

WE HAVE IDENTITY

PART ONE: AT ODDS WITH OURSELVES

Starting at a young age, women are told:

- Be like a man; no! Be better than a man. Compete with him in the home, the workplace, the sports arena, the bedroom, and in the military.
- Be as free as a man. Think, dress, and be sexy.
- Covet the boyish body.



What are the consequences?

- **Have relationships between men and women become more or less complicated? Are women more or less at risk?**
- **Does being "sexy" get a man's attention? What else does it get?**
- **What is the price paid when a woman suffers years of vomiting, purging, and disordered eating?**

In the 70s, modern feminists initiated a systematic and conscious effort to change the culture. Young girls were raised to be liberated, sex-educated, highly aggressive, and self-pleasing individuals. They were encouraged to be as profane and sexually frank as unchivalrous men in a herd. Modesty disappeared. So did respect. It has never been easy to grow up, but since the 1970s, girls have been placed at odds with themselves. As girls were sent on a quest for a masculinized body, they were also directed toward a more masculinized emotional life. They were prepared for sex, but not love or self-control.

It has been said that today's young woman is at odds with everything that is naturally womanly. **What do you think this means?**

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead wrote, "Anything that has to do with being a woman – most especially anything related to child-bearing – is supposed to be managed, minimized, and somehow overcome." ("The Girls of Gen X," *The American Enterprise*, Jan/Feb 1998)

What does she mean? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Whitehead notes that American girls are growing up without the support of strong stable institutions like marriage, the family, and even the church. Young women today are at a greater risk of being exploited or abused by young men who have no sense of gallantry or protectiveness toward women. She concludes that today's young women appear to be more free, but are less happy, less content, and less secure than previous generations of women.

How do you respond to this observation?

Be honest as you consider your own perspective:

- **Do you know more about sexuality than Biblical womanhood?**
- **Do you believe that being equal with men means "being the same?"**

- **What is your identity and from where does it come?**
- **From where did you learn what you believe about yourself?**

Could it be that women are less happy, less content and less secure because they don't know who they are? They don't know their origin, value, or hope? If a woman doesn't know who she is, then how will she know how to live?

GENESIS EXPLAINS OUR IDENTITY

How does the Creator of woman define her? What is her purpose? In what way is she the same as man? In what way is she different? How is she influenced by the world? What is her hope? Let's consider these questions in light of God's Word. A few short verses in Genesis offer life-changing truth about men and women.

What four things do you learn from Genesis 1:27? *(God created man to be a human being; man is made not in animal's image, but God's image; humans are not the same but uniquely different as male and female; because of whose we are, male and female are called to holy living.)*

God had only to speak and light appeared. Land and sea were divided. Animals came to be. But, God involved Himself in a very intimate way with the creation of man. **Read Genesis 2:7.** In Hebrew, the word "formed" relates to the word for a potter. God shaped man from the existing material of the created world. Man is called Adam which, in Hebrew, means he comes from the earth (*'adamah*). Unlike the animals, God shaped man in His image and blew into him the breath of His own life.

Read Genesis 2:18. Until now, God has declared all of His creation "good." **Does this passage infer that God has made a mistake or is the Creator pointing out incompleteness?** Man had no mate appropriate for him and no means of procreation. Man needed a helper. The Hebrew word for "helper" is *ezer*. An *ezer* is an assistant or ally. Later we will learn that "helper" is also a term applied to God. **Is being a helper inferior or does it reinforce God's order of creation?** Contrary to some opinions, the Bible is not hostile to women. In fact, the Bible is the only piece of religious literature from the ancient Near East that gives a full account of the creation of woman. More than any other religious writings, the Bible presents women in a positive light.

Re-read Genesis 2:18. What is the significance of "fit for him"? This phrase literally means "like his opposite." **What does this say to you about the male and female both psychologically and anatomically?**

Read Genesis 2:19-20. Of what was man to be a good steward? Is bestowing a name a sign of authority? As the animals were brought to the man so he could name them, did he find any compatible mate (or "good fit") among them?

