

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 134 | Q&R: Gender Series, Part 2

Featuring: Autumn Gardner, Dave Morlan, and Clark Nunnally



Autumn: Welcome to the Vision for Life podcast, an ongoing conversation between the pastors of Fellowship Denver and the Church at Large. Each week we talk about life, faith, the Bible, and how to follow Jesus as we go about our daily lives. I'm Autumn, host of the podcast, and today Dave and Clark, two of our pastors at Fellowship, and my friends, are joining me on the podcast. Thanks for being with me today.

Dave: Hey Autumn.

Clark: Hey Autumn, thanks for having me back. Glad to be doing this again. I'm back with my cat pillow.

Autumn: Back with a cat pillow.

Clark: It's right here again next to me.

Autumn: We joked that in the first part of this Q&R—so this Q&R episode turned into two episodes—and we joked in the first part, this is part two of two, and Hunter mentioned that it was because you were distinctly long-winded, Clark, and that's why it turned into two episodes. But you noticed who we cut today, actually, to get through the second episode.

Clark: Yeah, we just brought in a biblical scholar to keep things short.

Dave: I do like to keep things short, succinct.

Autumn: No, that's an unfair jab. Hunter's not here today, but that's just because he's off traveling around the world for a few weeks. So, I'm very grateful that the two of you are here, and we are actually rounding out a series of conversations about gender, men and women, and then men and women in the Church. And so, our first Q&R episode focused on a set of questions that we received about men in manhood. And today, our questions are not distinctly about women in womanhood, but we're more that direction, more about men and women together in the Church and about the experience of being a woman both in society and within the Church. So, I'm glad to jump into this with both of you. And I'm just going to begin by reading our first question.

Dave: Sounds great.

Clark: Let's do it.

Autumn: The first question that we're going to respond to asks, are the spiritual gifts spoken of in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 distributed differently to men and women? Do only men qualify for certain gifts such as the ones listed in Ephesians 4 that says, "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, the teachers"?

Dave: Well, those three different biblical references, I think they're really fascinating to pair together. The first two mentioned, the Romans one and the first Corinthians one, it's clear that what Paul is talking about is that God's Spirit is actually given to everyone who believes. And if you have God's Spirit, the fruit of God's Spirit and gifts that come through God's Spirit began to be manifest in individuals' lives. So, the question of whether or not those are differentiated between men and women certainly wasn't in Paul's mind. They're given equally among men and women, among people who have the Spirit. So, when you read those gifts and you see those manifest within the Church, you see those equally distributed. Now, the Ephesians 4 passage is interesting because Paul is not talking about the gifts per se. That is the

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things people do, but he's actually talking about individual people. So, he gave a teacher, pastor, prophet, evangelist; he's talking about individual people. Now, what those people do in Ephesians 4 is equip the Church, all the people, for the works of ministry, where I think Paul would then say those gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians and Romans would actually be expressed practically within the Church by both men and women. But the individual people who are holding the offices, that may or may not be differentiated sexually. But even in Ephesians 4, Paul, I think it's fair to say he is not making a point to say, here are particular offices within the Church and some of these may be reserved only for men. That's not really in his thinking. He's just saying that these individual people are given within a church that then God uses to help unleash the actual gifts of the Spirit among men and women within the building up of the body. So, that's kind of how I would answer that. I would say, no, it's not differentiated between men and women, but the Ephesians 4 passage does talk about particular people, and they may actually be referencing or holding specific offices that may in fact be reserved for men. But that's not what Paul is talking about in that passage. You'd have to go somewhere else to sort of kind of import that into an interpretation.

Clark: Yeah, it's a really good way to say it. It's kind of like trying to get that text to answer a question that it's not trying to do in the first place. It's talking about the way that the gifts support the Church so that the Church in the end is a thriving community of believers and people doing the work of God. So then, what we can do is start looking throughout Scripture to see how both men and women are actually gifted to do the work of ministry to equip the saints. And I think you see examples of men and women with many different giftings to see the Church flourishing. It's really evident that there are women doing the work of evangelism. It's really evident that they're serving as deacons in the Church. There are women who are serving in the role of prophet. And when all of these come together, that's going to be the place where the Church is actually going to thrive. So, it's not really- I just don't get the sense that it's fair to say that certain gifts belong only to men or only to women. But what we do see when you kind of put the entirety of Scripture together is that God's saying, hey, all of these gifts belong to both men and women. And then yet, that there is a way that I want men and women to actually express these giftings inside of the Church. I'm actually setting up an order for the way that they're going to work in the Church, and that's going to be the thing that lets the Church thrive. It's going to make the Church good. And that is where I think some of the tension comes in around this topic.

