

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 131 | What Is Biblical Manhood & Womanhood?, Part 1

Featuring: Autumn Gardner, Hunter Beaumont, and Clark Nunnelly



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 two of my friends and two pastors at Fellowship Denver are joining me, Clark Nunnelly and Hunter Beaumont. Welcome, guys. Thanks for being here with me.

Hunter: Autumn, thanks for having us. We just got back from staff retreat. And so, the three of us, plus Jesse, our producer who's sitting here with us, have just spent three days together. And so, this conversation could be extra spicy.

Clark: Thanks Autumn. Thanks for having me.

Autumn: Yes. No comments? Clark, are you feeling extra spicy?

Clark: We're all, yeah, more tired than spicy. But I'm here.

Hunter: Clark, would you say 10 hours in the car with me and Michael Goldstein is invigorating? Is that contributing to your kindness?

Clark: The fact that I know it was 12 hours, not 10, probably tells you everything that you need to know.

Autumn: Well, we're going to make it, spicy conversation or not.

Hunter: Well, fortunately, we have a pretty non-spicy topic.

Autumn: Right, this is when I say, H, you know, sarcasm doesn't translate well on the podcast.

Hunter: Sorry. Spicy topic alert.

Autumn: Yes, this is one of a series of conversations in which we're talking about being male and female aspects of gender in the church. And in prior conversations, in this series of episodes, we've talked about what it means to be male and female in the sense of being embodied persons created by God, that our bodies are given to us by God and they're modes of being that tell us something about how we should exist in relationship to God, each other and his creation. We've asked the question about the gender of God and why the Bible teaches us to call God "Father," about the theological concept of complementarity in the Bible, and today the three of us are asking together, what is biblical manhood and womanhood? And yes, this is a spicy topic.

Hunter: The way this works is we give a quick definition, and we wrap it up, right?

Autumn: Right. So, you want to do that for us? You have a quick definition just queued up?

Hunter: Well, you've planned a whole conversation here, so let's follow the flow you've planned.

Autumn: All right. Well, we're specifically asking, what is biblical manhood and womanhood? because of the way this exact conversation and topic has taken place in the Church over the past several years. It is a hotly contested topic. There are a lot of debates about this topic. And so, we didn't so much want to wade into the debate as ask, how do we engage this? and, how do we ask these questions thoughtfully? There are four influences driving this conversation, this debate in

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the church. And so, first, we're just going to identify what those four influences are. So, Clark, would you just mention the first of these four for us?

Clark: Yeah. The first one is really, this is just a pretty recent conversation that's changed, really stemming out of the industrial revolution leading to the rise of feminism.

Hunter: So, that's early 1900s. America goes through a change in how public life is organized as a result of work becoming industrialized. And we'll talk more about what this means and the implications for us as men and women in a few minutes, but we just want to acknowledge that in the early 1900s, feminism arises really in response to the industrial revolution. And this starts making the Church question, or reevaluate is probably the right way, assumptions we have about what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman and how homes should be organized and this kind of thing. So, that that really kicks this conversation off.

Autumn: What is the second of these major influences driving this debate?

Hunter: The second is a theological debate that happened. And I actually think this theological debate is where the terms biblical manhood and womanhood first surfaced, best I can tell. I could be wrong about that. But a theological movement arose in, say, the mid-century that called itself a movement for biblical equality. They sometimes use that term. It came to be called "egalitarianism." It argued, for example, that the office of pastor or elder in a church should be open to both men and women. It argued that some of the inherited gender roles that have maybe prevailed in homes, especially in the post-industrial revolution homes, shouldn't apply. And they call themselves the movement for biblical equality or egalitarianism. And then a response to that arose and that response has now been called "complementarianism." That term didn't really exist before this theological debate. So, for example, in 1991, a book is published called *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. It was a theological and biblical studies book with many different contributors, and it was edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, and it is a response to what was sometimes called evangelical feminism or egalitarianism. So, that's the second contributing stream to this, *what is biblical manhood and womanhood?* debate.

Autumn: All right, so we've got the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of feminism as the first of these four influences. The second is egalitarianism or this push for biblical equality and the response to it, which was called then complementarianism. And what's the third of these major influences driving this debate?