God involved Himself in a different way when He created woman. **Read Genesis 2:21-23.** He didn't blow into her delicate nostrils nor take the clay of the ground to shape her. The word "made" literally means that God "built" woman. With loving hands, He built woman

using one of man's ribs. **Why do you suppose God used a rib?** The Hebrew word for "rib" is commonly used for a structural component related to the side of something. When used of a building, it may mean a pillar, beam, or plank of wood. When used of a person, it generally means a rib bone. God built woman using part of man and established their relationship within the order of creation. **Who named the woman?** "Wo-man" (Hebrew: *'ishshah*) comes from man (Hebrew: *ish*). **What is the significance of this?**

Think more about the rib. **What does a rib bone help support? Is a rib fragile and easily fractured or broken? Is it a vulnerable target? Might it take the brunt of attack?** The first woman didn't have to fear attack or brokenness as long as she trusted God. Believing that God had a unique and wondrous purpose for her life, the woman could be what is described in Psalm 144:12b. **What purpose is described here? Is modern women encouraged to be a "pillar" or the "palace"? But, what happens to the palace when there is no pillar?**

We may have been influenced to think that "helper" or "helpmate" is less than equal. **But, what does Jesus call the Holy Spirit in John 14:16?** "Helper" (Greek: *parakletos*) means "comforter" or advocate. **What does this say to you?** The Holy Spirit was sent to encourage and help the disciples. In God's created order, the woman encourages, helps, and strengthens the man.

As we conclude chapter two of Genesis, all is right with God's creation. God presented the perfect "helper," "counselor," and encourager to man as his wife. The man was now complete. A perfect love relationship existed between God and His creation, and between the male and female.

There was harmony in the garden before sin changed the relationship between male and female. In spite of sin, however, God's created order remains the same. **Male and female were not made at the same time (Genesis 2:7; 18; 21-22), in the same way (Genesis 2:7; 21-22), or for the same purpose (Genesis 2:15-17; 18; 20).** This is God's created order for the benefit and blessing of generations.

ONE FLESH: MALE AND FEMALE TO PROCREATE

Read Genesis 2:24. Not until this passage does God's Word say anything about s-e-x. "One flesh" is the description of the "sexual act." Through the act of sex, husband and wife would procreate with God to bring human life into the world. Here is the pattern for marriage and family that would grow civilization and bring new sons and daughters to the Father God.

Unfortunately, the world distorts most everything pertaining to sex. **Return again to Genesis 1:27. Does your translation say that God created "sexual" beings? Or does it say that God created humans (or "man") to be male and female?** Let's be clear. There is no reference to anything "sexual" until Genesis 2:24 with the first marriage. In marriage, one man and one woman will become one flesh (one union) and procreate through this act of sex. Sadly, even the church has been influenced and indoctrinated by

the unbiblical sex education of Alfred Kinsey, Margaret Sanger, and other non-Christians. We've been deceived. Trusting God's Word (and not the world), we understand that God created us to be human beings of the male or female gender. There are only two genders. Our gender, or sex, corresponds with our biology and anatomy. According to God's design, a male husband and a female wife come together in the sexual act. They literally "fit" together in order that they might procreate. **How does this contrast with a homosexual relationship? With "same sex marriage"? How is marriage being re-defined?**

A husband and wife do not reproduce. Reproduction happens on an assembly line in a factory when we duplicate objects. But, God, a man and a woman procreate. Each new human life is one-of-a-kind unique. **What does this say to you about God the Creator? What does this say to you about God's love for humans?** How like God – and only God – to invite His creatures to be involved in a life-bringing experience.

Today, it has become common practice to disconnect the act of sex from procreation. Those who advocated for the birth control pill in the 1950s admit that "the pill" would "equal the playing field" between men and women. **When we put young, unmarried girls on the "pill," what are we saying to them about the act of sex? In what other ways are we disconnecting the act of sex from procreation?** At a homosexual rally, a man's t-shirt proclaimed, "The family tree stops with me." **What was he saying?**

Today, those who resist God ignore His design for sex and procreation. **Do you think that sexuality has become an idol? Explain your answer.** Visit Planned Parenthood's site for teens (www.teenwire.org) and "click" on "LBGTQ." Our sons and daughters are encouraged to question what God has made and, instead, do whatever "feels right" to them. Sexual orientation is a "choice" and several "sexual practices" are encouraged: "lesbian, bi-sexual, gay, transgender," etc. **But, how many genders did God create (Genesis 1:27)? What does God's Word say in Romans 1:18-32 (note especially vv. 24-27)?**

It is true that male and female have sexual thoughts and desires. **But, how does God's Word encourage us in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5; 7-8; Titus 2:5; and 1 Peter 1:14-16?**

We live in a world that identifies women as "sexy." But, God calls us to be _____(see verses above). Even Christian sex education material states, "Children are sexual from birth." This quote is not from God, but from Alfred Kinsey. **How has this worldly thinking influenced us? Does it matter how we define ourselves? Explain your answer... then, fill in the blanks:**

"I am a sexual being; therefore

_____."

(Examples: "It's my body, my choice;" "I can express myself any way I want;" "Sexy dress and behavior will bring love," etc.