Autumn: On occasion, passages as addressed to the Church, we assume that they're inclusive of men and women because they're to the Church, which included both men and women. In Romans 12, particularly though, it's clear, it's called out in a specific way. That chapter begins by saying, I urge you brothers and sisters. So, it's clear that that passage specifically is addressed to men and women in the Church.

You used some terminology, Dave, a moment ago in answering and responding to this question that I want to pick up on. You said general office and specific office. And my understanding of that might be general office would be a teacher within the Church. There are some classes that we hold at Fellowship, for instance, in which I teach or you teach. There's one class in particular I have in mind that we teach midweek together, you and I. And we both hold, within our Church's structure, and what we hope is reflective of the New Testament Church, that general office of teacher. And then there's a specific office—I think you use that term—and that would be referencing someone who teaches in a specific way. And I think that this leads us into another question that we received. So, these two are sort of tied together. And that question asks, what exactly is restricted in 1 Timothy 2? How does this work into practice inside the Church where men and women both can utilize their gifts?

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Dave: Well, the 1 Timothy 2 passage, Paul mentions teaching specifically. And there's a ton of ink that's been poured over this particular verse the past 60-70 years. But it is referencing a restriction. He says, I do not permit a woman to teach, or that is, have authority over a man. And there's a lot of sort of difference of opinion as to what exactly Paul is talking about, what kind of teaching, what sort of authority. And there're a lot of different places you can look to for sort of scholastic research. If you really want to know what Paul had in mind, there're a lot of places you can go to, I think, that can help you understand what Paul is referring to there. But kind of where we've landed, and what I understand Paul to be saying is that there, and in 1 Timothy 2 that then leads into Timothy 3, it's referring to the specific or the special office of elder-pastor. And that there is a particular expectation or role that an elder-pastor will play exercising headship, leadership, oversight. Some of these terms are used interchangeably, pastor, overseer, Elder. But there's a particular role that they would play in teaching that is a unique expression of that headship.

So, then when you look at that 1 Timothy 2 passage where it says, I do not allow a woman to teach, that is, have authority over a man. I would say there's almost a consensus among many scholars that this refers to a particular kind or expression of teaching that is unique to headship role within a local Church, that then would be restrictive to a male. Not all men, but those who are actually qualified in the way that Paul impacts in chapter 3, but that it would be restrictive to a male. And so, how I understand it, and I think there's some consensus that that's really what Paul is talking about. He's not talking about the gift of teaching. In other words, *only men have the gift of teaching*. Now that would be, I think, absurd, because you see women teaching in various roles and expressions in the New Testament, and speaking in the Church, obviously. And yet there's a particular office or role of teaching that seems to be reserved for men. And I think that's what Paul is talking about when he's writing to Timothy. So, it's not the gift, but it is a special office that is referred to when talking about eldership.

Autumn: But we don't derive necessarily the teaching about the specific office from this passage. It's a general reference to something that you're deriving the framework from, as you said—you referenced 1 Timothy 3. So, from putting together texts from other passages, this whole 1 Timothy 2 section is fairly complicated.

Dave: It is. You notice I've just quoted that one verse.

Autumn: Yes.

Dave: Because it is wildly complicated, and there are various ways to interpret it. I remember after seminary, Renee and I moved to Cambridge. And the very first class I had at Cambridge was taught by this really famous scholar. And she was teaching actually on the pastorals. And she just said that 1 Timothy wasn't written by Paul, and is not authentically Pauline literature, and therefore, you don't have to pay attention to it. And I remember thinking to myself, okay, I'm not at Dallas Seminary anymore. This was not an option given to me, but sometimes that's what people—that's a way to sort of grapple with this. It's just to discount it all together. But if you do want to say, okay, this is actually written by Paul to Timothy; it is canonized; it's a part of Scripture. So, we have to honor it and respect it, which means it's going to be good for us if we do it. How do we sort of engage with it in a way that's meaningful, in a way that gives respect to it, but also not in a way that doesn't just succumb to traditionalism and sort of old fashioned ways of referring or thinking about how men and women ought to relate within the churches, because that's the way we've always done it in the past. So, I think it demands a really honest read. And if you want to say that it's written from Paul—other people interpret it by saying, hey, it's culturally restrictive to a particular region and an emphasis—and there's sort of a way to understand that. And I don't find that to be convincing for a lot of different reasons. So, my encouragement is to have people, you know,

