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THE CONFIDENT WOMAN

Start Today Living Boldly and Without Fear



JOYCE MEYER



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NEW YORK BOSTON NASHVILLE

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INTRODUCTION

We've Come a Long Way (But We Still Have a Long Way to Go)

*“A woman has to be twice as good as a man
to go half as far.” —FANNIE HURST*

For most of the world's existence, women have not enjoyed being respected properly, nor have they enjoyed their rightful place in society. Although much of that injustice has been corrected in the Western world, there are still many cultures in the world where women are terribly mistreated. This is tragic.

Women are a precious gift from God to the world. They are creative, sensitive, compassionate, intelligent, talented, and according to the Bible, equal to men.

God created man first—but quickly discovered he needed a helper. Not a slave, but a helper. He created a woman from one of Adam's ribs and called her Eve. Note that Eve was taken from Adam's side—from something close to his heart—not the bottom of his feet. Women were never intended to be walked on, disrespected, bullied, or belittled. Eve was created because Adam needed her. God said Adam was not complete without her. It's the same today; men need women, and they need them to be more than a cook, housekeeper, sex partner, or baby-making machine.

Just to be sure that no one misunderstands my comment that Adam was not complete without Eve, let me state clearly that everyone does not have to be married to be complete. And, given

that 43% of all first marriages end in divorce—and 60% of remarriages—it's clear that marriage isn't the be-all, end-all of a happy existence.¹

While most people desire to get married and have a partner for life, God calls and especially enables many men and women to remain single all of their lives. Since this book is written especially to women, I want to say emphatically that as a woman you do not have to be married to enjoy your life and do great things. Just because most women get married, that does not mean something is wrong with you or is missing in your life if you don't.

Men and Women: Working Side By Side

I believe that most women possess a sixth sense that God did not give to men. It's often called women's intuition, and it's no myth. It's the real deal. Here's how it works: Men are usually very logical, while women tend to be more “feeling” oriented. For example, a male manager might look at a job candidate's resume, job application, college GPA, and work history and be ready to hire him, based on the “facts.” However, this male manager's female counterpart might be guided more by instinct, by “gut feel.” She might evaluate the same candidate and intuitively pick up on personality quirks or subtle-but-destructive attitudes that don't show up on paper. This does not mean that women are innately better leaders than men or that their instincts are based on a special God-to-woman frequency that men aren't tuned into. In fact, a woman's emotions can also get her into trouble, and she frequently needs the left-brain logic of a man to help her see things clearly.

The point is that women and men need each other; they can complement one another—just like the male and female bosses in the example I've just given. Neither the man nor the woman saw the whole picture clearly or completely. That's why men and

women should work together, side by side in harmony, respecting one another as equals.

For the sake of order, God instructed that if a woman is married, she should be submissive to her husband. Now, I know that a lot of women don't like that particular "s" word. But think of it this way: You can't have two people driving a car at the same time, wrestling over the steering wheel and competing for the brake pedal. By necessity, one person has to occupy the driver's seat. However, it was never God's intention that women be dominated and made to feel as if their opinions were of no value. (After all, as my husband Dave will tell you, it's great to have someone in the car who can sense when we're lost—and isn't too proud to stop and ask for directions!)

■ How Well Do You Know the World of Women? ■

A few recent nationwide surveys of women yield many intriguing revelations about women. Take the following True/False quiz to see how your experience and attitudes stack up with that of other women.

1. Most American women get adequate sleep every night.
2. Weekends are the only time women get a break from household responsibilities and chores.
3. Most remarriages don't involve children.
4. Most moms say they spend more quality time with their kids than their own mothers spent with them when they were children.
5. The No.1 thing women wish they had more time for is exercise.
6. Most married women are satisfied with the amount of time they spend with their husbands.
7. Time for sex is the No. 1 thing women miss about married life before kids.
8. Most moms say their husbands are the kind of dads they thought they'd be.
9. Most moms say they—not their husbands—are the problem solvers in their families.
10. The vast majority of moms say they don't have enough time for themselves.

Ask 21st-century women, “How do you feel about yourself?” and many will confess, “I hate myself.”

Due to years of abuse and a wrong worldview toward women, many of us have lost the confidence God wants us to enjoy. Our society has an epi-

demic of insecure people in it. This problem causes great difficulty in relationships and is one of the reasons divorce is so prevalent today.

Ask 21st-century women, “How do you feel about yourself?” and many will confess, “I hate myself.” Or, perhaps their opinion of themselves is not that severe, but they will admit they really don’t like themselves. Three factors contribute to this negative attitude.

1. A long history of men’s mistreatment of women has left many of us with vague feelings that we are somehow “less” than men. Less valuable. Less worthy.
2. Our world has created a false, unrealistic image of what women are supposed to look like and act like. But the truth is that every woman was not created by God to be skinny, with a flawless complexion and long flowing hair. Not every woman was intended to juggle a career as well as all of the other duties of being a wife, mother, citizen, and daughter. Single women should not be made to feel they are missing something because they are not married. Married women should not be made to feel they must have a career to be complete. If they choose to, that is wonderful, but we must have the freedom to be our individual selves.
3. Many women hate themselves and have no self-confidence because they have been abused, rejected, abandoned, or in some way damaged emotionally. Women need to experience a revival of knowing their infinite worth and value. I hope to help initiate just such a revival through this book.

