home organised. This fits a natural division of labour whereby the woman, created to bear and nurse children, is equipped primarily to nurture and the man, with the primary task of subduing the earth, is equipped primarily to provide. Thus there is an interdependence between marriage partners.

God calls wives to love their husbands. In Titus 2:4, Titus was to teach the older women to train the younger women to love their husbands. The word used denotes a tender, affectionate love. True love involves an act of the will, putting the interests of the other first.

But as wives, we must remember the greatest command: to love God more than anyone else. In the letter to the Colossians, Paul writes, "*wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord.*" (Colossians 3:18). Jesus is Lord – not our husband. We are not to follow our husband into sin. Peter addressed Christian wives of non-Christian

husbands in 1 Peter 3, which shows that those wives had taken the step of conversion independently of their husbands. Jesus makes it very clear that our prime loyalty is to him, even above our spouse. And Acts 5:29 says, “*we must obey God rather than men.*”

God’s great plan for all believers is that they should become more like Christ. He has planned each circumstance of our lives with that in view. In eternity we will look back and see that *our* sins and failings were just what were needed to make our husbands more like Jesus, just as *their* sins and failings were used to make us more holy. And whether or not our earthly marriage is a happy one, we will find true joy forever when Jesus returns and we sit down together at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

---

### **Chapter 7 God’s design for mothers**

Psalm 127 says that children are a gift from the Lord. We are to train up our children in the ways of the Lord, but all our training is to be conducted in the context of love. In Titus 2:4, the older women are told to train the younger women to love their children. Of course, our love for our children should not be greater than our love for God – that would be idolatry. Nor should it degenerate into indulgence. Our natural affection for our children can lead us to spoil them. Children must learn to be obedient, which will involve discipline. But we are not to punish them for mistakes. As a great preacher once observed, ‘Human nature is made to be moved and governed by love, to be drawn with the cords of affection, rather than to be dragged with the chains of severity.’ After all, that is the way God

treats us. In Hosea the Lord says to his people that he led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love.

We love our children when we pray continually and fervently for them. We are to use Scripture to pray through their particular circumstances. Each child is special, each one has a soul that will never die, and so we pray continually for their salvation. Salvation is not automatic, but we are encouraged to pray that the Lord would be gracious to our children and even to their children. In the New Testament we see that the ministry of elder Timothy was an answer to the prayers of his godly mother Eunice and godly grandmother Lois (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15).

We love our children when we show the love of Jesus in our own lives. We are to live out before them an example of what God’s patience and kindness is like. During my own childhood one of the best gifts my parents gave me was that I never heard them speaking unkind words about other people. Love was real to them, not just a doctrine.

We love our children when we encourage and affirm them. We have to learn to listen to our children, to look at them when they speak, to give them our full attention and really find out what is going on rather than leaping to hasty conclusions. We encourage them with physical expressions of affection, and with verbal expressions of love.

Motherhood is often exhausting, and sometimes seems to be unrewarding. But we remember that this life is very brief. The Bible compares our lives to a watch in the night, or to grass that springs up and withers. In this short life we have the privilege of looking after our children for a brief time, during which time we can influence their eternal

destiny. This gives significance and value to the mundane, hard, everyday chores of motherhood. The daily work may seem unrewarding. No one may thank you for it, or even seem to notice. And because our children are sinners, we may sometimes grow very weary, and even want to give up on them. But then we remember God's grace to us. He never gives up on us. He sees your hard work for your children. He will reward you. And if you call on him for the grace and help you need for loving your children and bringing them up the right way, then he will help you. As the old hymn says:

*“His love has no limit, his grace has no measure,  
his power has no boundary known unto men.  
For out of his infinite riches in Jesus –  
he giveth and giveth and giveth again.”*

Finally, a word to those mothers who are alone. In Psalm 68 God is described as ‘a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows.’ This is a word of direct comfort to mothers bringing up children alone. A good father should protect, provide for and love his family. God himself is committed to you, as his child, to protect you, provide for you, and love you. And you can lay hold on those promises for your children as well.

---

## **Chapter 8 God's design for women in the church: part 1**

The New Testament gives a lovely picture of every member ministry in the church. Paul says that the church is like a body, where every part is necessary. That includes

both men and women. We see in the New Testament an overall pattern of male leadership, but within that framework we see members, both men and women, active in serving Christ. In other words, the overseers (or elders) in the New Testament were men, but there are many other ministries which can be performed by women, and there are some ministries that are best performed by women. If you read the early part of Romans 16 you read of a number of women who worked alongside Paul. Similarly, in Philippians 4:3 he described Euodia and Syntyche as those who *“have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, alongside the rest of my fellow labourers whose names are written in the book of life.”* This indicates that such women were active in evangelism. They were possibly especially gifted, and set aside for full time evangelistic work.