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just the text is the text, you know, to engage with it. But to do it as a way to saying, hey, there's actually a- the fruit of this is supposed to be flourishing. So, how do we honor the distinction, and yet be for each other and flourishing? So, what we've tried to do as we've had to land—and other churches land in different places, which we can talk about—is to be as honoring as possible to the text. We've talked in previous episodes about the litmus test, the fruit of this, it ought to be that women flourish within the Church. And if that's not what's happening, it's a misapplication of whatever Paul is talking about in 1 Timothy 2.

Clark: I think that's a really great way to say it. The litmus test is, are women flourishing in the midst of your body? And for us at Fellowship Denver, I think that's the question that I hope we're always putting in front of ourselves. And yet, a Church's responsibility is to land somewhere on a text like this. And as you mentioned, this is one of those topics that people have just been pouring over for years and years and years. And for us, we just need to say, hey, here's where we are going to land, and we're doing that with the best of intentions. We're trying to do it with integrity. And yet, there's going to be churches at the same time who land in a different space than we are, and we can honor that as well. And we hope that that's a reciprocated action from them towards us in the same way. And yet, we at Fellowship Denver, I always think this is helpful, we even kind of treat this topic as what we would kind of say, like a second-tier theological issue. What that means is that there're going to be people inside of our church who actually don't agree with the pastoral team on where we land here. And yet, they are healthy, flourishing members of our Church. Really the only thing that we ask of them, we don't actually ask that they agree with us, we just ask that you don't cause division on this topic, and that we treat each other like Christians. To me, that's a really beautiful expression of the power that the gospel can actually have in the midst of tense conversations like this. So, this term, complementarian, is this big wide umbrella that really just kind of should, I think, be creating room and space for people to form their own conclusions on this topic. And yet, we should expect people to treat people like Christians at the same time, all saved by grace, where this is not something that should be hyper-divisive in the end.

Autumn: I think Clark too, if I can read a little bit into what you were just saying, you said, complementarianism is this big umbrella term. So, it in and of itself is going to be practiced really differently. And you, our pastors, are tasked with leading Fellowship and caring for people at Fellowship and coming to conclusions about how to faithfully interpret Scripture and apply it, put it into practice here. You are not responsible for all churches everywhere. And yet, we do have to ask these questions, not only for our own body, but also for wise alignments with other churches and even other influences. So, authors who we listen to, pastors who we would support or promote even their material, their sermons for our Church family to listen to. And so, within this, within that big umbrella of complementarianism, the way it's practiced at different churches might look quite different. And in terms of you saying this is a secondary issue, we've mentioned these terms a couple of times now in the series, but egalitarianism and complementarianism, there are some churches or authors or pastors, leaders who we would promote in that sense. We think that their work is good and theologically sound and would point people towards them to read or listen to. And yet, they land in a different place than you do, than Fellowship does on this question. I think a couple that we had thought of in our conversation before this podcast episode were Tish Harrison Warren, who's an Anglican priest and author. And we recommend her books and I've learned a lot from reading. She writes for the New York Times, and she's written several books. She's an excellent author who I recommend to people. And I think, Dave, you mentioned Fleming Rutledge.

Dave: That's right, who wrote a number of fantastic books, theological tomes on atonement, the nature of the cross, that are beautiful and penetrating. And are really influential for us, even for our teaching team. So, we read her quite a lot. So, those are amazing books and authors we recommend who differ from how we would interpret these particular texts.

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What they all have in common though is there is a profound respect for the authority of the Bible, and they submit themselves as Christians to the authority of the Bible. So, so we can disagree with charity and also learn profoundly from each other in that. We were talking before the show that Renee and I went, before we started Fellowship back when we were in Dallas, we went to a fantastic church that was egalitarian. We didn't really- I think those terms weren't really popular yet, but looking back, we realized, oh, that really was an egalitarian church. And it was a fantastic church, and we grew in it. And even though when we planted Fellowship we landed in a different place, we were so grateful for our home church while we were in Dallas. And they had charity towards us. And so, my hope is with discussing this is that we can model how to disagree well, and yet not in disagreeing have that not be the reflect an attitude towards Scripture that's kind of this whimsy, it-doesn't-really-matter. It does matter. It actually does. And where you land I think does have implications for your life, for how you respond to God's truth amidst difficulty and cultural fluctuations. And so, it shouldn't divide, but I also think that it's important to have a heart that is ultimately willing to submit to God's truth, because if we get into a habit of just choosing theological positions because they seem right to me in my particular cultural moment and based on sort of what I know about the world, that's not good enough. That's not good enough. It needs to be broader than that. So, I think we should be challenged, especially in culturally-difficult questions and topics. We ought to be challenged. And if we find ourselves adhering to theology that happens also to align with our political or ideological beliefs in other areas, then the tail is probably wagging the dog in terms of how we're understanding Scripture. So, let's be willing to be challenged. We all have to submit to it and sort of humble ourselves under Scripture. But anyway, those are some of my thoughts on that.