"I am a human being of the female gender; therefore

_____."

(Examples: "I am equal to, but different from a man;" "I am called to glorify my Creator, not myself;" "I have boundaries for my own protection and the protection of others;" etc.)

In what ways does our origin determine our:

- Identity?
- Choices?
- Relationship to men?

Trusting your creation as a female human being (Genesis 2:18) and your inheritance in Jesus Christ (Galatians 4:4-7), how shall you choose to live?

PART TWO: HOPE IN OUR IDENTITY

How long did perfect harmony between God, the man, and woman last? We don't know. But, we do know this. Life for Adam and Eve – and all of their children – became difficult when they did not trust God's Word.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE BEGINS

Read Genesis 3:1. The first temptation – and still the most powerful today – is to doubt God's Word. When we doubt God's Word, we are vulnerable and open to attack from Satan. Satan, the fallen angel, was present when man and woman were created. He knew the order of their creation. He knew the boundaries of safety provided by the equal, but different roles of male and female. Satan knew how much God loves His creation and despised the fact that God gives men and women opportunity to glorify Him and have dominion over Satan. And so, in the garden, Satan ignored the created order and struck the "rib." Martin Luther noted that the "rib" was vulnerable because she was not holding tightly to her sword, the Word of God.

What does Jesus call Satan in John 8:44? The "liar" approached the woman in such a way that implied God was holding something back from her, something that should rightfully be hers. **Does he do this to women today? Give an example.** You might say that Satan tempted the woman to spiritualizing and arrogance or self-pride (narcissism). The devil targeted woman and engaged her with a question. **In doing so, did he place her in the position of "leader" or "authority"? Is it possible that the woman was flattered by this? Was she about to learn something that her husband didn't know?**

The woman was guilty of sin when she failed to trust and obey God's Word. The woman sinned not only when she spoke for God, but when she distorted God's Word by adding her own. **Read Genesis 3:2-3. Contrast this passage with God's Word to the man in Genesis 2:16-17.**

The woman added: “. . . and you must not touch it” to God’s Word. This can be called “spiritualizing.” Spiritualizing is what we do when we try to establish our own standard of right and wrong; when we, in fact, try to be like God and define our own truth. **Is modern woman guilty of trying to be like God by defining her own truth? Can you give an example?**

The “liar” presses harder still on the woman. **Read Genesis 3:4-6.** Note that Satan doesn’t really challenge the woman; instead, he questions God’s integrity by suggesting that God doesn’t want the woman to be like Him. The seed of doubt takes root and grows. That’s how it is with temptation. Note the progression: 1) The woman doubts God’s Word, 2) rejects God’s Word, and 3) sets about determining for herself what is right and wrong. **What about us? Do we try to direct our own affairs according to our will?**

Although the “liar” distorted truth for his own purpose, the woman did come to know good and evil when she did evil by disobeying God. **Do we know both good and evil today?**

If God created everything, did He create evil? It is important to define “evil.” It is not a thing. “Evil” is the absence of good. Evil is not part of God’s character, but He does know the destructive nature of evil. He knows what happens when His Word is not trusted and He is rejected.

Look again at Genesis 3:6. In her desire to gain wisdom, the woman lost sight of the fundamental truth about wisdom. **What does Proverbs 1:7 tell us? What did the woman fail to do?** We, too, have a choice: to choose to trust and obey God or be influenced by the deceiver and our own pride. When the woman listened to Satan and followed her own will, she became a temptress to her husband.