In the early church it seems that there was opportunity in the worship services for men and women to participate in prayer and prophecy. In 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul writes: *“Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head.”* The first thing to note here is that when women minister, it should be in a way that signals submission to their husbands and to the leadership of the church. God has designed an order in creation. Men and women are spiritually equal, but wives are to submit to their husbands. In the same way, God the Father and God the Son are equally God, but the Son submits to his Father. In different cultures churches decide whether women still wear head coverings to signify submission, but whatever our culture, we are still to show that we are submissive to our husbands. The second thing

to note is that if women were praying and prophesying, they were not totally silent in the church. When Paul speaks of being silent in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12 he is using a word which means peaceful and submissive. He uses the same word in 1 Timothy 2:2 where he wants citizens to live quiet lives: not ‘wordless’ lives, but peaceful. So in church we are to submit quietly to the biblical teaching given by the elders, but when appropriate can sing or pray or share. The third thing to note is that because we have the finished Bible, we don’t need any more infallible prophecy. But men and women can contribute as appropriate in prayer and sharing words of encouragement.

The main teaching ministry in the church is given by the overseers or elders appointed to govern the church. But there are other opportunities for teaching that women can take. In Acts 18:26 Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos together, so we see a pattern of a couple doing teaching together. And we know that Timothy was taught the truths of the Bible by his mother and grandmother, which indicates the privilege we women have to pass on the Christian faith to the children of the next generation (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15). This can be done in the family, as well as in Sunday school, or Bible clubs or classes.

In Titus 2:3-5 the older women are seen to teach the younger women:

*“Teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-*

*controlled, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands so that no-one will malign the word of God.”*

The Titus 2 principle of women helping women applies also to pastoral care. When a woman has a problem, rather than a male pastor spending time alone with her, it is more appropriate for a mature Christian woman to spend time counselling her. It is wise for pastors to refer females to such experienced Christian women, so that they can receive help from another female. Within the church, if one sister has been through a particularly hard situation, she may be just the right person to draw alongside and encourage another sister who is going through a similar trial. She knows something of what it feels like. In this way we draw on the experiences the Lord has helped us through, and we find ourselves able to help others.

---

## **Chapter 9 God’s design for women in the church: part 2**

Jesus told a parable about his second coming, in which all are divided into two groups, the sheep and the goats. The sheep represent those who are welcomed into his kingdom, and they are those who have fed the hungry, provided drink for the thirsty; welcomed strangers, clothed the naked and visited those who are sick and in prison (Matthew 25:31-46).

The New Testament gives some lovely examples of women engaged in such practical ministries of mercy. Jesus was accompanied by a group of women who supported him and his apostles out of their own means and cared for their

needs. In the book of Acts, Tabitha (or Dorcas) was engaged in the good work of providing clothing for the poor (Acts 9:36-43). And Timothy is told which women qualify to go on the official list of widows. They are those who have lived lives full of deeds of mercy: those who are *“well known for good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.”* (1 Timothy 5:10).

Mercy ministries are a vital part of church life. The apostle James says that whether or not we help the needy is the test of the reality of our Christian testimony.

*“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says “Go, I wish you well, keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, without action is dead.”* (James 2:15-16).

It seems that in the New Testament the church appointed men deacons to collect money, food and other supplies to aid the needy. But the practicalities of this distribution were probably carried out by women, such as Tabitha and her circle of widows (Acts 9:39), and the widows of 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

In 1 Timothy 3:11 Paul included this sentence in a passage on the appointment of deacons:

*“Likewise the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers, but temperate and trustworthy in everything.”*

Some take these women to be part of an order of deacons, some take them to be deacon’s assistants, some interpret

them as deacon’s wives. When we look at the qualifications we see that these women must not bring dishonour to the church, they must respect the confidence of those they help. And they must be completely trustworthy. Whether or not they are called deacons, women should be used by the church to bring help to the sick, the hungry, the orphans, and the elderly. And each of us, whether we are set aside by the church for this task or not, come across needy people. We can each show mercy in different ways each day. This will be hard work, it may seem thankless, but we remember those wonderful words of the Saviour on the Last Day (Matthew 25:45): *“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”* That makes it all worthwhile. When we serve a needy person; that person is valuable because he or she is made in the image of God, and when we serve them, it is as though we serve Christ himself. And Christ will reward us.