Autumn: Yeah, you used the term litmus test a while ago. I think often we fall into this habit of developing a personal litmus test. And that is just asking this question of, does this resonate with me? Does this seem right to me? And so much of Scripture actually challenges us. I came upon this quote from someone else on a podcast quoting a Jon Tyson sermon. So, apparently this is attributed to Jon Tyson, but the line was shared in that podcast that said something like, resonance is not the determiner of obedience. And so, it can be so easy to ask, does this seem right to me or does this resonate with me? That's how we're conditioned. That's what we're taught by culture, by society, to do and to ask. And Scripture decidedly does not work that way. It confronts those attitudes and challenges us.

Dave: So, much of what we think we know is really tacit knowledge. It's not straightforward knowledge, it's sort of knowledge that fills in so many of the details, and our side viewpoints create plausibility of what seems right to us, and culture is so ubiquitous and is filling in so much of what we think we know. And then when we hear something that resonates, it may not be resonating with what we actually know or what's actually true, it's just connecting with all this tacit knowledge that we have picked up just by virtue of being people who live in a particular time, place, and culture. So, if we're not being challenged in terms of what we actually know and being challenged in those more profound ways, then we're probably just going along with the zeitgeist, the various waves of culture. Thankfully, God is kind to us and that accommodates to us, but we have to acknowledge and ask ourselves, am I being appropriately challenged, or am I just adhering to what it is that I like?

Clark: That is always the key indicator for me if I'm actually interacting with the Scripture. Am I actually being challenged in things here? And when I'm finding myself bored with my faith, it's because I'm doing exactly what you just warned against. It's like I've just taken out all the interesting bits here, and I'm just going along with my own whims and doing the things that I want to do.

Autumn: You've crafted your own Christianity.

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Dave: Yeah, it's exactly right, that's exactly right. What's so interesting about it is that I'm interacting with the Creator of the universe, and I should be expected to be challenged. How boring is it when I'm not having that happen?

Dave: That's right.

Clark: We should just kind of- it's just a good signal that you're actually probably interacting with the tax in a healthy way and we should expect it to happen because it will.

Dave: C.S. Lewis talks about when Jesus challenges His disciples to deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow me. He's sort of responding to how modern people and C.S. Lewis's time, like, how dare you deny yourself! and who is it really? And he just makes the point, who you think yourself is is actually a combination and a culmination of everything the culture sort of put on you. So, your real opportunity that you have to be your true, authentic, all this sort of language that C.S. Lewis was talking about, to be yourself who God's made you to be, is actually to deny yourself that is the cultural incrustations of you that's been put on you just by living when and where you live. Deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow me. It's an opportunity to actually be shaped by authentic truth, and Jesus authentically transforms you into a different kind of person.

Autumn: Before we move on to our next question, I'm going to redirect us to where we started on this question, which was about 1 Timothy 2. And Dave, you alluded to, you said there's some resources that you could interact with. If anyone does want to read further on this, do either of you have a recommendation to a resource that someone could-

Dave: Clark was just mentioning a great commentary.

Clark: Yeah, the *PNTC Commentary*, by Robert Yarbrough, is an excellent deep dive into this that really traces the totality of Paul's argument here. And then he also has written some short little summaries of this section specifically relating to this text. And I think we can link that article for this episode as well.

Dave: Another fantastic book is Kathy Keller's *Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles*. That's really influential. I know a lot of us have read that and kind of been shaped by sort of her interpretations within that book. I couldn't recommend it enough. And it's a super short read; you can literally read the entire book in 45 minutes. So, it's a concise, well-written, just exegesis of Scripture and a discussion on this topic.

