

## THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 132 | What Is Biblical Manhood & Womanhood?, Part 2  
Featuring: Autumn Gardner, Hunter Beaumont, 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, the host of the podcast, and today Hunter and Clark, two of my friends, coworkers, and pastors of Fellowship Denver are joining me on the podcast. They're joining me because we had planned one episode on this topic entitled, "What is Biblical Manhood and Womanhood?" and we started talking and then it turned into two episodes. So, here we are.

**Hunter:** Clark got so long-winded that we had to divide this into two episodes. And so, I just wanted to get in here before he gets rolling. I just wanted to get in here.

**Autumn:** Let's definitely pin this on Clark.

**Hunter:** Okay, we had mentioned these four influences that are driving this debate in the Church about biblical manhood and women. And we actually identified them and introduced them on part one of this. And we didn't finish discussing them. So, the influences were the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of feminism. We talked about that extensively. Today, we're going to talk about the second, third, and fourth, egalitarianism and the response to it; complementarianism; anxiety about boys not becoming men, anxiety about boys to men; and recent concerns about toxic masculinity in patriarchy. So, all that's to come on today's episode. Take us away, Autumn.

**Autumn:** Right. As we continue to unpack these influences driving this debate in the Church, let's move on to the second of these four that we identified at the top of this episode, which is egalitarianism and the response to it, which we call complementarianism. Even in the indication just of those words themselves, there's that little bit attached to both, an -ism. And so, what does that tell us about the nature of these words and the way in which this debate has settled into the Church?

**Hunter:** The term egalitarianism means equal. And so, the claim of the egalitarian argument is, unless there can be total sameness, there is not equality. So, it's an argument that we don't have equality. And then complementarianism is a newer word that was coined in response to egalitarianism. And it's trying to say, no, there's something inherent to the complementarity of men and women that does create some differences that we need to preserve and acknowledge. This debate is a biblical and theological debate. And by that I mean that it was originally primarily about what Bible passages mean and don't mean. It wasn't only an exclusive about that, but the ground of the debate was not just about, well, this is my experience, and this is your experience. But rather, what does the Bible actually say on these matters? And when it's engaged as a biblical debate, it can be profitable just to have to closely examine what does the Bible say. We started out in this podcast and said, hey, we need to examine these things as we're processing them through the lens of Scripture. And we gave three categories in relationship to God, in relationship to creation, and in light of the Fall. And this debate at its best is trying to do that. It's trying to ask these questions. And I think the fundamental debate comes down to, and this is an oversimplification obviously of a vast debate, but it's maybe helpful for our listeners to know this, the debate comes down to what is required by the creation and what is a result of the Fall. And the differences in these two positions really come down to what they attribute to creation and what they attribute to the Fall. So, for example, egalitarians argue that any kind of "male headship" is a result of the Fall and a response to the Fall. And now that the gospel is coming, we can go back pre-Fall. Whereas complementarians argue that male headship was God's original design in creation. It has been corrupted by the Fall and it needs to be recovered in light of the gospel. So, that's the nature of this debate. And that's what you'll find as you get into this. So, our categories in light of who we are in front of

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God, who we are in light of creation, and taking into account the Fall. These categories actually help us to even understand the lines of differentiation that take place within this debate.

**Autumn:** The question asked in the title of our episode is, what is biblical manhood and womanhood? And those two terms, I believe, kind of grew up alongside this debate, and maybe even were a result of some of the work that was initially produced in theological or more academic spheres as you mentioned, Hunter.

**Hunter:** And I don't know if those terms originate with this debate, but they have certainly, to your point, grown up alongside of them. So, when the egalitarian perspective started to gain traction within kind of the evangelical movement in America, and that was a new phenomenon, it had not really had a lot of traction for a long time. In 1991, a book was written by a compendium of scholars called *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. It was primarily a response to egalitarianism. And if our listeners want to pull that book up, it was edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, and many people attribute complementarianism to those two people. But it's important to know John Piper, Wayne Grudem were editors of that, they were not the authors, the sole authors of that book. And if they pull up the table of contents, they will notice a compendium of scholars, many of whom are still very, very productive evangelical academics who are writing about different aspects of this. And they'll notice, just perusing through the table of contents, that the articles in the chapters in that book are primarily biblical arguments. Not exclusively, but they are largely examinations of what different passages in Bible mean. So, I do think that book, even though it's maybe a little dated compared to where the debate has gone today, that book is valuable to read. It's a long book, so it'd be a lot to read, but it's valuable to read regardless of where you think you fall on this debate. It's valuable to read because it's going to get you engaging with questions about what Scripture means.