Hunter: There's a lot of cultural anxiety and this has bled into the Church about boys not becoming men. So, there's a concern for the maturation of men and women, and we could say there's also a concern for girls not becoming women. But I think there's much more anxiety on boys need to grow up and become men. And this has been an ongoing conversation within Christianity for probably the last 50- 60 years. And sometimes it is framed in response to feminism. So, sometimes it's framed as feminism has eroded any sense of what it means to be a man. And so, we need to teach our boys what it means to be a man. Sometimes it's just driven by the fact that men seem to not be doing well, or men seem to not be growing into maturity in in our modern culture. So, that's a third contributing factor. It really comes from a sense that we need to give men a vision for manhood that will call them up to something and call them out of immaturity.

Autumn: And then what's the fourth of these influences driving the debate in the church?

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Clark: The fourth one really sits closely to the third one, this anxiety around boys not becoming men. When you have a generational jump or an age jump in boys who are growing up without the maturity that they should be stepping into, it's really kind of started to create these categories that we've kind of identified as toxic masculinity or leading to negative forms of patriarchy, which is really just an immature boy that's kind of standing in the shoes of a man. And it's caused a lot of tension in our culture and a lot of confusion.

Hunter: The phrase toxic masculinity has been around for a while. I really saw anxiety about toxic masculinity become prevalent with the rise of Donald Trump and some of the things that he was outed for. And then the #MeToo movement follows in our culture parallel to that. Then there's a movement happening in the church where abuse is being discovered and unearthed within the Church. And there's been a concern arising within the Church that as the Church has tried to correct against feminism or give boys a vision for manhood, that they've given cultural stereotypes that are harmful to women.

I think of a book that came out a few years ago called *Jesus and John Wayne* that some of our listeners have probably heard of by Kristin Kobes Du Mez, who was a professor at Calvin College. And she's really arguing against the way masculinity has been both framed and practiced within evangelical spaces as hurtful to women. So, this concern about toxic masculinity has a broader cultural manifestation, and then it has an inside-the-church manifestation as well. So, you put these four things together and you can see why this becomes a thorny debate, because we have a cultural movement that is really arguing for women's equality, especially in public spaces and in work that starts in the early 1900s, and then we have a theological movement that's arguing for egalitarianism, which was a fairly innovative theology at the time. It didn't mean it's right or wrong, but it was a fairly new idea that's being presented. And then and then there's pushback on that from these this complementarity stream. Then there's concern that we really need boys to grow up and become men, and that concern actually can be shared across theological spectrums. And then there is this concern about well, what if what we're teaching men to become is toxic or it's harmful to women? So, all these things falling together can make this a pretty thorny debate.

Autumn: Because these are not only thorny debates, but because they're taking place in these different spheres, both in culture and within the Church, and because some of the central issues that are being identified and then raised within the feminist movement, and then in response to feminism, are worth considering; these are weighty issues. So, because of the real-world effect, the way in which all of these movements and their central philosophies have impacted us, the world we live in and impacted the Church, it's necessary then for us to ask, how do we start to engage these topics? How do we step thoughtfully into this debate?

Hunter: As Christians, our starting point for any debate is, what does the Bible say? And we don't come to that with the assumption that the Bible speaks to every one of the questions we're asking with specificity. But we do want to go back and say, what does the Bible in this case say about manhood and womanhood? What it means to be male and what it means to be female? If we're clear on what the Bible says, then we will be able to differentiate a little bit better what is biblical versus what is cultural? That's a big concern here. We'll be able to differentiate much better. Where is their flexibility and freedom for people to land in different places on maybe how this gets practiced in their home versus what does the Bible prescribe for us? Being really clear on what the Bible says is important anytime we're dealing with these thorny questions. This is not just true of this conversation. This is true of a lot of things that get debated in our culture. The thing I keep saying over and over again, I think it's important, is often we get into the debate without being clear on what the Bible says in our minds. Or we just assume we know what the Bible says, and then we dive into the debate. I

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think there's actually real value in going back and saying, what does the Bible say? How do we navigate this biblically? What are the biblical categories that help us navigate this? Then coming and looking at the questions. My pastoral approach is always, let's start with the Bible, not in an overly biblicist way, which would be to say, the Bible is going to tell us exactly what to think and how to answer every one of these questions. But rather, let's construct a biblical framework of thought and then go and engage in some of these debates.