During my childhood, I endured many years of sexual abuse. The abuse profoundly affected my confidence and the image I carried inside of myself. Inwardly I was very fearful, but outwardly I presented myself as a tough, bold person who couldn't care less what others thought of her. I created a "pretend me" so no one would discover the "real me." I was filled with shame and condemnation over something a man had done to me, and I must confess that for many years I held a rather low opinion of men as a result.

Today, however, I believe I am a well-balanced woman. I have a wonderful husband and four grown children. I am the president and founder of a worldwide media ministry that is helping millions of people find salvation through Jesus Christ, as well as freedom and wholeness in their lives. My husband, children, and I all work together in the ministry.

I have learned a lot on my journey about what "true confidence" is, and it will be my great delight to share with you anything I know that can help you be the woman God intends you to be. His desire is that you be bold, courageous, confident, respected, admired, promoted, sought after, and, most of all, loved.

God has a wonderful plan for your life, and I pray that reading this book will help you enter it more fully than ever before. You can hold your head up high and be filled with confidence about yourself and your future. You can be bold and step out to do new things—even things no man or woman has ever done before. You have what it takes!



The God-Ordained Gift of Confidence

CONFIDENCE

What is confidence? I believe confidence is all about being positive concerning what you can do—and not worrying over what you can't do. A confident person is open to learning, because she knows that her confidence allows her to walk through life's doorways, eager to discover what waits on the other side. She knows that every new unknown is a chance to learn more about herself and unleash her abilities.

Confident people do not concentrate on their weaknesses; they develop and maximize their strengths.

For example, on a scale of 1 to 10, I might be a 3 when it comes to playing the piano. Now, if I were to practice long and hard—and if my husband could put up with the racket—I could, maybe, transform myself into a middle-of-the road, level-5 pianist. However, as a public speaker, I might be an 8. So, if I invested my time and effort into this ability, I might just be able to get to a level 10. When you look at it this way, it's easy to see where you need to invest your efforts.

The world is not hungry for mediocrity. We really don't need a bunch of 4s and 5s running around, doing an average job in life. This world needs 10s. I believe everyone can be a 10 at something, but our problem is that we often work so hard on trying to overcome our weakness that we never develop our strengths. Whatever we focus on grows larger in our eyes—too large, in fact. We can turn something into a huge problem when, in reality, it would be a minor nuisance if only we viewed it in perspective with our strengths. For example, let's say you are not a “numbers” kind of

person. You struggle to figure out a 15% tip at restaurants, and your checkbook hasn't been balanced since 1987.

You could obsess about your inability to “do the math.” You could buy *Math for Dummies* and other books on the subject, and maybe even take a class at the community college. But your math obsession could eat up time that could be devoted to stuff you're great at—like teaching Sunday school, creative writing, or raising funds for charity. In other words, you might rob time and effort from the 10s in your life just to bring a lowly 3 up to a mediocre 5.

Wouldn't it be much better to delegate the math stuff to someone else? Use an online bill-paying system that has built-in ways to catch errors or overdrafts? And you can always ask your dining companions to help you with figuring a tip. There are even tip guides you can carry with you.

I remember interviewing a man and his wife on our ministry's television program. I asked the man, who happened to be a minister, what his weaknesses were. His answer: “You know, I don't concentrate on them. I am sure I have some, but I couldn't tell you right now what they are because I just don't focus on them.” I laughingly replied that I would ask his wife later. I was sure she would know his weaknesses, even if he didn't. When she joined us later in the broadcast, I promptly popped that question to her. She replied, “To me, my husband is perfect; I don't focus on his weaknesses. He has so many strengths that I just focus on them and help him be all he can be.”

It didn't take me long to understand why these two were so happy and upbeat all the time—and why they had such a wonderful marriage. Confident people make it a habit to think and act positively. Therefore, they enjoy life, and they accomplish a lot.

A person without confidence is like an airplane sitting on a runway with empty fuel tanks. The plane has the ability to fly, but without some fuel, it's not getting off the ground. Confidence is our fuel. Our confidence, our belief that we can succeed, gets us started and helps us finish every challenge we tackle in life. With-

out confidence, a woman will live in fear and never feel fulfilled.

Confidence allows us to face life with boldness, openness, and honesty. It enables us to live without worry and to feel

Confidence allows us to face life with boldness, openness, and honesty. It enables us to live without worry and to feel safe. It enables us to live authentically.

safe. It enables us to live authentically. We don't have to pretend to be somebody we're not, because we are secure in who we are—even if we're different from those around us. I firmly believe that confidence gives us permission to be different, to be unique. God has created every person in a unique way, yet most people spend their lives trying to be like someone else—and feeling miserable as a result. Trust me on this: God will never help you be some other person. He wants you to be you! You can be sure of this!

