

Discover Your Identity as a Woman in God

Where do I find my **identity as a woman**? It's not the Proverbs 31 woman or Ruth—it's God Himself. I was created in **His image** (Gen. 1:26-27) and am being conformed back to Christ's (Rom. 8:28-30).

In Scripture, the defining characteristics of the first woman—those things that make her utterly unique to her male counterpart—are inextricably tied to the character of her Creator. Knowing Him precedes knowing ourselves. If we want to understand our **identity as women**, we must first understand His identity as God.

Genesis 1:26-27 says, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own **image**, in the **image of God** he created them; male and female he created them" (NIV).

After Genesis 1 states the general idea of man and **woman** being created to bear the image of God, Genesis 2 zooms in on the creation of the first woman: "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a **helper** suitable for him'" (v. 18).

This **woman**, created in the **image of God**, was designed to be a **helper** suitable to her male counterpart. When I read this in common English, it always sounds condescending and substandard. "I'm called to be help? That sounds like some 18th-century snob referring to their servants! I'm not 'the help.'"

But that is simply because our English translation can't do

justice to the Hebrew term.

Instead, think of the Man of Sorrows carrying His cross toward Gethsemane. As He stumbles, Simon of Cyrene steps in to carry it with (or for) Him.

This is a much closer picture of the biblical concept of '**help**.' It does not mean being a maid. It is more like being a crutch. It does not mean being a mindless sidekick, waiting on an order. It is Morpheus or Trinity to the Matrix's Neo. The Hebrew word indicates strength.

The Hebrew term for **helper** is most often used in the Old Testament of **God Himself**, which makes sense since the woman was created to bear the image of God. Consider its use in Deuteronomy 33:29: "Blessed are you, Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will tread on their heights."

God Himself is called our "helper," the same Hebrew word used of the first woman in Genesis 2:18. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is also called our helper, counselor, and comforter (depending on which translation of the Bible you use). These are all translations of the Holy Spirit's role of *paraklete*, or "one who comes alongside in aid."

When we understand God's role on this issue, it puts things in perspective. God, the Almighty Sovereign Lord of the universe, is our helper, and we, as women, are created in His image. If I hold on to the attitude that being created as a helper is condescending and substandard, I am basically mocking the name of God and His character, for the role of helper is one He willingly embraces.

God, our help, defends (Ex. 18:4), cares for the oppressed (Ps. 10:14), delivers from distress (Ps. 70:5), rescues the poor and needy (Ps. 72:12-14), comforts (Ps. 86:17) and supports, shields and protects (Ps. 20:2; 33:20). God's

example reveals a high and worthy calling for women as helpers suitable to their husbands. We are not glorified maids, butlers or cooks waiting on an order to perform from a master. This is not God's example of help at all!

We are called to show compassion and to support, defend and protect those in our care. We are called to deliver them from distress and to comfort them. We are called to be conduits of God's grace in our homes. We are called to be like Christ.

There is a sense in which God's call to us is a general call to be strong helpers and advocates in widespread ways. My help extends to my children, my neighbor and the stranger God brings across my path, as He taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan. But there is also a very strategic application of this help that I'm called to offer. Eve was created to help her particular husband.

I remember asking my husband one day, "What would you find helpful?" To put the question in context, I had heard much from various sources about what a Christian woman was supposed to do for her husband. I found myself judging how well I was doing by comparing myself to friends, women's ministry leaders, book authors and so forth.

If any of them suggested what I thought was a better method of fulfilling my role in my home, I either worked to adopt it or beat myself up for my laziness for not doing it. When my husband and I talked about it, though, I realized he longed for my help in the strongest sense of the term—but I was constrained by the lesser expectations of others that distracted me from helping him in the ways he needed.

When I ask my husband what I can do for him on a particular day, he often tells me to simply "keep calm and carry on." He needs me to be strong and face the chaos of the day with two small boys with calm responses. He needs me to defend and protect, to rescue and comfort, to support and care for those

who can't care for themselves. He needs me to minister to our family like God, our help, ministers to me.

This may be painful to hear if you are single, widowed or divorced. But you, too, are God's strong helper though you do not have a particular man to whom to direct it. Throughout Scripture, women helped. Ruth helped Naomi. Mary helped Jesus. Phoebe helped Paul. Lois and Eunice helped Timothy. I do not trivialize the reality in which you find yourself. As God said in the garden and you well know by your own life experience, it is not good for man (or woman) to be alone. If you find yourself in this state of aloneness that God declared "not good," you are in good, godly company.

The gospel of Christ meets us in all of these realities. The single woman who longs to be married. The married woman who longs to have a husband who loves her as Christ loves the church. The divorced woman whose marriage ended in betrayal. The widow who feels the hole in her heart daily.

The truth for all of us is that the fall of man has marred the image of God in us. We are not who He created us to be. And the fall of man has marred the environment in which we live. Others around us are not what He created them to be, either. Loved ones betray. Loved ones die. And sometimes loved ones simply never show up. But in Christ, we start to see the reclamation of His image in us through redemption.

In Ephesians 1 and 2, the apostle Paul lays out for us all that Christ's death on the cross has accomplished for us. He expounds on it more in Ephesians 3 and 4. Then he opens Ephesians 5 with the amazing phrase, "Therefore be imitators of God" (NKJV). Finally, we have the tool for bridging the vast gulf between our created image in Genesis 2 and the fall of Genesis 3!

Now, in Christ, we start to reclaim His image in us, and Paul fleshes out what this looks like across the board—husband,

wife, parent, child, co-worker, boss and every relationship within the church.

I can't fully articulate in this short article how exactly the gospel does this for us. Paul sets the foundation for how God does it in six chapters in Ephesians, and I have spent much time studying it there. But living it out daily will require a lifetime of gospel meditation and transformation until finally I see Jesus face to face in perfection.

Today, I am simply asking God in prayer how the gospel equips me to reclaim His image in my life and what it looks like to live it out as a strong helper in my relationships. I trust He will meet us all in this prayer with wisdom for this day's struggles as a women after God's own heart.

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