It isn’t clear that the man was standing right next to the woman when she was deceived, but what are we told at the end of Genesis 3:6? Adam willingly joined his wife in disobedience. **At this point, what did he fail to do (see Genesis 2:16-17)? When were their “eyes opened” (3:7)?** A new emotion of shame came over both man and woman. This signifies that the man and woman were aware of a broken relationship with God and with each other. **What was their response (3:7-8)? What happens when we are aware of sinning against God? Does self-consciousness and shame cause us to hide from God, or is there another choice?**

The woman was the first to sin, but who does God hold responsible (Genesis 3:9)? Why? What does it mean to be the head and steward of God’s creation? Return again to Genesis 2:16-17. Man was given the Word for life and the warning against death *before woman was created*. How quickly Adam tried to blame the woman. **But, who else did the man blame (Genesis 3:12)?**

ORDER OUT OF CHAOS

Sin brought chaos into God’s perfect world. Sin changed the relationship between God and His creation and also between men and women. But, with amazing grace and mercy, God used His orderly and Fatherly structure to bring hope to sinful people. What is God’s orderly

structure? The very nature of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Three are equal, but with different roles. There is headship in this orderly structure... and there is submission. The same is true with male and female.

To bring order out of the chaos of a sin-filled world, God uses the headship of father in marriage and family for the benefit and well-being of children and society. God uses the submission of the Son, Jesus Christ, to save His Bride, the Church, and serve with humility. **What did Jesus do in Luke 22:42?** Women! There is no shame in submission when done to God's glory. When chaos threatens, God's order brings peace and leads to hope.

Satan comes to women today just as he did the first woman in the garden. He wants us to live in chaos. Despising God's created order, he tempts us to question headship, authority, and the created order itself. **What happens when we doubt that the events of Genesis 1-3 really happened or that Adam and Eve were not real people?**

Read 1 Timothy 2:13-14. Why do you think the woman was Satan's target? Was she more gullible or the weaker gender? Or, was Satan targeting Adam's headship? After all, he was the one ordained by God to be responsible for life in the garden. Satan deliberately defied God's created order for the good of the family and took up his dealings with woman. Look at the Timothy passage again. The *Lutheran Study Bible* explains that Adam sinned willfully, but Eve was a victim of deception. Eve is the "transgressor" which literally means "one who steps over the boundary." **What significance does this have for you?** Adam wasn't captivated by his appetite but was persuaded by his wife. **What significance does this have for you?** Adam failed to exercise his God-ordained headship, but Eve failed to exercise her God-ordained role as "helper" and "ally." **What significance does this have for you?** The first woman stepped over the boundary, took the role of leader, and led into death. **In what ways is God's created order being rejected today? What are the consequences?**

Satan wanted Adam and Eve to lose all hope after their sin. But, God brings order out of chaos and hope in the midst of despair. Satan wanted woman to be the mother of death. **But, what do we learn in Genesis 3:20?** Adam expressed hope for the future through the promised Seed of the woman. **Who is that Seed? Was the promise fulfilled? Return again to Galatians 4:4-7. What does this say to you?**

Adam gave his wife a new name and continued his role as steward of God's creation. Adam named his wife "Eve." Eve, in Hebrew (*chawwah*), means "life." Eve would be the mother of all the living. The Bible records many stories of real people – men and women – who continue to fight the battle between life and death. But, God is faithful to His creation. His design – before and after sin – brings order out of the chaos and hope from despair.

THANKS BE TO GOD FOR OUR ESTEEMED IDENTITY

Do you think women are on a constant quest for identity? Explain your answer.

We don't have to go to the university or invest in a self-help program to find our identity. Our identity is found in God's Word. Trusting God, we know who we are. When our

circumstances in life change, our identity does not. Look at the last page. **What do you learn? How does this affect your life? The lives of men? Children? Society in general?**

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-7. Do verses 1-5 seem familiar? Do you know women like the ones described in vv. 6-7? Are you one of these women?

In a culture that is constantly changing, in the “terrible times” referred to in 2 Timothy 3, in chaos and temptation – our identity does not change! Circumstances may change: we may fall out of love, be burdened by guilt, feel confused or insignificant, watch children grow up and leave home, age, battle with health issues -- but our identity does not change.

What does God tell us in 2 Corinthians 6:18?

Once we know who we are, we can share the Greatest Love Story ever told with other women (and men). We can remind ourselves and others that we are sons and daughters of the King. **How does knowing Whose we are affect our choices and behavior? How does knowing where God wants us to live after this world help us live better in this life?**

Children of the King have the promise of heaven. We don't have to remain captive to anger and despair, or feelings of unworthiness and guilt.

After we have shared the Greatest Love Story with women who long to hear it, we can help women find confidence in being female. We can remind ourselves and others that being a creation of God and treasure bought at great price determines everything for us as women. It affects the way we think, speak, act, and dress. It affects the way we HELP men.