Clark: That's a really good way to say it. It'll become evident throughout this conversation that so much of what's driven this, what's laid the foundation even for the confusion, has been even more so cultural dynamics, pressures of even the economic world that's actually been the driver. And the first thing that people have actually reached for to help answer the questions that they're asking. And we're saying, hey, let's actually use the Bible first, and then we can look through a cultural lens to actually get to the spot that we want to be.

Autumn: Well, let's do that. We don't have probably as much time in the course of a podcast conversation as you may otherwise if you were actually reading thoughtfully on a topic or studying it over a length of time, engaging it in a different way. But we do want to use that exact framework, those steps, go through those steps now in the course of our conversation to explain and model what it is that you're describing for us, Hunter. So, let's ask, what is a biblical framework within which we can engage this debate? What is manhood and womanhood? What does it mean to be male and female? And how then that has become convoluted? So, let's look at that biblical framework first.

Hunter: And I think you see a good biblical framework just tracing out Genesis 1, 2, and 3. And it would start with we just need to define male and female in relationship to God. And this is often not the starting point in the debate, right? The starting point is often like, well, how are men and women different? And we're defining them in relationship to each other. Or we're saying there is no difference between men and women, and we're just defining them in relationship to each other. But as Christians, we never just exist on this horizontal plane in relationship to each other. We first exist in relationship to God. And in Genesis 1, male and female appear, and they are defined in relationship to God. In the image of God, He created them. Male and female, He created them. So, both men and women, male and female, are expressions of the image of God.

Autumn: Within that first point that you just made, Hunter, there's an aspect of this- you said sometimes we jump right to the difference, but what you're emphasizing in that explanation is that in both being created in the image of God, there's a sameness. Why is it important to start there?

Hunter: I'm so glad you said that. And even in Genesis 2, when the man is created first and then God brings the woman to Adam, he says, this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this at last is one like me. And I think that's important because the cultural mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, which is the work we do as image bearers of God—it's the way we express the image of God—that's given to both men and women, which means a lot of what we do is the same stuff. There's not a clear, only men do these things and only women do these things; there're a few things that are given only to men and only to women to do, like being a father. Only a man can be a father and only a woman can be a mother. But there's a lot that's given to both of us. And it's like God is saying, you're going to both be fruitful, and you multiply, and you fill the earth and subdue it. You're going to cultivate this creation, and you are different as men and women. And those differences, which are just things we can all recognize as differences, those are needed in order to fully express my will on earth. And so, I think recognizing that we're both created in the

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image of God actually takes a lot of tension out of this conversation and keeps us from being overly-distinctive in how we describe like only men can do this, only women can do this.

Autumn: So, if that first aspect of this biblical framework, that first point is that male and female, in relationship to God, are both created in the image of God, that there are many things that are true of both men and women, then the second point really emphasizes the opposite of that. That there's a lot of sameness within that first point, but in relationship to each other and to creation, there are distinct differences. So, Clark, can you speak to that a bit for us?

Clark: Yeah, there is a pretty clear difference as well, even though there is an element of men and women created the same in the image of God, there are really distinct differences that also exist here as well. Hunter just mentioned one of these. One of them is that the male here really is the only one that can carry the role of being a husband, the only one that can carry the role of being a father. Similarly, the female is the one that carries the role of a mother or being a wife. And there's also just a huge difference here as well from all the creatures that God's already created. There've been these animals, all of these things are existing, and now man and woman together, when God says, I'll just make them in our image, now we start getting this kings and queens language; we're told to rule, subdue, cultivate, take care of all the things around us. There's a priority and an elevation of leadership that exists for both men and women and the way that they relate to the world around them.

Autumn: So, if we begin to put this framework together, men and women are both created in the image of God, both are actually given these roles, both are to carry out this aspect that you just explained, Clark, of cultivation, of rule, and they're to do it together. But in order to do that, they're given difference. So, that difference that God gives to them is a way in which they together carry out that mandate. So, both rule, both cultivate, but because of their difference, they can do it together in a unified way that wouldn't actually exist if there were complete sameness between them.