---

## **Chapter 10 Reaching other women for Christ and women in the workplace**

Christianity offers good news to men and women. Men and women alike are created in the image of God. Every person is to be treated with dignity and respect. But Christianity also offers forgiveness and peace with God to men and women alike. When we look at those around us, we feel great compassion for them if they are ignorant of these truths. We want them to know that their lives have meaning and significance. Maybe they are not valued by others, maybe they don’t even value themselves. But they

are created by God, and they have an eternal soul. They matter!

We also want them to know that they can be forgiven and enjoy peace with God. The gospel is offered freely to all – men and women, and children, rich and poor, all races, all kinds of people. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

As Christian women, we should take all the opportunities we can to share this good news.

The first way is by simply testifying to what God has done for us. There is an account in John chapter 4 of Jesus visiting a village in Samaria. He talked with a sinful woman, and told her about the living water that would never run dry. He was, of course, speaking about himself. She was so excited that she rushed back to the village and called out all the villagers to meet Jesus (John 4:29): *“Come”, she said, “see a man who told me everything I ever did.”* She shared what Christ had done for her. Or think of the blind man who was healed by Jesus. He did not understand very much. But he said (John 9:25), *“One thing I know, I was blind, but now I can see.”*

It is very important to speak of Jesus to others. The apostle Paul says (2 Timothy 2:12), *“If we disown him, he will also disown us.”* So it is important for us to be telling others about Christ. However, Paul does add a word of comfort (2 Timothy 2:13): *“If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.”*

The second way of sharing the gospel is by our lives. Peter says that this is the best way for Christian wives to share

their faith with non-Christian husbands. By inference, this is probably the best way to share the gospel with any others who are in a position of authority, for example, non-Christian parents or employers. Peter says (1 Peter 3:1-2): *“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over by the behaviour of their wives when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.”* And he says that we will be true daughters of Sarah if we do what is right, and do not give way to fear (1 Peter 3:6). Later in the chapter he writes (v14), ‘Do not fear what they fear, do not be afraid.’ Peter is describing a lifestyle that is beautiful. Godly women fear the Lord, and if we fear the Lord, we don’t have to fear anyone or anything else. Even if we are unjustly or harshly treated, we have confidence that the Lord will vindicate us. And godly women live in a way that is pure and reverent. Their gentle and loving way of life may attract others to the Gospel. Each of us can take opportunity to do good works. Peter writes (1 Peter 2:12): *“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they may accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds, and glorify God.”*

For many Christian women the home will be a base from which we can share the Gospel with others – neighbours and friends. Other Christian women are out in paid work. Whatever work we do, whether unpaid work in the home, or paid work outside the home, we can work in such a way as to *“make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive.”* (Titus 2:10). If we work with a cheerful,

positive attitude, without grumbling and complaining, that 'adorns' the Gospel.

In Colossians 3:23 Paul addresses slaves, and says, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."* This is so encouraging, as it means that God sees our hard work and will reward us, even if no one else appreciates what we do. We can be liberated from self-pity or resentment at our circumstances, even if we have no choice but to work in a less than ideal situation. Paul also told slaves to respect their masters (Titus 2:9-10) and we should respect our employers. But we remember that Jesus is Lord, not our employer, and so we must not obey our employer if he or she calls on us to break God's law. We are to maintain integrity at all times, remembering that at every moment God can see us, and we will answer at the Last Day for all we have done. As Christian women, we must endeavour to maintain modesty and purity in the home and the workplace, and not to be a stumbling block to others. As we work, whether at home or outside the home, we work in such a way as to serve the Lord, help others, and witness to Christ. We need to pray for each other and support each other in our different situations, as each of us is an ambassador for Christ wherever he has placed us.

---

## **Chapter 11 The pastor's wife**

Pastors are set aside by the church to teach and govern. This is a high calling. It is not easy; it is costly. Any leader is likely to be criticised; he will never please everyone. And godly leaders are often the targets for

Satan's attacks. The enemy would love to see many pastors leaving the ministry through discouragement and disappointment. In situations of persecution, often the pastors and their families are the targets.

How are pastor's wives to respond?

1. We need to be clear that all we do is ultimately for Christ. Our husbands may spend much time helping those who are ungrateful, even hostile. We may receive no human thanks for what we do. There may be great demands in terms of hospitality. But we remember that at the Last Day Jesus says that even a cup of cold water given to one of the least of his brothers, was given, as it were, to him. What a wonderful encouragement.
2. We must pray fervently for our husbands. Probably the wife knows her husband better than anyone else, so she knows best how to pray for him. In the spiritual battle, he needs her prayers.
3. We must seek to encourage our husbands. Often, only the critical people bother to speak up. Our husbands need words of affirmation and comfort and support. We can give those words. At times of discouragement remember the promises of God. He has promised to build his church. He is sovereign, and he will do it.
4. We must seek to be peacemakers in the church. Often there may be tensions and disagreements. It is so tempting to interfere. Far better to remain silent, and pray. It makes life so much easier for our husbands if we don't take sides, if we don't get involved in disagreements.