Autumn: Thank you both. We will link both of those, both the commentary, the Kathy Keller book, and then also the link to the article, the shorter article summary by Robert Yarbrough that Clark referenced. Let's move on to our next question, which asks this, 'In the book of Genesis, God first creates the man, Adam or *Adam*, and then creates the female, Eve. The Bible calls the female companion of Adam, 'the helper.' I've heard this term used as a catch-all to promote the idea that the female in aspects of male-female-relationships should stand behind her husband or male leader or pastor to support and work towards whatever goal or mission they have identified. Is this a correct vision for the relationship between male and female?'

Clark: This is a really, I think, important question and before I answer it, I would say that you can always clearly see that God makes things good and humans can exaggerate them to be something they shouldn't be. They get an oversized place in our hearts, or we extrapolate them out to conclusions that they shouldn't be in. And I think there is a real risk for churches to take something that's good, like we would say at Fellowship Denver, like complementarianism is, and make it

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into something that actually shouldn't be. And I think a question like this stems from the reality that sometimes churches have taken this word 'helper' and they've used it, or has historically been used, to kind of subjugate women into a second-chair role, like a lesser role, where their importance isn't necessarily vital to the health of the church, and it sometimes has created a culture where women aren't really thriving with the gifting that God has given them.

So, that being said, this is important because it's been the word 'helper' that's been used to kind of do that. And the reason that that's happened, a funny little story that I can tell, is we got my five-year-old daughter—this could be a bad idea; I wouldn't recommend this for everybody—but we did get her her very first kitchen knife for Christmas two years ago, and she has yet to cut herself with it. So, apparently we're doing a pretty good job parenting. But it's a real actual sharp knife for the kitchen. And we will invite her—my wife and I love to cook—we will invite her to come help us cook dinner. So, maybe we'll give her some celery or some carrots or strawberries that she gets to use her kitchen knife. In reality, we've invited her to help, but she's slowing us down. She's certainly not doing the meal by herself. We could do it without her, and it really- the food's not as good in the end either, but it's this cute little thing that we've done to make her feel like she's involved, and we've called her 'the helper' the entire time. This is not at all what Genesis means when they use the word helper, but sometimes there have been instances where this has been explained to women this way, where women were told that they were the second cook, in the kitchen here, for an example. And when you actually see in Genesis what's happening here, this word *ezer* is way more than you might get on a first pass when you understand and fully see what the word 'helper' is. I think it gets used a total 34 times in the Old Testament in specific in relationships to men and women and God actually. And of the 34, 32 times actually is used of God himself. Many times Israel will find themselves in impossible positions where they are literally on the brink of death, and the Helper shows up. It's actually God himself that comes to save them. So, we will kind of see like, oh, this is like the nurse to a surgeon, that maybe is how it's been used. Or like, you're the secretary to the CEO. In reality, it's way, way more than that. I've often kind of said it's like Gandalf coming over the hill to save the people in the Lord of the Rings. And that puts a whole new meaning and value on the word "helper" here. Oftentimes it can be translated as deliverer. Like you are literally dead without this presence in your life. So Adam, by getting a helper, is actually getting a life-sustaining presence around him, something that's going to make him into something he wasn't in before. It's going to pull him out of situations that he wasn't going to make it out of before. Or another word that I think has been helpful is the word "ally." So, the woman is the ally to the man. It actually puts just more meat in there for what helper means in the book of Genesis.

Dave: I would also sort of push back on the question a little bit because Genesis 2 isn't the first time the woman is mentioned. She's mentioned in Genesis 1. In the beginning, God made them, God made man, male and female He created them, in his own image He created them. So, the first time she's mentioned, she's mentioned being made specifically in God's image, reflecting His splendor and likeness in really key important ways. So, however it is we interpret "helper" in Genesis 2, it has to be done in light of the fact that she's actually made in God's image, reflects God's character in really critical ways. Also, we read about in Genesis 2 when God makes Adam first and we get the order of creation, it's actually the first time in all of creation something's mentioned is *not* good. The man was alone. He was in isolation, and says it wasn't good for the man to be alone. So, whatever again "helper" means, it has to help to deepen our understanding of what it means to be human and express God's image as male and female together, and that without the helper, it's not good. Human society doesn't function or flourish without this helper. We see it sort of unfold in the rest of the narrative in Genesis 2.

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Clark: Which is like, this is the danger I think that churches can run into when it is a church that is men running in isolation from the wisdom of women. You're actually removing the deliverance, the ally that God created that's there in creation for a church to thrive. You actually have to have these two different creation aspects together.