But, what if we have been hurt by our earthly father? We can always depend on the love of our Heavenly Father. **But, what if we can't trust sinful men?** We can always trust the Perfect Man, Jesus Christ, who laid down His life for us.

Eve was deceived. She doubted God. She was wounded. But, she was never abandoned. With trust in her Creator, she was a new person in the promise of Jesus Christ. We are like Eve. Forgiven and set free, we are beautiful vessels in God's mighty hands. Everything that we are and all the good that we do comes from the Father God, the Creator of our precious lives.

Read 2 Ephesians 2:8-10. What is God saying directly to you?

It's not by chance that we are women. Our gender/sex is not by accident. We did not become feminine because someone handed us a doll or dressed us in pink lace. We were born feminine because we were created feminine. Therefore, we can trust God's design for women – even in the midst of chaos.

A woman is called, first and foremost, to love the Lord God with all her heart and mind. She is to seek His wisdom and submit to His will. She is to trust His good plan. She is to nurture children – her birth children, adopted children, or a neighborhood of children. And,

whether she marries or not, she is to build a home – a place of harmony and unconditional love where God’s Word is faithfully taught and put into action every day.

OUR VOCATION

Our ultimate calling and first vocation is defined in our name: *Ezer*. Eve was created to be man’s helper. A woman helps men remember God, bring order out of the chaos of sin, bring new life into the world, and guard the treasure of our souls. **Do you find anything insignificant or degrading in this?**

In all ways, we are to help build up, raise the standard, and make use of God’s Word. Striving toward purity in a dating relationship fulfills the role of helper. Being a wife, homemaker, mother, friend, or mentor are vocations through which we fulfill our role of helper. We may help in other ways by using our talents as teachers, attorneys, doctors, or accountants. As an *ezer* – a helper – we affect the culture in powerful and generational ways by living in ways that glorify God rather than ourselves.

How does the “helper” glorify God rather than self in the home? Church? Neighborhood?

Don’t let your head be turned by the deceiver. Don’t wrap Jesus around worldly ideas. Trust the Word of God. Become familiar with it. Then, be confident that Satan does not have dominion over you. You have dominion over him! You are the treasure for whom Jesus sold all He had.

Read Matthew 13:44.

Yes! You are that treasure. Jesus is the Man who paid for you with His life and covers you with His robe of mercy and righteousness.

OUR HOPE AND PROMISE

In this world, we will continue to struggle. Even the best pastor or therapist can’t remove the consequences of a sin-filled world. But, we are not defined by our failures and sins. We are defined by our identity in Christ. There is a place where we can go – again and again – to be reminded of who we are, how much we are loved, and how we are to live.

That place is God’s unchanging Word. Whenever we want to be reminded that there is a good plan for our lives as women, we can go to Genesis. There, we see how life was supposed to be, before sin corrupted it. We also see how mercifully God offered the sinners, our first father and mother, a future of hope.

As women of hope, we can encourage ourselves and others to remember Eve and learn from her. We are modern Eve’s – deceived, vulnerable, and fallen. But, because of what Jesus did for us, we are forgiven and set free to glorify our Father. What is the promise of Psalm 147:3; Isaiah 43:24; 61:1? What did Jesus say to the fallen woman in John 8:11?

What does Jesus say about truth in vv. 31-32? The deceit of satan, the world, and our own sinful nature keeps us captive and in darkness. Jesus is the key that unlocks the chains and provides light for our journey.

The Bible describes many “weak women” in the last days. But, we do not have to be among them. Why? **Read Ephesians 4:14** and **1 Timothy 4:7-10**.

In Christ, we have new life and the wisdom to live it.

May all that we are and do be to His glory. **AMEN.**



MY IDENTITY

- **A Creation of God**
(This is my origin.)
- **A Daughter of Eve**
(This is my ancestry and connection to His-Story.
This explains why life and relationships are so difficult.)
- **A Treasure bought at great price**
(I am valuable because Jesus Christ died for me. He lives for me.
His Spirit intercedes for me. I always have hope.)
- **A Helper**
(This is my first most influential vocation. I am designed to help men remember Him, bring order out of the chaos of sin, and guard the treasure. Together with men, we nurture generations of hope.)

My identity is not wife, mother, or friend. It is not my career. My identity does not change with the circumstances of life. I am the bride awaiting her Bridegroom. While I wait, how shall I bring glory to God?



By Linda Bartlett.
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