**Clark:** Something else that is really interesting, and I think helpful when you're talking about this topic in regards to how is this driving debate within the Church, these categories are helpful, but they're not all encompassing; these are the umbrellas that kind of stand over this entire conversation, but the nuances and the inner workings of how these are enacted and implemented in the local church actually vary differently from church to church.

**Hunter:** And within families as well. In fact, the movement that came out of this book is sometimes called complementarianism. There's an organization called The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood that also kind of grew out of this book and this debate; they're arguing for the complementary position. But even within the complementary camp, you'll find churches that practice this slightly differently. So, for example, you might find some churches that subscribe to the same complementarity in theology who will say the office of pastor and deacon is restricted to men, whereas others would say the office of pastor is reserved for men and the office of deacon is open to men and women. You'll find some churches that will teach that a woman is not permitted to teach in any environment where men are present, and others say, no, that's just a restriction on the pastoral teaching office. And so, there're differences in how these things get fleshed out in the life of local church. Some churches will teach, as an application of complementarianism, that a woman's primary work should be inside the home, and others will teach that complementarianism does not require restricting women's work to just inside the home. So, you'll find differences of application even among people who essentially have the same understanding of what the Bible means.

**Clark:** That's right.

**Autumn:** Within egalitarianism, because the central thesis is that it's emphasizing the sameness of men and women, I think there is a danger just inherent sort of in that perspective that could overemphasize sameness. And within

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complementarianism, because it is noting and based in the differences between men and women, male and female, and then some of the roles within the Church and the home that are mentioned in Scripture, that there can be a danger in overemphasizing the difference in creating categories that aren't actually scriptural. And yet, the debate itself continues. And we see implemented both egalitarianism and complementarianism look different in different church spaces because some of this is not extremely clear. Some of this is not prescribed for us. Even Piper himself says this on reflecting on- this is not contained in the book that you referenced, Hunter, but it is in an article in which he's reflecting on that writing and probably answering, I'm imagining based on what I'm reading here, that he's answering some of these questions. So, Piper says, "I admit that Deborah and Huldah do not fit neatly into my view." So, Deborah was an Old Testament character who led the Israelites into battle. Huldah is an Old Testament character who prophesied. And he says, "Perhaps it is no fluke that Deborah and Huldah did not put themselves forward, but were sought out because of their wisdom and revelation. I argued in-," and then he references this article, "I argued in this issue in 1 Corinthians 11, 2-16, how a woman should prophesy, not whether she should. Are Deborah and Huldah examples of how to prophesy and how to judge in a way that affirms and honors the normal headship of men?" And he leaves that with a question mark. So, Piper himself, in responding to some of these critiques, is saying, yes, we see some patterns in Scripture that are outliers, that may not fit neatly within this paradigm. And I'm simply pointing to that to say that if we believe we can settle into this and sort of tie a bow on it and stick there without an act of consideration, I think like we're attempting to do right now of the attendant questions within this issue, then we probably need to revisit our perspective.

All right, that is point two. So, egalitarianism and the response to it, complementarianism. What is the third of these issues that we identify?

**Hunter:** There's a lot of anxiety in the Church and in our culture about boys not becoming men. In our culture, sometimes this is an anxiety about boys not growing up. Sometimes it's an anxiety about toxic masculinity or not becoming good men. I think in the Church, there is a lot of concern that boys won't grow up. I would say anecdotally, and I'm strictly speaking anecdotally, I hear this from women, particularly single women. I hear this quite a bit. I hear that they're not thrilled with the dating and marriage prospects that they're finding among other single men in Denver. One of the common themes I hear is that these men just don't have a lot of sense of direction and purpose and responsibility. Sometimes it's described to me as they're underemployed or they're not on a track of life that's suggesting that they aspire to some of the roles that only men can play, like husband and father. Young women are often finding, I aspire to being a wife and being a mother and being an adult that can be a competent wife and mother; I aspire to that more than I'm finding men who aspire to the same thing. One young lady even described it to me recently as, a lot of the men she's dated are way underemployed. She's just looking at that as like, can we do life together and build a family? It's hard.