People with low confidence, on the other hand, are not sure about anything. They are double-minded, indecisive people who constantly get frustrated with life. If they do make a decision, they are tormented by self-doubt. They second-guess (and third- and fourth-guess) themselves. As a result, they don't live boldly. They live little, narrow lives, and they miss out on the big, rewarding lives God wants them to enjoy.

You may be aware of some of God's promises for His people—promises for peace, happiness, blessings, and so on. But did you know that all of God's promises are for every person?

That's right—when it comes to fulfilling promises, God does not discriminate. However, He does attach certain conditions to some promises, just as a parent might promise to take a child on an outing as a reward for a good report card.

Similarly, God requires us to approach Him in faith—the deeply held confidence that God is trustworthy and will always make good on His promises. God loves you; He wants you to relax in the knowledge of that love. He wants you to experience the peace of mind that comes from resting in His love and living without the

torment of fear and doubt. Too many people cower at the mention of God's name, because they are afraid He is sitting up in heaven, just waiting for them to slip up so that He can punish them. I'm not saying that we never have to face consequences for our actions, but God doesn't delight in punishing us. Instead, He wants to bless us and prosper us. He is merciful and if we are able to receive His mercy, He frequently gives us blessing when actually we legally deserve punishment. Thankfully He sees our heart attitude and our faith in Jesus and not just our actions.

When we have confidence in God and His love and kindness, we can progress to living confidently and enjoying the life He wants for us. Note that I said confidence in God, not in ourselves. Usually, when people think of confidence, they think of self-confidence. Think of how many times you hear TV self-help gurus or athletes urging you to "believe in yourself!" I beg to differ. I want to make it clear, right from the start, that our confidence must be in Christ alone, not in ourselves, not in other people, not in the world or its systems. The Bible states that we are sufficient in Christ's sufficiency (Philippians 4:13), so we might also say that we are confident through Christ's confidence. Or another way to say it would be, "we have self-confidence only because He lives in us and it is His confidence that we draw on."

Imagine you're a member of a basketball team, captained by a point guard who is the most talented and most court-savvy player in the world. Not only can this athlete outplay anyone else on the court, she can also bring out the best in her teammates. You can enter each game with confidence, knowing that your team leader has the knowledge and skill to lead you to victory. Sure, you will need to do your part, fulfill your role on the team, but even if you have an off-game, your superstar will have you covered. She's got your back. And, as each game unfolds, you find that your leader's confidence is contagious. You can play boldly, because your captain inspires you.

So, if I say I am confident, which I frequently do, I don't mean that I am confident in myself or my abilities. I mean that I am confident in my leader, God, and the gifts, talents, and knowledge He has placed in me. I know that without Him I am nothing (John 15:5), but with Him, I can be a champion, because He brings out the best in me.

... we glory and pride ourselves in Jesus Christ, and put no confidence or dependence [on what we are] in the flesh and on outward privileges and physical advantages and external appearances. (Philippians 3:3)

Are You Suffering from Confidence Deficiency?

Under-confidence is a condition; it might even be considered a sickness. And just like many other sicknesses, under-confidence is caused by a deficiency of one thing (confidence) and too much of another—in this case—fear. I refer to fear as an emotional virus because it begins as a thought in your head, then affects your emotions and behaviors—just like a flu virus might invade your body via a handshake or a sneeze and then make you feel miserable all over.

Fear is a dangerous virus, because a fearful person has no confidence and can never reach her potential in life. She won't step out of her comfort zone to do anything—especially something new or different. Fear is a cruel ruler, and its subjects live in constant torment.

It breaks my heart when I see people living fearfully, because without confidence, people can never know and experience true joy. The Holy Spirit of God Himself is grieved, because He has been sent into our lives to help us fulfill our God-ordained destinies. But you can't seek out your destiny when you've let fear

slam and lock the door of your life. Instead, you cower behind the door, filled with self-hatred, condemnation, fear of rejection, fear of failure, and fear of others.

Many victims of fear end up being people-pleasers, prone to being controlled and manipulated by others. They give up the right to be themselves and usually spend their lives trying to be what they think they ought to be in someone else's eyes.

Sadly, when we try to be something or someone we are not intended to be, we stifle ourselves and God's power in us. When we have confidence, we can reach truly amazing heights; without confidence, even simple accomplishments are beyond our grasp.

Now, you might have read the preceding paragraph—about “amazing heights,” and thought to yourself, *Yeah, right, Joyce. I'm not able to do anything amazing. (And I'm scared of heights too.)* Don't despair if you have thoughts like this. Throughout history, God has used ordinary people to do amazing, extraordinary things. Yet, all of them had to take a step of faith first. They had to confidently press forward into the unknown or unfamiliar before making any progress. They had to believe they could do what they were attempting to do. “Achieve” comes before “Believe” in the dictionary, but the order is switched in real life.