Hunter: Yeah, Clark mentioned only a man can be a father and only a woman can be a mother. Well, that is just one creation difference that God has made. And that also means, as a man, it is good to aspire to be a father and to fulfill that aspect of your gendered expression of your humanity in a beautiful and robust way. And it's good to aspire to be a mother. Now, I get to speak to single people all the time who are not getting to be fathers and mothers, and there's a kingdom of God/new-creation parallel to this, which is there in the New Testament. We see a spiritual father and spiritual mothers who act that way toward the Church and toward the people of God, even though they're not caring for biological children. And so, even if we don't marry, or even if we're not able to have children, there's still a way that as a man I express fatherhood, and as a woman, a mature woman, expresses motherhood. And so, I think these are creation categories which we can begin to ask, what is distinct to me as male, what is distinct to you as female, that God is calling me to express?

Autumn: That language is even used in the descriptions of people within the context of the church in the New Testament, they're described as being mothers. And that indicates to us, when that term is used, that a mother is a female person, that within the context of the church, someone who is functioning in that way, even in a spiritual sense is a woman. And when the term father is used, then even if that person is functioning in a spiritual way within the context of the Church, that person is a man or a male person.

Hunter: I was recently reading a biography of Tim Keller, the well-known pastor, and he was describing the woman who taught him Bible study methods. And she was a single woman, and she was like a spiritual mother to him in that she was ahead of him in the faith. And she taught him an essential component of what it means to follow Jesus in the same way

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that a mother might teach her son something in the home. And so, to begin to think about, how do I express fatherhood among the people of God? How do I express motherhood among people of God? Is a great question for us to ask.

Autumn: There's another aspect of this biblical framework that we identified together. So, what is this third consideration? The first is that God created man and woman in his image sameness. God wove difference into the creation in many ways. We discussed that in the theological consideration of complementarity in a prior episode, and then are reiterating it here. Then, what's this third aspect that we want to bring into this conversation?

Hunter: So, the first one is in relationship to God. The second one is in relationship to creation. And the third one would be in light of the Fall. In light of the Fall, we should expect that sin has marred us as image bears of God, and it has marred us as men and women. And so, part of our redemption is the restoration of the image of God. And I should expect that as a man, there's probably going to be sin patterns that are pretty typically, I wouldn't say exclusively, but typically masculine. And as a woman, there might be sin patterns that are typically, not exclusively, feminine. And so, I'm going to need to think about, how do I grow into maturity as a man? And you need to think about, how do I grow into maturity as a woman who follows Jesus in a way that is putting to death what is fleshy and what is sinful and what is from the Fall and is a restoration of the creation?

Clark: And you could also even add on to that and say that, if there is confusion- I like the word that we should expect to see confusion around this type of topic here, when there literally was a fall that broke the relationship between man and woman, and also changed the trajectory for what complete maleness and femaleness was going to look like. It shouldn't actually be surprising for us that there's a confusing topic for us. So, even for us to say, hey, this is a little bit of a spicy topic, is saying, hey, the Bible kind of informs us, you should probably expect this to be a spicy topic down the road.

Hunter: That's right. I don't think it's too controversial, though, to say there are typical male sin patterns and there are typical female sin patterns—not exclusive, but typical. Like most violent crime is committed by men. So, not women. That's just statistically true. So, violence, use of physical force in a way that harms or that takes life, it seems like that's a typically masculine sin pattern. Even things like we mentioned earlier, the #MeToo movement is responding to a typically masculine sexual sin pattern. And so, I think it's just important to know that as men and women, and as we think about how do we grow into mature men and women, to recognize that the Fall does affect our masculinity and our femininity.

Autumn: Let's take that understanding then, that framework, people in relationships—so, the man and the woman in relationship to God, the man and the woman in relationship to creation—and within that, we also mean to each other as well as the created world, and then in light of the Fall, there are certain things that we can anticipate or expect in a sense to be true of a complicated reality that exists within this topic, as you mentioned, Clark, and in relationship to each other. There are particular ways that it impacts the relationship of the man and the woman to each other over the course of human history. So, let's use that framework, that understanding, then, and consider with a bit more intention and depth each of these four influences that we mentioned before that are driving the debate in the Church. The first of those that we that we mentioned was the effect of the industrial revolution and the rise of feminism. So, if we're utilizing this biblical framework, and then asking, now, how do we thoughtfully engage? what was the impact of the industrial revolution on culture writ large? how did that intersect with culture in the Church? And then, how did that give way to feminism? how did that encourage the rise of feminism and do that within this framework? Ask those questions within this framework. So, let's ask the first part of that observation first. What were the effects of the industrial revolution on this aspect of the relationship of men and women to each other? How did that impact the culture?