**Clark:** Even looking at the creation design, which we've been trying to do this whole time, is saying like, what are the Scriptures actually inform about what it means to grow into a man? Part of being a man is to grow into this vision, to cultivate the world around us, to add to the formation of our community and our families and our workplace. And what I've seen when I meet with men is it can actually stump them when you ask, what is the thing that you are working for? What is the thing that you're trying to form around you? Or if you ask questions like, what are the things that you are trying to develop or lead your family into? What's the vision for your family? These are questions they've never considered. There're no answers for them. And what I think has been really interesting in a city like Denver, this is a place where people actually move with an opportunity to kind of maintain their boyhood, where maybe they grew up where life was fun and Denver is this new adventure where you can move into this place, do the things that you want, and really, you're not ever really thinking about the people around you, the things that you're forming, how are you actually

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cultivating the world as God called us to, God designed us to do. Which is really just preserving the boyness and kind of snuffing out the ability and chance to develop into men that God's called us to be.

**Hunter:** When I was in my 20s, my Church did a big emphasis on men becoming men. And I mean, there are hundreds of men who would come to this thing early on Wednesday mornings. And we learned this definition of manhood. I've shared it on previous episodes, but it was, a man rejects passivity and accepts responsibility. Those were kind of the first two planks. And we developed that by looking at Adam in the Garden of Eden and seeing that God had given him responsibility to stir the creation. And in the Fall, when Eve was deceived, that he was sitting there beside her and not protecting her and essentially spiritually being passive. And this was used to say, hey, passivity and not rising to responsibility is a problem for men since the Fall. I find that to be pretty compelling at a biblical level, I think. That that does seem to be true, and that does seem to what Adam did in the Garden. And so, I would not be surprised if the sin of Adam gets passed on to future generations of men. And then anecdotally, given what I just described, I'm hearing that from girls, they're not saying that men are passive, but they're essentially describing that. So, I do think, and I have found that when I can talk with men about aspiring to do something noble with your life, aspiring to do something good and creative in the world, for many men, aspiring to be husbands and aspiring to be fathers in the best sense of those terms, to accept that kind of responsibility, is life giving to them. And it speaks to something that God has put in them that they may be struggling to know how to live out.

**Autumn:** We've identified this anxiety that is present in the Church about boys not maturing, not becoming men, and stepping into a sort of leadership, accepting that they have this role of cultivation, and that they're called into this type of pursuit of work within the Church. But this is present, this conversation is taking place outside the Church as well. And you had an example, a specific example, Hunter, that came to mind as we were discussing this.

**Hunter:** Yeah, I was thinking of a book that was released in 2022 that I haven't read. I've only perused it, but it was called *Of boys and Men*, by Richard Reeves of the Brookings Institute. The subtitle is *Why the Modern Male is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do About It*. And he looks at this more empirically than just anecdotally. And he examines education, and he sees that men are behind in education. He examines the labor market and sees that men are behind women in gaining ground in the labor market. He looks at the decline of fatherhood. He looks at how it has affected particularly men of color and men from lower socioeconomic status and families. And he's basically saying, hey, this is a society problem. He also notes that that it has tended to get politically polarized. So, the left, maybe because they have really emphasized and embraced the feminist movement, the political left doesn't tend to see this as a problem. So, he has one chapter where he says the political left is in denial. And then he has another chapter called, "The political right wants to turn back the clock," meaning some of the answers that are offered to the political right are almost to go back, pre-industrial revolution. And he's trying to find a more constructive way forward in light of the culture that we live in. Our friend Jeff Haanen, who's a friend of the podcast and a friend of our Church, Jeff Haanen wrote a review of this book in Christianity Today last year that our listeners might find interesting to check out, and we'll stick that in the show notes.

**Autumn:** There's a version of masculinity, or maleness, perhaps we could say, a way of existing in the world as a man, that does reject passivity. I suppose we could say it that way in some sense, but is also not an accurate representation of what Scripture holds out to us as a vision for being a man. And that is, you already alluded to it, what we typically call toxic masculinity. And sometimes even patriarchy, the term patriarchy, is lumped into this kind of discussion.