It's important to note that, in many cases, successful people have tried many times and failed before they ultimately succeeded. They not only had to begin with confidence, they had to remain confident when every circumstance seemed to shout at them, “Failure! Failure! Failure!”

Consider inventor Thomas Edison. He once said, “I speak without exaggeration when I say that I have constructed three thousand different theories in connection with the electric light, each one of them reasonable and apparently likely to be true. Yet in two cases only did my experiments prove the truth of my theory.”

That means that Edison developed 2,998 failed theories en route to arriving at success. In fact, the true story of the light bulb is a long, tedious tale of repeated trial and error. Imagine how Edi-

son must have felt as the failures piled up by the dozens, then the hundreds, then the thousands. Yet, through it all, he kept pressing forward. He believed in his bright idea, so he didn't lose his determination.¹

Just because ordinary people take steps to accomplish extraordinary things does not mean that they do not feel fear. I believe the Old Testament hero Esther felt fear when she was asked to leave her familiar, comfortable life and enter the king's harem so she could be used by God to save her nation. I believe Joshua felt fear when, after Moses died, he was given the job of taking the Israelites into the Promised Land. I know I had fear when God called me to quit my job and prepare for ministry. I still remember my knees shaking and my legs feeling so weak that I thought I would fall down. I remember the fear I felt then, but it frightens me more now to think of how my life would have turned out had I not faced the fear and pressed forward to do God's will. Fear does not mean you are a coward. It only means that you need to be willing to feel the fear and do what you need to do anyway.

If I would have let the fear I felt stop me, where would I be today? What would I be doing? Would I be happy and fulfilled? Would I be writing a book right now on being a confident woman—or would I be sitting at home, depressed and wondering why my life had been such a disappointment? I believe a lot of unhappy people are individuals who have let fear rule in their lives.

How about you, my dear reader? Are you doing what you really believe you should be doing at this stage in your life, or have you allowed fear and a lack of confidence to prevent you from stepping out into new things—or higher levels of old things? If you don't like your answer, then let me give you some good news: It is never too late to begin again! Don't spend one more day living a narrow life that has room for only you and your fears. Make a decision right now that you will learn to live boldly, aggressively, and confidently. Don't let fear rule you any longer.

It's important to note that you can't just sit around and wait for

Courage is not the absence of fear; it is action in the presence of fear. Bold people do what they know they should do—not what they feel like doing.

fear to go away. You will have to feel the fear and take action anyway. Or, as John Wayne put it, “Courage is being scared to death, but saddling up anyway.” In other words, courage is not the absence of fear; it is ac-

tion in the presence of fear. Bold people do what they know they should do—not what they feel like doing.

As I write these words, I feel very excited for you. I truly believe this book will be life-changing for many of you who read it. It may be a good reminder for some of you, but for others it will help you step out onto the path of your true life. The life that has been waiting for you since the beginning of time—and the one you may have been missing due to fear and intimidation. Satan is the master of intimidation, but once you realize that he is the one behind all your hesitation, you can take authority over him by simply placing confidence in Jesus Christ and stepping out boldly to be all you can be. God told Joshua, “Fear not, for I am with you.” He is sending you that same message today: FEAR NOT! God is with you, and He will never leave you, nor forsake you.

Abraham was told, “God is with you in all that you do” (Genesis 21:22). That sounds like large living to me. Are you ready for a larger life, one that leaves you feeling satisfied and fulfilled? I believe you are, and I want to do everything I can to help you on your journey.

I know what it is like to live in fear. Fear can actually make you sick to your stomach. It can make you so tense and nervous that everyone around you notices that something is wrong; it’s that evident in your facial expressions and your body language. What’s more, just as confidence is contagious, so is the lack of self-confidence. When we possess no inner confidence, no one else has confidence in us either. Imagine a timid, cowering basketball player, standing in the corner of the court with her arms wrapped

around herself. Is anyone going to pass her the ball? Is anybody going to call out plays to her?

When we think people are rejecting us, we feel hurt by them. The basketball player in the example above might think that her teammates hate her or have something against her. But, for fearful, under-confident people, the root of the problem is that they are rejecting themselves. They are rejecting the person God intended them to be.

A Classic Case of Confidence

Just as under-confidence comes with its list of symptoms, the same is true of confidence. A confident person feels safe. She believes she is loved, valuable, cared for, and safe in God's will for her. When we feel safe and secure, it's easy to step out and try new things. During the initial construction on the Golden Gate Bridge, no safety devices were used and twenty-three men fell to their deaths. For the final part of the project, however, a large net was used as a safety precaution. At least ten men fell into it and were saved from certain death. Even more interesting, however, is the fact that 25% more work was accomplished after the net was installed. Why? Because the men had the assurance of their safety, and they were free to wholeheartedly serve the project.²

When people feel safe, they are free to take a chance on failing in order to try to succeed. When we know we are loved for ourselves and not just our accomplishments or performance, we no longer need to fear failure. We realize that failing at something does not make us a failure at everything. We are free to explore and find out what we are best suited for. We are free to find our own niche in life, which is not possible without stepping out and finding out. Trial and error is the road to success, and you can't drive that road as long as your car is parked. So get moving, and God will direct you. When people are confident, they try things,

and they keep trying until they find a way to be successful in what God has called them to do.