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Clark: Yeah. Nancy Pearcey's book, *Total Truth*, has a great chapter on this, which she really just digs into the history of the industrial revolution and how this affected culture, specifically the relationships between men and women in the home and in the workplace. And her point here is that, in about 1820, homes really worked as a singular force. Most of the time that was agricultural, sometimes it was storefront, but husband and wife and their children often worked together in a really kind of equal playing field in the way that worked. Post 1820, the industrial revolution starts, and factory work becomes the predominant method that humans start collecting income, supporting their families. Fast forward a little bit, laws get enacted because of the dangerous work that existed inside of these factories. And the fathers are the only ones that start taking these jobs because it's now illegal for women and children to start working in these dangerous environments. What this does is it ends up creating a separation in spheres between work life and home life, where the fathers are the ones working in the factories, have a life outside the home, while the mothers now are staying home, taking care of the children. And it creates a pretty expansive divide between these two mothers and fathers who historically, at this point, have been working together in a close-knit community with really a singular goal. And that divide really was kind of the catalyst to start a feminist movement.

Hunter: It's hard for us in 2023 to imagine this, but there was a time when work and home life were much more integrated. So, if you just think about how especially an agrarian society works, and that's what America was prior to the rise of the cities and industrialization, just think about working a farm—your home exists on the land, your house literally sits on the land that your family works. And so, work and home are just right there together. They're physically in the same place. And day-in, day-out, they are integrated into a whole. When the factory starts to become a reality, and even non-factory work is now organized in an industrial way through management and through labor and through all these divisions of labor, then work becomes something that you go to. You literally leave your home to go to work. And when that happened, due to kind of the forces Clark was saying, initially a lot of women worked in factories, but over time, the going to work became more of a man's thing, and the staying home and taking care of the home became more of a woman's work. And this division of labor between home work and away-from-home work happened as a result of the Industrial Revolution.

The tension that that introduces into our society is this, that away-from-home work is much more public-facing, and the at-home work is much more private. And a lot of women began to be shut out of public life because their sphere was confined to just being at home. And Nancy Pearcey—who is not a feminist, at all—Nancy Pearcey is acknowledging this tension between this public and this private split that happened in her book, *Total Truth*. And this affects how we experience work. And so, I think one of the key takeaways from this is, if the cultural mandate from Genesis 1, that men and women are both creating God's image to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and to cultivate the earth, if that's the vision of Genesis 1, what the Industrial Revolution does is it almost divides that in a way that's artificial. And so, I think some of the tension that women especially felt about being shut out of public life or shut out of public work is an understandable tension because part of the cultural mandate was being taken away or being made harder for them to express.

Autumn: It was not only the division into different spheres of work and life, the at-home sphere and the public sphere. So, women's work was much more private, men's work—we're saying this very stereotypically—was much more public, but there also was a different value attached to the work that was done publicly and a lesser value attached to the work that was done privately. And that is part of that inherent divide that is that women feel that's intuitive in this expression, this cultural expression of what is, what *becomes*, assumptive as men's work and women's work.

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Hunter: That's really well said. And even if we could say there's wisdom in an industrial society, I think for a lot of families, there is wisdom in the woman is going to, at least for a season of life, focus, maybe her work, home work, and the man is going to go to work and provide in in these ways that we typically talk about it. Still, that feeling of the homework is just not valuable or not as valuable, that can be a really hard thing to just navigate spiritually and emotionally when you just feel like your work is being devalued by society at large.

Autumn: I want us now to ask, in what way did the industrial revolution encourage the rise of feminism or create the conditions for the rise of feminism? And we're already hinting at that in our conversation. If women, by and large, were relegated to the sphere of the home, and that in some sense held a lesser value—we know that that's not true, but in a cultural conception held lesser value—then women obviously may begin to experience dissatisfaction with that status.

Hunter: They're effectively asking for equal access to the public realm of the world. It starts with suffrage; it starts with voting. But they're asking for equal pay, they're asking for equal access to the public realm, because the public realm is deemed to be the more valuable realm.