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**Hunter:** Yes. And I learned this definition in a culture which was suburban Little Rock, Arkansas, where men were typically working very hard outside the home. So, there weren't a lot- of the 500 men I probably went through this with, there weren't a ton of them that were struggling to live their life vocationally or career wise. They weren't struggling with work. The passivity that they were struggling with was more in relation to being a father or being a husband. They were struggling to engage their marriage in any kind of creative and constructive and visionary way. So, part of the message was, hey, give the same energy to your family and to your children that you give to being successful in the workplace. That was a big part of the message. Now, in a different culture, like the one we live here in Denver, the message might sound a little different. It might be, hey, give as much energy to creating your work life in a way that's going to be able to support a family and aspire to being a husband and aspire to being a father in the same way that you give energy to playing on the weekends or to your soccer team or skiing or fly fishing or downhill mountain biking.

**Autumn:** In what way is that kind of version of masculinity impacting this conversation and driving this debate within the Church, specifically about manhood and womanhood?

**Clark:** It's a great question, Autumn. The thing that I see most is that when you think about a complete and holistic vision of what biblical manhood looks like, there's many different realms that this exists in. You have work, you have home life, and you have the life that you do for fun and your community. And I think within the Church, those have really kind of been segregated out from each other, and it's become okay to kind of maintain some boyiness in some of those. So, sometimes you can see a Church culture where a work life, growing into a man in the way that you work, is really prominent and there's a great vision for that, but the home life that Hunter just mentioned is completely lacking. So, as these things get separated, it actually starts to disintegrate around itself because these are pillars that kind of stand together in a holistic vision for what it looks like to be a man. So, inside the Church, I think one of the ways that we can grow and that we should look to grow is holding these things all next to each other and casting a really solid biblical vision for what it looks like to be a man in all of these different areas in the home and in work and in play and in our community and our friendships, and most of all our relationship with the Lord. These things need to be talked about together and how they stand together and with one another. And for some reason, it seems that we've just made it okay to hold on to some and not hold on to others.

**Autumn:** Yeah, I appreciate both of you reflecting on this with me. And this raises one more question in my mind. We've talked about this aspect of passivity and their specific dynamics that I think can arise within a home or Church due to male passivity, or we can examine it from a sort of larger social perspective. In the example you gave, Hunter, of women, young women, desiring to become wives or mothers and finding that men were largely passive, whether passive in the way they approached life or passive in the way they approached work. There's another way I think that an inappropriate vision for expression of masculinity takes place, and that sometimes is through domination or oppressiveness or being authoritarian. So, not appropriately utilizing a role that does carry some authority, but actually using it as a means of control. And there's a response I think both societally and within the Church to that particular portrayal of masculinity.

**Hunter:** I appreciate your raising this because a lot of times when the Church begins to speak to men and kind of call them up in the way that Clark was just describing, it does trigger a fear. And the fear it sometimes triggers is like, you're just basically asking us to return to male domination. And some men even hear that, and we should expect that that's gonna happen in their distorted, sinful thinking; they hear a call of rejecting passivity and they move to the other end of the spectrum, which is domination. And so, helping men know what it means not to be passive, but also not to be domineering is a huge, huge issue for the Church to face. And I keep coming back over and over again in my mind to the

wisdom of Scripture. The wisdom of Scripture even in the instructions it gives several times to husbands is nothing close to domination. I'm thinking of Peter, and Peter had the benefit of being a little bit simpler writer than Paul. And so, Peter writes in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter chapter 3, verse 7, he goes, "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way." So, he's basically said, guys, your job is to understand your wife.

So, the domination that we just described could be summarized like this, it's a lack of understanding. It is passivity in a different kind of sense. It's like, I'm not gonna give energy to actually trying to understand who my wife is and how she flourishes, I'm just gonna assume that I know the best without ever really understanding her. So, he says this, "Live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman." And so, you need to be active, not just in asserting yourself, but you need to be active in understanding and in showing honor. And he says, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel. And I think he means physically, like, understand she does not have the physical strength. And so, it's easy for the physically dominant just to kind of assert themselves and run over. And Peter is arguing against that as redeemed manhood. And then he goes, since they, your wife, they are heirs with you of the grace of life, meaning she has the grace of God, she has wisdom from God, she has the spirit of God. So, this is all pushing in the direction of, you need to devote a lot of energy to understanding her and listening to her and honoring her and not just asserting yourself because you're stronger. And then he goes, "-so that your prayers may not be hindered." He's basically saying, if you don't understand your wife and honor her, and you dominate her, God's not actually listening to your prayers, and He's opposed to you.