Sure, life can sometimes make us feel like we're in over our heads, but the reality is that, without God, we're always in over our heads.

For example, a little three-year-old girl felt secure in her father's arms as Dad stood in the middle of a swimming pool. But Dad, for fun, began walking slowly toward the deep end, gently chanting, "Deeper and deeper and deeper," as the water rose higher and higher on the child. The girl's face registered increasing degrees of panic, as she held all the more tightly to her father, who, of course, easily touched the bottom. Had the little girl been able to analyze her situation, she'd have realized there was no reason for her increasing fear. The water's depth in ANY part of the pool was over her head. For her, safety anywhere in that pool depended on Dad.

At various points in our lives, all of us feel we're getting "out of our depth" or "in over our heads." There are problems all around: A job is lost, someone dies, there is strife in the family, or a bad report comes from the doctor. When these things happen, our temptation is to panic, because we feel we've lost control. But think about it—just like the child in the pool, the truth is we've never been in control when it comes to life's most crucial elements. We've always been held up by the grace of God, our Father, and that won't change. God is never out of His depth, and therefore we're as safe when we're in life's "deep end" as we were in the kiddie pool.

A Little Godly Confidence Goes a Long Way

Katie Brown weighs only ninety-five pounds, and she is just a bit over five feet tall. She stands a lot taller than that, however, once

she's nimbly scaled a 100-foot climbing wall (that's equivalent to a ten-story building).

Katie is a “difficulty climber,” an endeavor in which she's a world champion and multiple gold medalist at the “X Games”—which you may have seen televised on networks like ESPN2.

As you might imagine, it's intimidating for a small person to attack climbing walls and cliffs that are twenty times her height, but Katie says that her extreme faith brings her peace, even when facing extremely dangerous challenges.

“I know that I couldn't have done what I've done without being a Christian,” she explains. “My faith in God doesn't get rid of my healthy fear or caution when climbing extreme heights, but it does help me deal with it. It takes away a lot of the pressure, because you know that God's not going to condemn you if you don't win. So there's nothing to worry about. When I see others competing, I wonder how I could compete if I didn't have faith in God.”

The “walls” you face in your life might not be literal or physical. They might be emotional or relational. And it's okay to feel intimidated or frightened by the walls in your life. As Katie notes, it would be unhealthy not to appreciate the significance of a major challenge.

But, like Katie, you can rest secure in the truth that God will not condemn you if you can't get to the top of your wall—or if it takes you hundreds of attempts. God is more concerned in your faithful effort—an effort built on your confidence in His love for you.³

If at First You Don't Succeed, Try, Try Again

I believe that failing is part of every success. As John Maxwell says, “We can fail forward.” History is filled with examples of people who are famous for doing great things—yet if we study their lives, we find that they failed miserably before they succeeded. Some of

them failed numerous times before they ever succeeded at anything. Their real strength was not their talent as much as it was their tenacity. A person who refuses to give up will always succeed, eventually.

Consider these examples:

- Henry Ford failed and went broke five times before he succeeded.⁴
- NBA superstar Michael Jordan was once cut from his high school basketball team.
- After his first audition, screen legend Fred Astaire received the following assessment from an MGM executive: “Can’t act. Slightly bald. Can dance a little.”
- Best-selling author Max Lucado had his first book rejected by 14 publishers before finding one that was willing to give him a chance.
- A so-called football expert once said of two-time Super Bowl-winning coach Vince Lombardi, “He possesses minimal football knowledge. Lacks motivation.”
- Walt Disney was fired from a newspaper because he lacked ideas. Later, he went bankrupt several times before he built Disneyland.
- Upon his election as U.S. President, Abraham Lincoln was called “a baboon” by a newspaper in Illinois, his home state. The paper went on to say that the American people “would be better off if he were assassinated.”
- A young Burt Reynolds was once told he couldn’t act. At the same time, his pal Clint Eastwood was told he would never make it in the movies because his Adam’s apple was too big.⁵

The people listed in the examples above succeeded in a variety of different endeavors, but they had one thing in common: perseverance. Another shining example of perseverance is renowned pastor John Wesley. Let’s take a peek into his diary . . .

Sunday, A.M. May 5

Preached in St. Anne's. Was asked not to come back anymore.

Sunday, P.M. May 5

Preached in St. Jude's. Can't go back there, either.

Sunday, A.M. May 19

Preached in St. Somebody Else's. Deacons called special meeting and said I couldn't return.

Sunday, P.M. May 19

Preached on street. Kicked off street.

Sunday, A.M. May 26

Preached in meadow. Chased out of meadow as bull was turned loose during service.