Autumn: In what way did this cultural division, these spheres of public and private labor of work that became segregated into these two spheres, intersect with culture in the church?

Clark: Yeah. And like Hunter just said, what the women in that time were asking for was access to the public sphere that was right there in front of them. That's a good ask. It's a good thing to do that. And as though that became the cultural norm for that time, that actually starts kind of leaking into the Church a little bit. And it actually starts influencing the way at that time that the Church is initiating and teaching how men and women should relate. So, the same way that the Industrial Revolution affected the public and private spheres of husbands and wives. Now the Church is starting to say, Hey, this is also the way that the public sphere should be working inside the Church as well, which is now the Church being influenced by culture instead of the Church being the influencer of culture.

Autumn: So, it's almost just a Christianized adaptation of really what was a cultural dynamic, but it settled into the Church and could be given some spiritual language and represented as biblical to some degree.

Hunter: I think that's a fair critique. And that's one that we really need to wrestle with in the Church. How have we been perhaps overly prescriptive of what a woman can or can't do? And I say that acknowledging I know a lot of families who have chosen for, especially in seasons where they have young children in home, for the mother to be primarily day-in-day out responsible for the care of those young children in the home. And I know other families where the mother is also running a school in the home, and those families are incredibly vibrant, and man I'm just thinking of people right now who I just admire their lives and I admire the wisdom within which they are running their lives. I also know families where both the man and the woman work outside the home, and those are also vibrant families. And so, I'm a little bit reluctant to be prescriptive about what that season of life has to look like, especially acknowledging the hard questions that this division of public and private through the industrialization of work has introduced to us. The mothers I'm thinking of who take care of the children and who are maybe even running a school in their home are providing enormous economic benefit. Even if it doesn't result in a paycheck, if it doesn't hit the bank account in the form of income, they are providing enormous economic benefit to their home, in addition to spiritual benefit. And sometimes the mothers working outside the home are providing enormous economic benefit as well. So, we need to be able to just see that and acknowledge it for what it is.

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Autumn: In what you're saying there, Hunter, I love the effect of the way in which you're speaking about a woman's work at home. I think that elevation, that recognition that when a woman chooses to stay home to care for her children in her home or to school them at home to teach them in the context of the home, that, rather than saying that that is an aspect of work that is relegated to private life and therefore less valuable, what we can do in this conversation is to elevate that work and to say this is important and beautiful and necessary work caring for young children is not a lesser occupation.

Hunter: And it has economic benefit also as public benefit. It's really not private work. The children that she's educating are going to have public influence. The home that they, that that couple in that family has, has a public impact. In fact, I was just reading an article yesterday about how robust homes and families can have tremendous economic and social benefit to their neighborhoods. And this really shows up in what we might call lower income or lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. The more functional, stable, life-giving homes, like your home is one of these, Autumn, in those neighborhoods provides social and economic benefit to those neighborhoods. And so, this is just a way of saying it has public impact. And we need to learn to see it, and not just think in the terms that the industrial revolution has given us. We're like, well, only real work happens outside the home and only the economically impactful and publicly impactful stuff happens, you know, when someone goes away to work.

Clark: This is the exact danger that we mentioned earlier of why it is so important to actually have a biblical framework for walking into these conversations. Because so many times it's the culture that's influenced the conversations that we're having. It's the culture that's giving us the vocabulary, the framework to understand it, and it's really even developed a worldview in the way that we're processing the whole world around us. Christianity is calling us back to a biblical framework to say, hey, use this first to understand this process to see what's actually been going on so that you can actually see this with complete clarity.

When we are speaking about the importance for using Scripture to understand this conversation, a way that this has become really evident to me, and I need to just thank the people in our church for actually helping me see this. I didn't really grow up in the Church the same way that some people did. But there's a very famous passage of scripture regarding specifically women, and it's Proverbs 31. And at times, this is what I've learned from people inside of our Church, women who have actually had bad and negative experiences with this text being taught to them. That this text was actually being understood through a cultural lens, not through a biblical historical perspective. And what that means is that that text was used at times to say, hey, here's the things that you should be doing to actually support your husband. You should be at home taking care of the children. And it's that type of work that a woman is really called to. I was actually unaware that that text had been used that way. Kind of coming into the Church later in life. I had never experienced that before. So, that was interesting for me to actually learn that. But when you read Proverbs 31 without maybe a cultural add-on like I had experienced, I read that text and I was like, hey, this is actually calling women into the public sphere. This is saying there is a private sphere and that's really good and healthy, but the woman that's being talked about in this text is really cool, she's running a business in the public sphere. And actually, her husband has a good reputation because of the work that she's doing in the public sphere. That is kind of removing that text out of the cultural kind of like context that it has sometimes negatively sat in.