**Clark:** And those are really good examples of how not to do it. And Scripture also gives really great examples as well on how to do it. Thinking about Paul's letter to the Ephesians, it gives clear direction to husbands, to love their wives with some goals here, that he could present her in splendor, have her cleaned by the washing of the Word, without spot or wrinkle or with any such thing so she could be holy and without blemish. But the kicker here is that Paul is framing this all, and he's saying, hey, do all of that with this goal in mind. And the way that you do it is that you love your wife as Christ loved the Church. And there's no room for domineering in that. What there is room for is putting yourself second in complete service. When you look at what Jesus did for the Church, that's what it was. This was never a domineering relationship. It was to come and to serve and to be sacrificial at the heart of all of it.

**Autumn:** What do those two examples indicate to us? Both of those, both in Peter and in this account, Ephesians that you mentioned, Clark, are talking about men and women in relationship to each other, but in a specific relationship, and that is marriage. Marriage is used symbolically within Scripture over and over. So, what do those two accounts tell us about the way in which men and women should exist together in a different sort of relationship like in the Church, in which we employ this familial language? So, what do these passages tell us about the way in which brothers and sisters exist together or mothers and fathers? We've used that language because the New Testament uses that language of the Church.

**Hunter:** I think it's first important to note, this is primarily talking about how husbands and wives relate. It's not talking about how men and women relate in general. And so, women are not called to relate to every man the way they relate to their husband here, and men are not called to relate to every woman the way they're called to relate to their wives here. So, I think that's really, really important to say because perhaps one of the over applications of complementarianism has been insisting that, in all spheres of life, this is how men and women have to relate. So, we can establish that. Then I think though there are some principles that come out of like what Peter said, she's a fellow heir with you of the grace of life. Well, that's true of all my sisters in Christ as well. They are fellow heirs with me of the grace

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of life. And so, they do have wisdom, they do have the Holy Spirit, they do have gifts, and part of my whole perspective toward my sisters in Christ and really toward the whole Church—this is the same thing could be said of the body of Christ—my perspective ought to be, I need to work with other people who have other gifts. I need to see those, cultivate those. In no sphere am I just trying to assert myself and not understand and listen to other people. That's just not the way Christians relate to each other.

**Autumn:** There's a fourth issue or fourth stream that we could say is driving the debate, but really I think it's actually kind of crystallizing this, pulling these three streams together. I'm going to mention those again so they're fresh in our mind. The influences that we have identified thus far are the effects of the industrial revolution and the rise of feminism; egalitarianism and the response to it, which is complementarianism; and anxiety, both within the Church and without about boys not becoming men, not growing into mature men. Then this fourth stream or issue that we mentioned that is driving this debate are recent concerns about toxic masculinity and patriarchy. Those are mostly in the public view through some popular-level writing that has been published in the last, probably really within the last five years, the majority of these books within the last five years. I think these three streams that we've identified are present in driving even the concerns expressed in these books. There also is an observation that we just made that is very valid that's present in much of this writing, and that is the way in which Church leadership, particularly men in leadership, have evidenced either passivity or a type of authoritarian leadership that doesn't reflect the Christ-like example that we've just examined. I'm going to kick it to you, Hunter, to explain that a little further.

**Hunter:** A couple of these books are critiquing complementarianism, but they're not critiquing it primarily from a biblical standpoint. In other words, the old egalitarian critique was complementarianism is not biblical, and here's why. Rather, these critiques are more saying, my experience in complementarianism has not been good and it's hurting women. You don't primarily find these critiques being made of egalitarian spaces as much as you find to be made of complementarian spaces. Here's a couple of book titles we'll give our listeners a hint if they're not familiar with these works. There was a book that came out a few years ago called *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. The author, Amy Bird, was describing her experience inside the kinds of churches that would say, we are not egalitarian, but we are practicing biblical manhood and womanhood. She's describing her experience and she's saying my experience was not good for all kinds of reasons. There's another book that came out a couple years ago, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*, by Beth Allison Barr. She's talking about how womanhood got depicted within the Church that she grew up in and how it was presented as biblical. Now she's reexamining it and saying, hey, it appears to be more cultural than just biblical. These are all coming from the concern that a kind of masculinity or manhood or patriarchy is being practiced inside churches under the banner of 'it's biblical,' and they're saying it's not fully biblical. That's my best clumsy summary of the spirit of the books. There's another book that came out a few years ago called *Jesus and John Wayne*, by Kristin Kobes Du Mez, who's a professor at Calvin College, and she did a historical analysis of how manhood had been presented and masculinity had been presented within kind of conservative evangelical Church spaces. And—John Wayne is in the title—she's basically saying, hey, they kind of represented John Wayne as the archetypical man, and here's how that has affected women and other people in the Church. So, these are really critiques that are coming from what might be the cultural left or the evangelical left, the more progressive end of evangelicalism, and they're critiquing the more conservative end, but not primarily critiquing them as they got the Bible wrong, but critiquing the practice and the experience.