Sunday, A.M. June 2

Preached out at the edge of town. Kicked off the highway.

Sunday, P.M. June 2

Afternoon, preached in a pasture. Ten thousand people came out to hear me.⁶

You know that Mr. Wesley had to possess perseverance—and a healthy sense of humor—to keep pressing on in the face of rejection and failure. He ultimately succeeded because he had a classic case of confidence. A refusal to give up is one of the symptoms of confidence. I encourage you to keep trying, and if at first you don't succeed, try, try, again!

■ *Chapter Two* ■

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

God never intended for women to be less than men in anyone's estimation. Neither are they above men. Both genders should work together for the common good of all. The competitive spirit that exists in our society today between men and women is downright foolish. When women began to realize they would have to fight for their rights, some of them became extreme in their attitudes. It seems that we imperfect human beings always live in the ditch on one side or the other. Like a novice driver, we start to run off one side of the road, then over-correct so severely that we end up careening off the other side!

The key to peace between the sexes is balance. Let's see what God has to say about this subject.

A God's-Eye-View of Women

God created women, and He said that everything He created was very good. Learn to believe about yourself what God says about you, not what other people have said about you. God created you, and He looked at you and proclaimed, "Very good!" You are one of God's works of art, and Psalm 139 states all of His works are wonderful. Therefore, you must be wonderful!

Because Eve initially disobeyed God and tempted Adam, women

have gotten a bad rap ever since. I believe Adam should have stepped up to the plate and refused to do what Eve was tempting him to do—instead of doing it and then blaming her for the mess they were in. After all, God did create Adam first, and it was to Adam that He gave the command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

I am sure Adam told Eve about God's command, but it certainly was not her fault that he didn't use discipline when temptation came. Actually, the Bible states that sin came into the world through one man, Adam (Romans 5:12, 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22). I am not making excuses for Eve here. She made a bad choice and needed to take responsibility for her part, but she was not the sole cause of a great sin. It was a team effort.

You know the story: Satan tempted Eve initially and then used her to tempt Adam. Each of them is responsible. Unfortunately, men and women have blamed each other for creating problems since the Garden of Eden. It is time for a change.

Have you ever wondered why Satan approached Eve with his lies, instead of Adam? It may have been because he thought he could play on her emotions easier than Adam's. Although it's not always the case, women are usually more emotionally driven, while men are more logical.

In any case, Satan was successful in getting Eve to do what she knew she was not supposed to do. He lured her into sin through deception, and he's still doing the same thing today to anyone who will listen to him.

When God dealt with what Adam and Eve had done, He dealt not only with them but with Satan also. God said to Satan, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her Offspring; He will bruise and tread your head underfoot and you will lie in wait and bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15).

Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton make an interesting observation in their book *Why Not Women?*: "Ever since the

Garden of Eden when God told Satan that the Seed of the woman would bruise his head, the devil has been ferociously attacking women all over the world.”¹

Genesis 3 makes it clear that Satan and the woman are at odds with one another. Why? Satan has hated women almost from the beginning, because it was a woman who would ultimately give birth to Jesus Christ, the defeater of Satan and all of his evil works. Just as God said, her offspring bruised his head (his authority).

Looking Back at Women

In ancient Greek mythology and literature, women were often depicted as an evil curse that men must endure. The philosopher Plato, for example, taught that there was no Hades. He said the true punishment of men was to endure women. (Wouldn't you love to see him interviewed on *Oprah*?) He said men could not get into the world without women—but they didn't know how to put up with them after that. Plato is regarded by many as a great philosopher and many of his ideas have influenced our culture. Could it be that some of the lingering attitudes of women can be traced back all the way to 400 B.C.?

In one of the oldest documents of European literature, Homer's *Iliad*, he contends that women were the cause of all strife, suffering, and misery. They were possessions to be won and had no intrinsic value whatsoever.²

The poet Hesiod is another guy that wouldn't be invited to speak at a N.O.W. convention. He contended that Zeus, the supreme god in Greek mythology, hated women.³ Hesiod also claimed that Zeus created women from one of ten sources: a long-haired sow, the evil fox, a dog, the dust of the earth, the sea, the stumbling and obstinate donkey, the weasel, the delicate and long-maned mare, the monkey, or the bee. Not exactly “sugar and spice and everything nice,” is it?

To make matters worse, Hesiod painted women as the source of all temptation and evil. To him, women were a curse, created to make men miserable.

Here's the bottom line: Men need women, and women need men.

From the three examples above, you can see that Western misogyny—the hatred of women—has deep roots. I believe that Satan has methodically taken centuries to build wrong thinking about women into the minds of society. This wrong thinking has caused women to be mistreated, and in turn, has caused women to lack confidence. It seems that women either have no confidence or they are radical feminists trying to correct a real problem in an extremist way that creates more problems than it solves.