Autumn: Yeah, I think in that example, the term used in Genesis that says that it's not good, and then the presence of the woman, makes that creation moment complete and good. So, there's a connotation of necessity. That's kind of what you're saying, Clark; men and women working together that both are necessary. And in that image that in Genesis, the woman was what was necessary for that vignette within the creation story to be complete, to be good. I want to pick up on something else that you said, Clark, to that this term, *ezer*, the Hebrew word used there that is translated "helper" and then misapplied in a way that this question is asking to indicate that women are there to simply support whatever that men have decided to do and there to go along with it, sort of like a second-tier cook, as you said. But the use of that word as "deliverer" in certain passages, I think, actually gives us an idea of what you mean when you say Gandalf coming over the hill. This passage in Deuteronomy 33 uses the word twice, so Deuteronomy 33:26-29, and I'm going to read it from the NIV translation because it's a little clearer where *ezer* appears in here. It says:

There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides across the heavens to help you and on the clouds in His majesty. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemies before you saying, destroy them. So, Israel will live in safety. Jacob will dwell secure in a land of grain and new wine where the heavens drop dew. 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.

And both of those uses there are referring to God. So, that's an example of what you were saying about how this term is actually primarily used within the Old Testament.

Clark: Israel was not going to make it out of that if they did not have a helper, and that's what you see in the creation story throughout. God looked at Adam and said, this is not good; you are not going to make it out of this by yourself; there's another piece of you that's missing here, and that's your helper. It's way more than just like a, oh, I'll bring you along because you're cute.

Autumn: Something else you said earlier in our conversation, Clark, about taking the entirety of Scripture also when asking these kinds of questions, sheds a bit more light on this in that the way that the New Testament Church operated. It's clear from the references in the New Testament to the women who were present in doing the work of ministry alongside the church leaders, alongside Paul himself, specifically the women, I think, who he greets in some of his epistles and in Romans 16 make it clear that that was the dynamic that was happening within the New Testament Church. And when it was spreading and more churches were being planted, that men and women were actually working together to do the work of ministry. And that leads us into our final question that we'll respond to today. It asks, 'How can adult men and women in the Church faithfully navigate relationships, resisting the messages and norms of a highly-sexualized secular culture, and those of reactive Church subcultures, that place the majority of the burden of chastity on women?'

Dave: What a great question. The immediate answer we get from the New Testament, which spells out how men and women are to relate to each other, and it uses family language—so, men and women are to relate to each other as brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers—there is a respect that is demanded for each other as you would respect your

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mother and your father and a love and a compassion for each other that you would expect between brothers and sisters. Now, of course, because people are broken and sin has divided community in particular ways throughout all of human history, this family dynamic has been ruptured in a multitude of different ways, specifically within the context of church. And so, how do you respond to that breach of trust? Well, churches have gone one of two ways. One way is to say, hey, we know that there is sexual temptation, or there are opportunities for abuse of power, and so, we're going to create a structure such to where we're make sure by this structure that could never happen again. And often it ends up creating practices and behaviors that begin to breed a sense of fear for the opposite sex.

Sort of a famous example is the "Billy Graham rule," where there had been men who would have affairs on their wives while traveling, and so, it was just a rule, never go out to eat by yourself with someone who's a woman who's not your spouse. Now that's responding, of course, to all of this bad behavior and carnal behavior that was actually happening by men. And so, it was a practice to rectify that. However, what it ended up creating after a while is that women actually weren't really invested in, and they were left out of important conversations that would happen over dinner. And so, it wasn't ultimately respectful to women either. And so, I still think, going back to this familial kind of language, respect. Now, other churches respond in an opposite way, which is a kind of naive confidence that, okay, we have God's Spirit and so we can put ourselves in situations with the opposite sex because we know that we would never be tempted because we're just sort of above that. Well, as you can imagine, those churches that have that kind of naive understanding of human carnality have a very particular pattern that they follow too. And you don't need to name any of the examples because there's so many we can, depending on the day and the month and the year, you can pick a fresh example. So, you can't be naive about it because carnality is what it is. But the response, though, is submission afresh to God's Spirit and also being honest about where vulnerabilities exist, not being dumb.