**Clark:** How would you say then that a Christian that's desiring to engage this topic thoughtfully should go about engaging both culture and Scripture on a topic like this that can get a little bit convoluted?

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**Hunter:** I'm going to sound like broken record, Clark, but I think you first have to be clear on what the Bible says and what it doesn't say in order to have a foundation within which to read these books. So, for example, I recently had a friend who is just trying to understand the biblical argument ask me about Beth Allison Barr's book, and she said, is this good to read? And I said, it kind of depends on what you mean by good. If you mean, is it going to teach you what Scripture says? No, it's not going to do a great job representing Scripture. There are some portions where she deals with Scripture and I think other books, both from the egalitarian and the commentary perspective, have done far better job of dealing with Scripture than she does in that book. So, in terms of a biblical treatment, if you want to set your foundation and wrestle with what does the Bible say, this book is not going to help you. If you're trying to sort out, if you say, I know what the Bible says, I know what I think the Bible means, and I'm pretty clear what it does and doesn't mean, and now I want to do some critical reflection on how it should be practiced, then I think these books can be helpful.

So, even though like all three of those books I mentioned, I probably fall in a different place theologically than all three of the authors. And I think all of them have purposes, some more critically or skeptically might say agendas, in writing, but they have purposes or agendas in writing that I don't share. I still can learn something from them, but I can learn it because my biblical foundation is pretty solid, and I've wrestled with the passages. I'm convinced of what the passages say. I'm also convinced that what the Bible says is good, and that is a presupposition of mine. It's not like I feel like it's good, I presuppose if the Bible teaches it, it is God's Word and it's good. Now, I don't presuppose that then all of our applications are immediately in line with the Bible, right? So, what these books help me do is they do help me critically reflect on, okay, if I know what the Bible says, how do I practice what the Bible says and live it out in a way that is life-giving? And usually the best criticisms come from opponents. They don't just come from people who are totally friendly to your argument. Often the best criticisms come from opponents. So, I think Amy Bird, for example, spent a lot of time in complementary spaces. She may still say she's complementary, and I'm not sure where she's landed. One of the things you notice as you as you follow some of these authors is there they tend to evolve in their own convictions over time. So, I'm not sure where she is today. But what her work does help me do is to reflect on, hey, are we unintentionally creating experiences and stereotypes within complementary spaces that I actually don't want people to have? And I might be a little bit blind to it, but she's lived through it, and she's writing about it. She might have a purpose and an agenda different than what I would have, but again, sometimes the best criticisms come from people who are not committed to the same thing that you're committed to. So, I can read it as a critique that's helpful to me in thinking through even if I don't agree with all her presuppositions.

So, would I recommend these to someone? It kind of depends on where you are spiritually, where you are in your biblical work. I do think doing foundational biblical work is important. I once had a friend ask me, do you think complementarianism is good? And I said, well, it depends. If you mean, do I think what the Bible teaches on men and women is good? Absolutely. I think it's absolutely good. It's God's Word and God doesn't tell us anything that's bad for us. And I do think it's different; I do think what God's Word says is different than what the egalitarians think that it says. And so, I think that what God's Word says is good. And that's why I'm not egalitarian. Do I think that complementarianism as it's practiced in every Church at every time is good? No, because we're sinners. And even when God's Word is clear, we sometimes don't live it out in ways that are consistent. And these books help me reflect on where sin and where misunderstanding might be woven into the cake. That's not even a right metaphor—baked into the cake.

**Autumn:** Might be woven into the cake.



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**Hunter:** Woven in the cake, woven in the blanket, or baked in the cake, but you don't weave cakes.