Here's the bottom line: Men need women, and women need men. This does not mean that all men and women have to get married, but it does mean that the world needs both men and women in order to run smoothly. God created us to need each other. The radical feminist has the same attitude toward men that men have had toward her in the past. She hates them and feels she can get by without them just fine.

Certainly, women have been abused, maligned, and treated with contempt and disrespect throughout history. But, a bitter, vengeful attitude is not the way to correct this wrong.

Let me take this to a personal level: I was sexually abused by my father for many years. I also suffered abuse at the hands of other men throughout the first 25 years of my life. I developed a hardened attitude toward all men and adapted a harsh, hard manner. I acted like I didn't need anybody. I developed a phony personality that I actually hated, but I played the role because I was terribly afraid of being hurt again—or taken advantage of. Many radical feminists have been abused in ways that are unspeakable. They are hurt, wounded little girls trapped inside adult bodies, afraid to come out for fear of being hurt more.

I understand the feelings of these women. But I want everyone

to know that, through God's Word and the help of the Holy Spirit, I was healed in my spirit, emotions, mind, will, and personality. It was a process that unfolded over several years, and I have enough first-hand experience to highly recommend God's ways of restoration and healing, rather than the world's ways. It is much better to let God heal you than to spend your life being bitter about the past.

Shocking Statistics

Around our world, horrible crimes and unspeakable acts happen every day to women and children who are powerless to stop them. One disturbing trend that seems to have increased in strength over the last ten to twenty years is the sex trafficking industry—human beings kidnapped and sold into the sex trade, usually into prostitution rings or worse. The U.S. State Department estimated that in 2004, out of the estimated 600,000 to 800,000 men, women, and children trafficked across international borders each year, approximately 80% are women and girls and up to 50% are minors.⁴

Neary is one of those statistics.⁵ She grew up in rural Cambodia. Her parents died when she was a child, and,

in an effort to give her a better life, her sister married her off when she was seventeen. Three months later they went to visit a fishing village. Her husband rented a room in what Neary thought was a guest house. But when she woke the next morning, her husband was gone. The owner of the house told her she had been sold by her husband for \$300 and that she was actually in a brothel. For five years, Neary was raped by five to seven men every day. In addition to brutal physical abuse, Neary was infected with HIV and contracted AIDS. The brothel threw her out when she became sick, and she eventually found her way to a local shelter. She died of HIV/AIDS at the age of twenty-three.⁵

It gets worse. It's estimated that between 114 million and 130 million women around the world experience female genital circumcision (FGM), an ancient practice still used today to keep young girls "pure" and controlled by their families. The ritual, which is often life-threatening, makes sexual intercourse or child-bearing extremely painful and traumatic experiences. It's mostly practiced in Africa and the Middle East.⁶

Let's bring it closer to home.

Every two and a half minutes, somewhere in America, someone is sexually assaulted and one in six American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape. Two-thirds of the rapes that occur are carried out by people that the victim knows.⁷

Ten percent of violent crimes in 2003 including physical assault and battery were committed by the victim's intimate partner and women were typically victimized by intimate partners at a greater rate than men.⁸ In the same year, 9% of murder victims were killed by their spouse or intimate partner. The majority of victims, 79% to be exact, were female.⁹

It's important to note that each of the sad, shocking statistics above affects the life of a precious person, created in God's image. We must never see only numbers; we must see people.

We were recently ministering in Africa, and while we were there we visited an outreach program for children affected by the AIDS pandemic. During our visit, we noticed a row of huts on a main street, and one of our hosts pointed out that if a female child could not find food or lodging for the day, she might go to one of these huts to be used as a prostitute in exchange for enough money for food and a bed to sleep in. Many of the girls reduced to this horrible lifestyle were as young as eight and nine years old.

The degradation of women is a worldwide problem. And this problem is at its worst in parts of the world that have no Christian heritage. This tragic situation violates God's standards of fairness. Jesus said there is no more male or female—we are all one in Him

(Galatians 3:28). The total sum of our worth and value is based on who we are in Christ, not whether or not we have a Y chromosome.

Our gender does not determine our value; our God does.

The Women's Rights Movement

We should appreciate the women who have fought for women's rights. The positive changes that have come about since 1848, for example, are wonderful. The women's rights movement began when five women met for tea. Their conversation turned to the situation of women. One of the women, Elizabeth Stanton, poured out her discontent over the limitations placed on women under America's new democracy.¹⁰ After all, she wondered, hadn't the American Revolution been fought seventy years earlier to win freedom from tyranny? The women had taken equal risks as the men, yet they gained no freedom. They still weren't able to take an active role in the new society.

So, these five women decided to convene the world's first Women's Rights Convention. The gathering took place in Seneca Falls, New York, at the Wesleyan Chapel on the nineteenth and twentieth of July in 1848.

In the resulting Declaration of Sentiments, Stanton carefully enumerated areas of life where women were treated unjustly. She used the pattern of the Declaration of Independence and stated, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men *and women* (emphasis added) are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Stanton's version read, "The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world." Then it went into specifics:

Married women were legally dead in the eyes of the law.