Autumn: And it wasn't actually intended as a standard. When Proverbs 31 was written, it was not intended as a standard to which a woman should adhere if she's going to actually be a faithful follower of Jesus. It's a beautiful depiction of a woman whose life is influenced by the type of wisdom described in Proverbs and what the outworking of that is. \

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Featuring: Autumn Gardner, Hunter Beaumont, and Clark Nunnally



Clark: One commentator that I even read on this text said that there's a very purposeful use of it being lady wisdom throughout the book of Proverbs to stand as a polemic against the cultural context that only at that time when this text was written, women were, in the literature and the art, seen as charms or adornments. And to use lady wisdom as a polemic against that saying, hey, they belong in the public sphere, they are serving the world around them. And the idea of heroism is much more than just exploits in battle. It's also the things that women are doing in the public sphere.

Autumn: It's the economic pursuit and the thoughtful keeping of a household. All of those are evidences of a woman's worth and value and the impact of wisdom that actually comes to life through a female form in the depiction in Proverbs 31.

Clark: Yes, exactly.

Autumn: Thanks, Clark. I appreciate that understanding of Proverbs 31 so much. And what you said calls to mind this quote by author, Carolyn Custis James, and she refers to this God-ordained partnership between men and women as the "blessed alliance." And so, she says this kind of a long quote, so bear with me. But she says:

What has the ring of something innovative and progressive is actually a remnant of humanity's forgotten ancient past, an idea with primordial, biblical roots that can be traced back to the Garden of Eden. The notion that things work better, and human beings become their best selves when men and women work together is found on page one of the Bible. When God was launching the most ambitious enterprise the world has ever known, the team He put together to do the job was male and female. Adam and Eve faced a challenge of Mount Everest proportions that required a solid connection between themselves and their creator. As his vice-regents, together they were charged with looking after things on His behalf, wisely to steward and utilize the earth's resources. Their goal together was to build His gracious kingdom on earth. No square inch of earth is excluded; no arena of life is beyond the parameters of their joint rule. God created a blessed alliance between male and female. Having created his male and female image bearers, God blessed them then spread before them the global mandate to rule and subdue on His behalf. According to Genesis, male-female relationships are a kingdom strategy designed to be an unstoppable force for good in the world.

Hunter: That is the triple chocolate cupcake of quotes. It is rich, and I'm going to be working on that for a while. So, I know we have more to discuss, but it sounds like we're in for a part two.

Autumn: It sure does. Is that quote what gave it away? No, it's actually Jesse telling us, hey guys, you're already- We said we were going to identify these four issues that are driving this debate in the Church. Turns out today we're going to identify one, and then pick this episode back up with a part two and identify the other three in that next episode. So, we're making this decision right now as we're talking about triple chocolate cupcakes.

Hunter: Sounds good but we'll bring Clark back and we'll see you next week. Yeah, actually I kind of want to give Clark the last word on today's podcast. Clark, any parting thoughts?

Clark: I don't know how to top any chocolate cupcakes but I do think that one of the articles that we linked in this episode is "A Beautiful Difference," and I think that quote just captures that idea really well. This is written throughout God's creation, and we see it all over the place. Even then in the night and the day and land and the sea, God has made

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things to work together for the flourishing of the world. And when we're curious about how to actually define biblical manhood and womanhood, it is just stepping into God's design, creation, as it's laid out in Genesis.

Autumn: We need each other in order to identify the opposite. We need men and women working together in order to depict and display what manhood and womanhood are when they're lived out and their potential.

Clark: Well said.

Autumn: Well thank you both for joining me today. Turns out you'll be joining me again soon. So, to those of you listening, if you have questions about today's episode or if you want to send Hunter a triple chocolate cake and need to know where to deliver it, you can email me about that too. Or if you have suggestions 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. 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.