**Autumn:** But you don't want to eat a cake that's accidentally a blanket.

**Hunter:** No, you don't.

**Autumn:** I think I can briefly speak to this. I don't want to jump deeply into a personal interpretation, but I grew up in a religious environment that calls itself independent, fundamental, Baptist churches. And my particular Church was complementarian. The leadership were faithful men who loved their families and loved our Church. And so, I did not experience directly within my Church context a heavy-handed sort of authoritarian presence. But there were many churches who took that same label and churches who I was really familiar with who did actually, their leadership, did practice a sort of complementarianism or lead in a way that was highly authoritarian. And it didn't lead to flourishing for the women within their context. And sometimes the miscarriages of that office were really egregious. So, without jumping into those specific examples, I appreciate what you're saying, Hunter, because where these works can be valuable is holding to account some of those very specific and very real ways in which someone in the role of a pastor or an elder in leadership in a Church did not faithfully fulfill that. You even alluded to the way in which you can watch some of these authors, their trajectory, change over time. And sadly, some of that I think is due to the very real way in which they're mistreated from people who would theologically align themselves with complementarianism. And so, all of those aspects of this discussion again make it complicated, and I really appreciate your pastoral insight and wisdom in saying we have to always return to Scripture, be rooted there first. And so, in engaging some of what these women have written there's a real resonance that I feel. All three of the authors who we've mentioned are women. All three of them have shared hurtful experiences that they have had. And that is unfortunate, and we can actually face the real needed reckoning that that can be had through some of the questions that they're asking and through some of what they share.

**Hunter:** There's a massive theme right now that experience is driving what people believe and especially bad experience, and so a lot of people are rethinking their beliefs based on something they experienced. And that's not just true in this, this is just even true about at a macro level people going, I'm not sure I believe in Jesus because of my experience in the Church, and I just want to say over and over again that's it that's a terrible way to form belief. The best way to form belief is to ask, what does God's Word say? You will inevitably find that what God's Word says is not always what Christians have done or practiced, and I want to bring people back to something more sure and solid than just like, well, my experience here is bad so that must not be true. Rather, I want to say what God's Word says is true, and it's not only true, it's good and we need to have that in place when we begin to evaluate our experience so that we can know what part of our experience we can just let go of and what part of our experience is actually a reflection of what the Bible does say, and we need to try to hold on to that.

So, I appreciate even what you just modeled for us there and the way you talk about your upbringing is I think a mature reflection on upbringing where you might be existing in a slightly different kind of Church now, and yet you have held on to the core gospel convictions that you learned in the churches you grew up in that were good and the reason you've been able to hold on to them is you know what the Bible says and you're committed to the authority of Scripture so I just want to keep coming back to, in times of cultural upheaval and where experience is really bad, the thing that's going to help you is really knowing the Bible better. And I'm not making this up, this is the Protestant Reformation. That whole period of time in the life of the Church didn't really even start with Martin Luther; there were so many people who were just frustrated with their experience within Christendom at the time, and Martin Luther was just one of them, and the

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breakthrough for him was actually going back and learning better than he had previously learned what the Bible said, and once he got really clear on what the Bible said then he knew what to let go of and he knew what to reform and he knew what to hold on to and I think that would be the experience for many of us. And so, let's be Bible people who study the Bible talk about the Bible, and we and debate different perspectives of what the Bible means. That's part of learning.

I talked to a lot of people who are wrestling with this question or others, and they will say something like this, "I know what the Bible says, but here's my experience I need to understand." And their kind of working assumption is, I do understand what the Bible says, but I'm now I need to unpack my experience. And usually, though—or, often, I should say—their understanding the Bible is true, but maybe not as deep as it could be. And I know that because actually find this to be true my own pastoral ministry when I have to go back and examine afresh what Scripture says, and dive into passages, and dive into the exegesis of passages so that I can pastor people, it's not that my beliefs change; it's not like, oh, I didn't know the Bible said that. But I come to be more confident I come to understand it at a level deeper than what I previously did that happens every time I study something. And so, I think that even if you think you know what the Bible says, it's still really helpful to go back and do more detailed exegetical work using books and resources and commentaries that help you do that and you get into what does this work mean what does this work mean what does this phrase mean, and this actually can strengthen your confidence in what God is and isn't saying.

**Autumn:** Thank you Hunter, thank you to you too, Clark, for joining me on the podcast today. For those of you listening, if you have any questions about today's episode or a suggestion about what you'd like to hear us discuss on the podcast in the future, you can send all of that anytime to [podcast@fellowshipdenver.org](mailto: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.