5. We must seek to provide a refuge at home for our husbands. They may face so many difficulties and discouragements. The last thing they need when they come home is more trouble. We need to try to ensure that the home is well-ordered and calm and happy.

6. Finally, we need to focus on eternal realities. Life in the here and now is tough. Serving Christ is not easy. But Paul tells the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15:58): *“Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.”* We must fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. We are to look up to God, and forward to the coming of Christ. Nothing we or our husbands do for Christ will be forgotten, nothing will be wasted. There will be eternal reward.

Near the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote (Romans 16:3,4): *“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.”* This couple are called fellow workers with the apostle Paul. In Acts 18:26 both Aquila and his wife Priscilla taught the great preacher Apollos about the things of God. Paul respected both of them for their ministry.

Pastors, do you encourage your wives to develop and use their gifts in the church? And do you respect your wife as a co-labourer in the Gospel? Maybe she needs encouragement. Maybe she needs to be given some more time for Bible study. Do you pray with your wife, and cherish and provide for her, as Paul teaches in Ephesians 5? She will be a more effective co-labourer if you make

every effort to encourage her and develop the gifts the Lord has given her. Let us strive together to be co-labourers in the Gospel.

---

## **Chapter 12 God’s design for women: the beauty that lasts**

We have seen that God created men and women equally in his image, but that he made us different by design. As women we are given special capacities to help others, and we are truly feminine when we understand and fulfil our helper design.

The world places a great importance on external beauty for women. This is bad news for women. By accident of birth, some are regarded as beautiful and some as plain. And many cultures equate youth with beauty, which is bad news as we all grow older inexorably. The Bible contains good news, however. It teaches us that the beauty that matters is the beauty that never fades. And in terms of inner beauty, the Christian woman can actually grow more and more beautiful year by year.

This is what Peter wrote about it (1 Peter 3:3-4):

*“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and clothes. Instead it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.”*

This is not a literal prohibition; for the original text simply says clothes, not fine clothes. Rather there is a very strong comparison being made. We should not just worry about outward adornment, rather, far more importantly, we

should worry about inner beauty. We should remember that God sees what we are like inside, and we should pray for that inner beauty that pleases him.

A woman of unfading beauty will cultivate a ‘gentle and quiet spirit’ (v4). This does not mean that we are never allowed to raise our voice in any situation. Peter speaks of the inner tranquillity that comes from trusting God. When we are absolutely confident in the sovereignty of God, then, whatever happens, we need not panic. We know that the God who loves us is in control of all things. This leads to a calm consistency, a mature self-control that is truly beautiful. Such confidence in God enables us to say with the Psalmist (Psalm 27:1), “*Whom shall I fear?*” The real sense of the presence of a mighty God, the certain knowledge that at the judgement day all human wrongs will be righted, releases godly women from anxiety and fear. As the hymn writer expresses it:

*“Leave all things to a Father’s will,  
And taste, on Him relying still,  
E’en in affliction, peace.”*

Similarly, Paul wrote (1 Timothy 2:9-10): “*I want women to adorn themselves . . . with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God . . .*” When women serve others, their deeds of kindness make them lovely. A gracious, unselfish, generous woman is truly beautiful in God’s sight.

The body we live in here is like a temporary tent, and Paul writes that outwardly we are wasting away, but as Christians, inwardly we are being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). As Christian women we can have

confidence that as we grow more and more like the Lord Jesus, so we grow in inner beauty, which is the beauty that never fades, the beauty that pleases the Lord.

---



---

### **Sharon James**

Formerly a schoolteacher, Sharon James is now a pastor’s wife and mother. She studied theology at Toronto Baptist Seminary, and is the author of ‘My Heart in His Hands: a biography of Ann Judson’ and ‘God’s Design for Women’ (both published by Evangelical Press, UK).

---



---

**This book is supplied by Grace Baptist Mission and other titles are available in e-mail format at the address below:**

**Grace Baptist Mission  
12 Abbey Close  
Abingdon  
OXON  
OX14 3JD  
UK**

**e-mail: [radio@gbm.org.uk](mailto:radio@gbm.org.uk)**