

Biblical womanhood

Goal

This session is titled “Biblical womanhood” so our goal is to try to understand what the Bible has to say about being a woman.

We’ll look at several key Bible passages, and find what they teach, and see what that means for our lives today. It’s going to be a quick dash through several passages, because I want to give you a broad picture of what the Bible says about being a woman. I’m using a lot of material by Carrie Sandom, who’s written a book called “Different by Design” and who taught at a women students day when I was at university.

Our culture and society around us has a lot to say about being a woman, and we will also have taken on board lots of ideas from our upbringing too, whether consciously or not, and some of these things may clash with God’s design for women as we read the Bible, so we need to try and come to the Bible with open hearts and minds and pray for the Lord’s help.

Pray: Heavenly Father, we come to you to ask for your help as we study your word. Please soften our hearts and enable us to hear you clearly. We know that this topic might raise strong feelings and challenge our thinking, please help us as we seek to understand what your word says about being a woman. And then please help us to live more in line with your good design for us as women. We ask in Jesus’ name and for his glory. Amen.

Brainstorm: What does society say about being a woman? What do you think it means to be a woman?

The Revelation of God’s design: Genesis 1&2

We’re going to first look at Genesis, to see how God created men and women, what his **good** design for us was.

Gen 1:26-28

26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

27 So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

The key truth to notice here is that both men and women are created in the image of God. V27 “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.” None of the rest of creation has this amazing privilege, as human beings we are distinct from the rest of creation.

And they are created by a God who is three persons, united in love. Can you see how God says “Let US make man in OUR image, after OUR likeness”? Man and woman were created by a God of relationship, and it is in relating to one another that we reflect God’s image.

Much thinking in the world wants to make equality mean sameness, which is not what the Bible says about how men and women were made, and I think is obviously wrong – men and women are different – physically, and emotionally. There can be equality and also difference. Being created in the image of God gives us dignity and worth. You are so valuable. You might be hearing all sorts of messages about your self worth – that you need a husband, that you need a job, that you need a better husband, or a better job. If only I had xyz, the my life would be worthwhile. Listen to what God says to you in his word – “I made you and I don’t make mistakes”.

Both the man and the woman are also given a job. V28 “God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth” That is, they are to reproduce and rule over God’s world. God has placed human beings as the caretakers of his creation, and this means our work is valuable. We’re going to see more in ch 2 of how both men and women are needed for this job.

So the first key truth here in Genesis 1 is that men and women were created equal. Equal in status, dignity and humanity.

Let’s read Gen 2:18-25

¹⁸Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” ¹⁹Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to

every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. ²¹So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.”

²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

What should surprise us in verse 18 is that there is something that is not good. In the creation narrative the phrase “And God saw that it was good” is repeated over and over. But now it seems there is something lacking. Creation is not good or complete without woman. Man needs woman to fulfil his role in being the image of God, in filling the earth, and in ruling over it. It is as they relate to one another that they show what God is like, that he’s a God of loving relationship. And it is as they work together that they demonstrate unity of purpose and difference of role. The woman was created to be a helper. She is needed. And there is an order in creation: the man was created first and his role is to lead, the woman was created second, as a helper for Adam.

We need to see that this doesn’t contradict the equality they have as people made in the image of God. It’s not about superiority and inferiority. We can see that most clearly in the Trinity – all 3 persons of the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit, are equally God, but they have

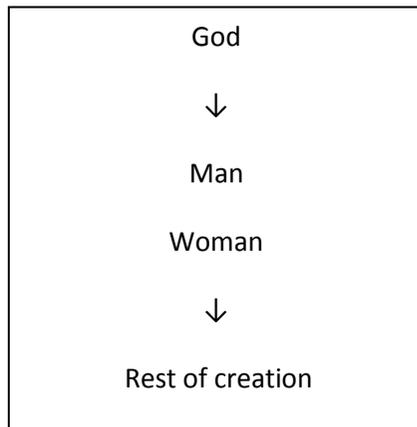
different functions. The Son submits to his Father's will. That doesn't make Jesus any less God or any less important.

Maybe you're thinking that being a helper is a negative thing? Then maybe it's good to know that God is described as Israel's helper – some references you can look up are Ex 18:4, Ps 33:20 and Heb 13:6.

So in Genesis 2 we see the relationship between Adam and Eve as it was meant to be, the man leading, having authority over his wife and her submitting to him. There is harmony, and complementarity. Complementarity is the idea that men and women complement each other, that their differences are a positive thing, that they are able to work together to achieve more than they could on their own.

So the second key truth we see from creation, of God's good design, is that men and women have different roles as they work together to fulfil God's purposes.

Diagram:



The Rejection of God's design: Genesis 3

So far, so good. But it didn't last long. Let's read Genesis 3, the account of the fall. We'll see how it all went wrong..

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." ¹³ Then the Lord God said to the

woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

¹⁴ The Lord God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you."

¹⁷ And to Adam he said,

"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it',
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;

and you shall eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return."