When we were talking about this before this episode, we were talking about so much of the examples we hear of failure are really just, it's not just bad theology, it's just stupidity. It's just classic foolishness. It's getting drunk and having leisure time with someone who's not your spouse in a setting where there's no accountability. Well, what do you expect is going to happen after a while if that becomes your pattern? Well, of course there's going to be brokenness that emerges from that. So, I suppose the answer to this is always go to Scripture, what's the ideal, what does God hope for us within the kingdom, within His kingdom? We're family together. Be honest about where we are in terms of we are still broken and have confidence though that God's Spirit does reside in us. Self-control is a fruit of God's Spirit and so our expectation isn't to be fearful of the opposite sex, to be afraid that something horrible might happen, but also not to be naive as well. And so, we have to trust God I suppose is the answer to it. Trust God with what He's calling us into. Be smart, and yet not also overly reliant on super-strict structures and policies that will eliminate any possibility of sexual misconduct because those, because the nature of carnality, I mean Paul talks about that sin actually uses the law to do its work. And so, if that's the case, then if you're overly reliant on really strict policies, overly strict policies and traditions to protect you from it, well carnality just licks its chops with that. I think the better thing is to look at, okay, what has God saved us into? What does community really look like within the body of Christ? What's God's desire and vision and hope for us, and how do we lean into that with wisdom, with honesty, but also with hope and expectation that we can experience some of this family, men and women working together for God's glory, for the good of community abroad, and community outside of the Church blessing and that we can model some of that actually for the world?

Clark: I think that's really well said Dave. There are some kind of hangover tensions that we just need to kind of break through and reform the way that men women relate to each other in a way that's grounded in Scripture, that casts a new vision and shows actually what's possible there. I think that that to me is a really compelling thing to hear as well. The

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thing I maybe would add there is part of this question talks about these subcultures and other cultures that we kind of find ourselves where the burden of chastity is primarily placed on women. And to lean into that a little bit, we've been using this definition a couple times around like a biblical manhood, and I just want to kind of speak to the men here, but two of those bits there were to reject passivity and to accept responsibility, and if those two things are being done, it should remove all possibility for the primary burden of chastity to be placed on women. That responsibility actually belongs both to men and women. And to me, if that is a culture that you are living in and existing in, that is a culture that is probably dominated by boyish behavior and not boys that have actually grown into men. I mean I've worked with—I was a teacher for 10 years—and I worked with boys, and the primary and immediate reaction of boys is to blame somebody else for their shortcomings. So you correct a boy, and they point at you and say this is actually your fault. People and males who are grounded in Scripture are ones that are able to do this well they can reject passivity and see where they need to grow where they need to move and they can accept responsibility for the ways that they maybe have had or noticed or recognized their hearts have actually been twisted a little bit and a culture that has men growing up into it won't be a culture that's going to be placing that burden on women alone. There's going to be an acceptance of responsibility to know that chastity is a God-given gift, and that both men and women should be pursuing that together.

Autumn: I think too one facet of this question that we didn't directly address, and that's the question about culture, the culture in which we live. The portrayal of men and women in a sexual—that's what this question is asking—a very sexualized society, is that we maybe, not all of us, but certainly some of us, exist as objects. And that therefore there's an inherent potential for gratification that can be accomplished through using people, men or women, and anyone can hold this perspective, and that's taught to us that's portrayed for us in so many ways and so much of the media that we consume in shows and movies and books and on billboards and in advertising, and so we're steeped in that kind of culture. So, there's really a wisdom says that we have to reject. Both that male and female are created in the image of God, that we are persons, body and soul, knit together, and therefore have inherent value and worthy of respect in the way that we treat each other in the way that we use our bodies towards each other to either encourage and build up and serve each other or simply is what secular society tells us is that, if a person is an object, then they can simply be used in this way.

So, we have to reject those cultural norms, and also reject the subcultures within churches that say that we can address this issue that's within the hearts of people through rules because, as you told us a moment ago, Dave, that doesn't actually change our hearts, and it simply gives us an external standard to point to. But anyone whose heart desires something other than what the law says will find a way around it anyhow.

Dave: That's right.

Autumn: So, I think we have to do both. The vision for men and women living together in the Church through the use of that familial language, being brothers and sisters, teaches us that there's a certain sort of respect but also an appropriate level of intimacy that can be shared within the Church context, and that is different than either of these depictions, either the reliance on rules and law or depiction to us that men and women can relate in a way that allows us to use each other.