Women were not allowed to vote.

Women had to submit to laws when they had no voice in their formation.

Married women had no property rights.

Husbands had legal power over and responsibility for their wives—to the extent that they could imprison or beat them with impunity.

Divorce and child custody laws favored men, giving no rights to women.

Women had to pay property taxes, but had no representation in the levying of these taxes.

Most occupations were closed to women, and when women did work they were paid only a fraction of what men earned.

Women were not allowed to enter professions such as medicine or law.

Women had no means to gain an education since no college or university would accept women students.

With only a few exceptions, women were not allowed to participate in the affairs of the church.

In other words, women were being robbed of their self-confidence and self-respect, and were made totally dependent on men.

However, change was in the air, and Stanton and her colleagues were hopeful that the future could and would be brighter for women.

Of course, history tells us that the battle for women's rights was long and grueling. Initially, people were shocked and outraged that women were demanding to vote. Even many women were aggressively against it. The newspapers launched a vicious attack on the movement; nevertheless, it continued to grow rapidly.

Where Are We Today?

As we know, women have come a long way, and I personally appreciate those who fought the good fight and paved the way for the freedom I enjoy today. Sad to say, though, discrimination against women is still apparent in many areas. I recently read that in the United States, women still earn only 77% of the salary a man does for doing the same job.¹¹

As a woman in ministry I have dealt with my share of criticism and judgment for no reason other than because I am a woman, and according to what many people believe, “Women shouldn’t preach or teach God’s Word and especially not to men.”

I will respond to this contention later and show that God has always used women in ministry. In fact, Psalm 68:11 says, “The Lord gives the word (of power); the women who publish (the news) are a great host.”

Because of the lingering discrimination, many women still lack confidence. They live in fear of stepping beyond what they feel is acceptable “female” behavior. I can remember feeling that I wasn’t “normal” because I was aggressive, had dreams and goals, and wanted to do great things. I kept trying to settle down and be a “normal” woman, but it just never worked for me. I am glad now that I found courage to do something radical and chase my dreams.

It is time for the truth to be told and for people to realize the attack on women is actually from Satan himself. He works through people, but he is the source of the problem. And his handiwork litters our history. Women have been habitually discriminated against, contrary to God’s will. In Genesis, the Bible simply states

“So God created man in His own image, in the image and likeness of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it [using all its vast resources in the service of God and man]; and have dominion over the fish

of the sea, the birds of the air, and over every living creature that moves upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:27, 28)

It certainly sounds to me as if God is speaking to the man and woman equally, giving them both rights and authority and telling both of them to live fruitful lives.

We see in other parts of God’s Word that He did establish how authority should flow from Him to man and then to woman. The Bible states that the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the church. The woman is to submit to her husband as is fitting in the Lord. However, in my estimation and understanding of God’s nature, that was never intended to include abuse, control, manipulation, or mistreatment of any kind. In fact, man is instructed in God’s Word to love his wife as he loves his own body; to nurture her and treat her kindly and tenderly (Ephesians 5:21–33).

God is a god of order, and He has established lines of authority that allow an orderly, peaceful existence. He expects us to submit to and respect one another. If a married couple can handle themselves the way God intended, their relationship will be wonderful and unbelievably fruitful. However, pride destroys most relationships. It’s the great “I” factor. Selfish, self-centered people do whatever they must to get their own way, including abusing those they were intended to nourish and protect.

If a person with authority administers it in a godly way, it becomes a protection and safety net for those under it. But, if an authority figure abuses his or her position, using it for power and personal gain, then those under the authority will resist and rebel, or, at best, they will be filled with resentment. I have a lot of authority, and I have learned that “the boss does not have to be bossy.” People admire authority and actually want someone to look up to—as long as they are treated well.

It’s clear today that a lot of people don’t know how to use their authority with responsibility and love. The statistics regarding child abuse of every kind are staggering—and increasing at an

alarming rate. We all ask ourselves, “How could anybody abuse a helpless, innocent child?” Yet, it happens somewhere in the world every minute of every day. Why? Some adults are simply selfish. My father abused me sexually in order to fulfill a selfish sexual desire. He was in authority and no one could stop him; therefore, he did what he wanted to do. He did not consider what the outcome would be for me; he thought only of what he wanted at the moment.

Abuse can take other forms too. Some parents take their frustrations out on their children, verbally and physically, depriving them of the emotional nurturing they need. Children are blamed, accused, resented, and looked at as an inconvenience. Many children are burned, beaten, starved, locked up, and treated in other unbelievably cruel ways. I could tell you story after story that would break your heart, but that is not my purpose for this book. My purpose is to encourage you as women, to tell you that it is time for you to take your rightful place in the family and society. It is time for you to have a healthy self-respect, balanced self-love and a firm, unshakeable confidence in God and the gifts, talents, and abilities that He has placed on the inside of you. You are woman! God loves you, you are equal with men, and you have a destiny. It is high time someone realizes who you really are!