²⁰ The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. ²¹ And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

²² Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live for ever—" ²³ therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

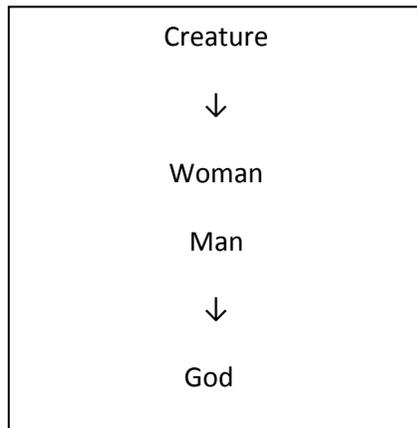
What Satan (the serpent) achieves here is the reversal of God's created order. He uses crafty tactics to tempt Eve to disobey God.

- He questions God's word, look at verse 1 "Di God actually say...?" encouraging Eve to doubt what God has said,
- Then he gets her to doubt that God would judge her for disobedience, verse 4 "you will not surely die"
- Then he gets her to think that God is a spoilsport, he questions God's goodness, verse 5 "you will be like God"

He uses the same tactics today to tempt us to sin. For example, Satan will get us to question whether sex outside of marriage is wrong, he'll question God's goodness as he asks why would God withhold a good thing, he'll tell us that God wouldn't really judge us, after all, we love each other, and we're going to get married. Can you see the subtle temptations to doubt God's word, his goodness and his judgement?

So Eve does as the serpent suggests, and then Adam follows her lead. Can you see how God's good order has been reversed? Adam has allowed Eve to lead, he has stood by and let the serpent deceive her instead of taking the lead in obeying God's word.

Diagram:



The result is judgement. Satan was lying when he said there would be no judgement. The specific punishments that Adam and Eve receive are related to their distinctive roles. So for Adam, his work of subduing the creation would now be hard work (v17-18). And for Eve, her work of

bearing children would now be painful and hard. And both of them would die, they will return to the ground (v19).

But there is another awful consequence of their rebellion against God, which is that their relationship is spoiled. V16 "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you". The word "desire" here is the desire to control, to rule over. So there will be a battle for control. Eve will no longer want to submit to her husband's lead, instead she will seek to control him. And Adam will no longer exercise loving leadership over his wife, but seek to control her too. An example of him not exercising loving leadership is the way he rejects and blames her.

Instead of equality, there's a battle for control, there's competition, there's a lack of trust of one another.

Instead of the man and the woman complementing each other, and enjoying the diversity that God has made, of celebrating male/female differences, they are reversing the roles and ignoring God's design.

I wonder if you see any of those things in our world?

Can you see the tendency women have to try to control or manipulate men? (Marriages where the wife nags her husband into submission, where she's the one in control?)

Can you see the tendency men have to either give up their responsibility to lead or to dominate women in an abusive way? (use hands to emphasize 2 options) (I wonder if in traditional society the tendency is for men to dominate women, and that in modern society things have swung so far the other way where men give up their leadership responsibilities)

Remember, these sinful behaviour patterns come as a result of God's judgement at the fall, and were not part of God's original design.

Small group discussion

- How does Genesis 1 challenge people and cultures who view and treat women as second class citizens?
- What does it say to women who view men as the enemy/always wrong/not needed?
- In what ways is the view that men and women are created differently under attack?
- Which of these is more of a challenge to you personally? Do you find it hard to treat men and women as equally valuable and made in God's image? Do you find it hard to accept the different roles God has given to men and women?
- Do we delight in God's good design of men and women as equal but different or are we fighting against it?

The Restoration of God's design

Satan succeeded in the garden in enticing Eve to disobey God. He got her to take the lead, undermining Adam's leadership role. Adam just stood by and allowed his wife to lead him into disobedience.

Wonderfully and amazingly God didn't leave mankind in that state. Jesus came to deal with the problem of sin. In Genesis 3 God promised that there would be a serpent crusher, one who would deal with sin and its consequences. **Let's read Galatians 3:23-28**

²³ Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

We see here that men and women are **equal in salvation** – we were imprisoned in our sin, and the law condemned us, but in Christ we've been freed and made sons of God through our faith in him. So both men and women are equally redeemed, both inheritors of the promises of God. We could say that our social status in the world makes no difference to our salvation. We love to put people in boxes don't we? And to hang out with people who are like us. But the gospel breaks down all those barriers, if we are in Christ, we are one, united together in Him. And that needs to be our primary identity, not whether we're male or female, black or white, single or married, kikuyu or Luo.

Another result of our union with Christ is that we are now free to live the way he designed us to live. Sin is still present, we still have sinful natures, there's still a voice inside us telling us to fight God's good design, and Satan is still the Father of lies, telling us to doubt that God's design is good. We will have this battle inside of us until Christ returns, but we also have the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower us to live holy lives.

But we must be careful here not to make equality of status, that is, our standing before God, mean equality of function. What we saw in Genesis showed us that men and women are created equally in dignity because they are both made in the image of God, but this doesn't mean they are

the same. And God rejoices in diversity, he made us different for a purpose. So as we read Galatians 3, we need to remember that it's addressing the issue of salvation.