Dave: That's right. Something that's required for that is trust, and I do want to acknowledge that so many people have had trust violated, and when that happens, the impulse to create all of the rules so that something like this might not ever happen again. I get that, and so I'm very sympathetic towards creating those rules, and there are of course

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standards and behavioral patterns that have to be enacted and imposed that I think are fit under the category of just wisdom and smart. But in order to experience what God wants for us, it does actually require trust again. And so, I just want to highlight that for us to experience what God wants in community. It requires us to be a part of family, which requires trust, which means we have to be vulnerable, hurtable again. And I just want to acknowledge, I know that's scary. I know that's scary. The healing actually that can occur when trust has been violated in the past isn't not to trust ever again, but it's actually to be in a context where people are trustworthy. And then slowly but surely you can begin to trust people are faithful. And then you can experience that family again. But I know a handful of folks and maybe a solid percentage of folks who will listen to this, they've had that, been violated. And so, they may think to themselves, oh, it sounds real nice to have this family, men and women working together and serving God together and God's kingdom. Of course, that sounds nice. That's not what I've experienced in the past. And so, what about me? Encouragement to you is the pathway forward, I think, is actually to vet. Not all communities, not all churches actually are deserving to trust. I think discernment is critical for you. And yet, the end game of all of that is to be a part of a family again where you have to rely on people, where we are all dependent. None of us are independent. We're all dependent on each other for flourishing and growth. And I know it's hard for many of us to acknowledge or to accept, but it's just true. So, we are reliant on each other. God's made us that way.

Autumn: Before we finish out our episode today, I want to share something on just a personal note as the representative female in this room. And having grown up in the Church context and existed now in a few different types of churches, the experience of women, which I to some degree have experienced myself, and then also have had a lot of different conversations with women, most recently at Fellowship because I've now been attending Fellowship and been really solidly here since 2007. So, for the last many years, my Church experience has been at Fellowship. And I think the experience of women in different Church contexts, perhaps this looks a little bit differently, is that they are boundaried out of certain spaces, and that could be due to theology that's put into practice in a certain way. So, the intent of, for instance, a complementary and theological position might be that men hold this specific office of pastor or elder, as we discussed this can be applied in many different ways. But therefore, women, because of their gender, are not allowed to participate in that office in a certain way. But sometimes the effect of that actually is much broader, I think, than what Scripture depicts. And so, the message that women receive and feel is that they're then never invited into any of those spaces. So, the picture that we see in the New Testament of women working alongside men in ministry feels absent because they're not invited into serving alongside pastors and elders. They're not invited into discipleship processes that sometimes are reserved for or more naturally inclined to men. Or they're not invited into certain spaces in which decisions are being made. And I think those can be an effect that women feel, even if that's not the actual stated intent of the theological position. It can be an intended or unintended effect.

And then to the question that we just answered, I think sometimes women within churches also experience that it probably is never stated like this, but that their female body is something of a threat. So, they can't be in certain spaces designated for men because, not because we dislike you, Autumn, but because you come with this dang body that is unfortunately not really welcome in these spaces because it holds this, it carries this potential threat in violating these sorts of structures that are put in place with perhaps a good intent, but nonetheless. So, I think that unfortunately can be the experience of women in many churches, is that whether intentionally or unintentionally, they're boundaried out of many areas simply because they're female. So, I think that that's- in summary, I would say that's not been the whole of my experience at Fellowship. And yet, these questions also are raised. And I want to say that's never our hope at Fellowship. We know we too are learning and growing in this. We discussed, Dave and Emily and I, that we want actually our theology and practice to wind up such that we create a space where men and women work together clearly and are

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flourishing together. And the litmus test that Dave has mentioned now a couple of times is that women within our church family are flourishing. And so, we hope that we're learning and growing in that.

But also, to any of the women listening, I hope that your experience is not that at Fellowship. And yet, I know that we all will wrestle with these tensions and these realities at times. So, just want to invite you to keep asking those questions. We're willing to be challenged together. And you can bring them to me or to any of our pastors, Clark, Dave, some of this conversation came about because you've been asked these questions, as have I.

Clark: Great.

Dave: Yeah.

Clark: Really well said, Autumn.

Autumn: Well, thank you both for being on the podcast with me today. And as always, we welcome your input and your questions. So, if you have questions about today's episode or suggestions about what you'd like to hear us discuss on the podcast in the future, send all of that anytime to podcast@fellowshipdenver.org. Thanks for joining us on the Vision for Life podcast. Special thanks to Adam Anglin for our theme music, to Jesse Cowan, our producer, and to Judd Connell, who provides transcription for these episodes.