When we read the New Testament, we see Jesus affirming the foundational truths of God's good design for men and women that we looked at in Genesis. He affirmed male leadership and the helper role of women in his life and ministry. His respect for women would have been very counter cultural. But he chose 12 men as his disciples, who were then the leaders of the early church.

So now we're going to look at some of the New Testament passages that address women, and as we do so, let's keep these 2 truths in mind:

1. Men and women are equal in status, dignity and humanity
2. Men and women are different in function, they have different God-given roles
 - Men should lead
 - Women should help

God's design worked out in marriage: Ephesians 5

We're not going to spend a lot of time on marriage and singleness, because that subject will be covered in other MTC sessions, but I want to point you to Ephesians 5:22-33, and show you how the truths play out in marriage.

Key ideas: husband to love sacrificially – he is to be a loving leader of his wife

Wife is to submit willingly – she is to be a helper to her husband

Christian marriage should be a beautiful picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. Roles are not interchangeable

God's design worked out in the church: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 (1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Cor 14:26-40)

So now we're going to look at how the equality and difference of men and women works in the church. Let's read 1 Timothy 2:8-15:

⁸ I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling; ⁹ likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, ¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. ¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

Paul is giving instructions to Timothy about how he should teach the church at Ephesus (1:3 "As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine,"). The whole letter has much to say about how believers should behave in the local church. So that's the context for our passage. These are instructions for the church, which includes specific instructions for men, and specific instructions for women.

Looking first at v8-10, what are men told to do? And what are women told to do?

Men are encouraged to pray. Women are encouraged to dress modestly and do good works.

In the instructions to women, again we can see that this is an area where women are tempted to behave in a way that could manipulate men or distract them. So consider whether what you wear is modest and whether your focus in making yourself beautiful, or attractive, is about your outward appearance or your good works. If we're spending masses of time and money on our physical appearance then we've lost our focus on what's important.

Now to the more controversial verses! Quick small group/pair bible study:

Q1) What attitude are women to have when they meet together with the church family? (v11-12)

Q2) Why? (v13-14)

So in the local church, women are to have a submissive attitude. Let's remember that submission is not derogatory, it's an attitude commanded of all Christians (Eph 5:21) and of particular groups to others. So children are to submit to their parents authority, citizens of a country are to submit to the authorities of that country, wives are to submit to their husbands. And in the church, women are to learn submissively. Particularly, women are not to teach men or exercise authority over men. This passage is probably not frequently taught because it challenges so much. But I hope you can see the plain meaning of this text?

Let's look at the reason Paul gives as to why women should not teach or have authority over men in church. Does he talk about cultural factors? No, he goes back to Genesis and says it is because the man was created first, and because the woman was the one deceived. So going back to our diagram of God's good design, man is supposed to lead, woman to help, there is an order in creation that Paul applies to teaching and authority in the local church. The deceit that the woman fell for was the deceit to take the man's role of leadership, which seems to be why Paul mentions it. He doesn't want Christian women to fall into the same trap as Eve, into being deceived about the goodness of male/female roles.

Now, we need to see what this "teaching" is. Claire Smith, in her great book (called God's good design) in which she tackles all of these controversial passages, says "the teaching on view in this passage is the ongoing, authoritative and public exposition of God's truth...what we call preaching". So, because of the fact that God's created man first, and gave man the role of leading, men are to be the leaders in the home and the church.

If we look at ch 3 of 1 Timothy, immediately after our passage, we see this worked out. Leadership in the local church and the preaching that is part of that leadership is a role reserved for men. And not all men. There are very strict criteria for who can be appointed to be an overseer or deacon (overall and supporting leadership roles in the church).

So what ministry roles *are* open to women in the local church? We're going to look at many passages quickly, looking at the many different things we can do as believers within our church fellowship.

Eph 4:15-16

Eph 5:19

Titus 2:3-5

1 Timothy 5:10

2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:14-15

Romans 16:1-16

I hope you can see that there are many ministries open to women, including many word ministries – of encouragement, of speaking the truth to one another in love, of singing songs that help us focus on Christ and encourage one another, of teaching children, of teaching and training younger women, as well as equally valuable non-word ministries of good works, hospitality, caring for one another's needs, caring for the poor and needy. We need to remember that the church is a body, and that we all have a part to play, different parts, different roles, which are all needed and important. Let's get on with fulfilling the 95% of roles that women can do without worrying about the 5% that are reserved for godly qualified men.

Carrie Sandom says that ignoring complementary patterns of leadership will result in either men dominating aggressively and women becoming passive, or women dominating and taking over male roles making men into passive wimps. Neither of these options is very attractive or honouring to the Lord Jesus.

Let's pray: Father God, thank you for making us women, and for your good design for us. We're saddened as we see the effects of rejecting your design. Please remake us through the power of your Spirit, that we

might be more and more the women you want us to be. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

More Resources:

- <https://9marks.org/article/delighting-in-authority-how-to-create-a-culture-of-happy-complementarians/>
- <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2011/01/11/im-a-complementarian-but-single-women-are-missionaries/>
- <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2011/01/06/im-a-complementarian-but-women-must-be-taught-and-they-must-teach/>
- <https://iserveafrica.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/resources-on-complementarianism-and-egalitarianism.pdf>