

Boys & Girls

Why Gender Matters...and Why it Doesn't

May 29, 2016 // Trevor Atwood // Ruth 1-4 // Where Is God?

I'm going to talk about gender roles today... I realize that's a controversial topic. So let me be very clear about my motivations.

There are 3 reasons I'm talking about gender today.

1) Today, we are finishing our series on the book of Ruth...and there are some very positive and negative examples of gender roles in here.

2) Our culture is shaping our view of gender.

There are multiple voices shaping what we understand about gender, but if we really believe that God has revealed himself through the Bible, then we must take seriously what the bible says about Gender.

3) I know people in our church who need this.

I don't preach for a podcast. I preach for you. The elders of this church and I have been called and commissioned to care for you. And I know that many of you grew up with absent fathers, hurtful relationships with mothers...you grew up with a lack of understanding of what a Godly man or woman is. No one ever defined it for you. At best, you grew up confused...and now its effecting your marriage, your parenting, your singleness, your sexuality...its effecting your ability to hold down a job...and a thousand other things. So, I'm preaching out of a responsibility and a love for you.

One more thing. I know some of you may be in this room today who are feeling deeply confused about your own gender or sexuality...and my heart is for you, not against you. I'm very glad you're here. I know this message is not one that's easy to hear, and I don't intend to preach it with a snarky tone or one that minimizes your pain.

I want you to know that you are a person. Loved by God. You are his image bearer, and there is something beautiful about you simply because of that glorious truth. None of our salvation, none of our identity is bound up mainly in our maleness or femaleness, not in our physical biology or in the way we feel...if it is, we are without hope. Our truest identity is our relationship to our creator. And if we define ourselves in any way outside of that...we break...and remain broken.

The desire of this church is not that you hide who you are to "fit in"...but instead, discover fully who you are in the person of Jesus Christ.

So here's how we're going to do this today.

I'm going to start by giving you the source of gender first from the book of Genesis, then we are going to jump back into Ruth for how these roles were done well...and how they were done not-so-well.

In the end, my hope is NOT SIMPLY that you see God's design for gender, but that no matter what gender role distortion or confusion that may have happened to you or be happening in you...I want you to walk away sure that God loves you...and he wants you.

Before I read, I do want you to know that I'm not going to say everything that needs to be said this morning about gender roles or marriage, or sexuality, but in 3 weeks, we're going to have a series addressing relationships and marriage and singleness that I'll be able to say some more. Additionally, on the City Church blog every week, we'll follow up the sermon with some additional thoughts...it's a great resource that is intended to help you out...you can find it up on Tuesdays.

Alright, Here we go.

Gen 1:27-28

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Gen 2:15-25

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Ruth 2:1

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

Ruth 3:11

And now, my daughter [Ruth], do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman.

Here's what the creation account in Genesis shows us about men and women...

1) Culture doesn't create gender. God created gender to create culture.

One of the chief ideas behind de-emphasizing gender is the thought that gender is just a cultural construct. It goes like this..."Gender roles aren't real things, they are just cultural ideas that have no real significance and so they can be re-defined and cast aside as we please."

Now, on one hand, there ARE cultural ideas tied to manhood and womanhood.

For example, being a man doesn't necessarily mean you throw a football, grow a beard, or know how to fix a car. That's not what it means to be a man.

Likewise, wearing a skirt, liking the color pink and knowing how to do the sorority squat for group pictures is not what it means to be a woman.

See, cultures don't create genders. They create different kinds of EXPRESSIONS of gender. But not Gender. Therefore culture's don't get to define what MAKES a man or a woman. Only the one who CREATED those genders can do that.

Now, if you were to ask the average college student "What's left after you take away all the cultural expressions of gender like blue and pink, beards and shaved legs, cured meats and lipsticks?"

Most would probably say, "Nothing but the physical...and that's not really important." "The only real difference between men and women is body parts and hormones...and, those can all be medically adjusted."

But, if you ask the God that created you,...he'd tell you something entirely different. He'd tell you that he created genders to create culture. Not cultures to create gender.

Did you see earlier that the statement made in the poem in Genesis 1:27 about humans being created in the image of God, and specifically being created Male and Female? That statement comes right in the middle of what theologians call “the cultural mandate”.

Now, a cultural mandate does not mean a couple of burly, bearded dudes go out one evening to a modern art museum....

That's a cultural Man-date. There's a hyphen between man and date. This is a mandate... one word...like a command. A task. A mission.

The cultural mandate is expressed in verse 28- It means that God gives to the man and woman an “un-subdued” world. A wild creation. But he puts them in the middle of a garden that is a model of perfect creation...and then he shows them the way to make a wild world into a culture that produces flourishing for humans, animals, trees, rivers, all of creation.

Here's the point: Our gender roles were created by God as a WAY to develop culture together.

Physically, Men and women were created to create culture by creating children in their marriage. But this is not where it ends. Everything beyond that is not simply a stereotype. I've already told you that gender stereotypes...even harmful ones surely exist...but it is ridiculously important not only for theological reasons...but for simple human flourishing in the earth, that as we try and squash stereotypes...that we don't also squash the archetype in the process.

A stereotype is an oversimplified image of something that has been distorted by personal experience. So you may have grown up in a home where you understood wives submitting to husbands as the stereotypical guy in a dirty t-shirt, in a recliner, yelling at his wife to get him another beer...to hurry up with his supper. THAT IS NOT THE PICTURE GIVEN HERE or ANYWHERE in the Bible. That's a bad stereotype created by a sinful culture.

But an archetype is a model, an original design meant to be copied and emulated. At the end of the day we have to ask ourselves the question, “Who sets the agenda for our lives and the way we use them- GOD or us?” The stereotype, or the archetype?

And, just to show you, theologically, how important this is, take a look at this passage from the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 33:20-21a;

Thus says the LORD: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne

(Remember from the end of the book of RUTH? That son of David is Jesus)

Jeremiah 33:25-26

Thus says the LORD: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth, then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his offspring to rule over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them."

This passage is so important. Let me explain. In the very first chapter of Genesis, that we read from this morning, there is a binary pattern to creation. God was doing things in complementary pairs.

He created light-dark, day-night, sun-moon, sea and dry land. Then it gets to humans and he creates gender as a binary pair- (male & female.)

The other thing you notice about these binary pairs is that the day and night binary runs through the whole passage. The whole creation account is being measured in the day-night pair. Evening, morning. The first day. Evening- morning. The second day...all the way to the 6th day. Its almost like brackets around the equation that makes up creation.

Now, take another look at what the LORD says through Jeremiah: God ties the sureness of his promise to rescue his people by sending his son as the way he will save them...to the sureness of his created order. The fixed order of creation. Not the evolving order. Not the changing order. The fixed order. He doesn't randomly choose day and night. NO he is pointing to all the binary pairs in Genesis 1- including Male and Female gender. God is pointing to the sureness of his created order as a sign...an IMAGE of the sureness of his promise to save us. These binary pairs are created by GOD, not by culture.

The Lord is saying, my promise to save you is not something you can reverse just like my created order is not something you can reverse. If you go back and try to change the binary pairings I've made, then you have no confidence that any of my promises are true.

That's why the way we treat gender is so important. God stakes his reputation as a promise keeper on it.

Ok, now lets look at the ways some of the characters in the book of Ruth show us how manhood and womanhood are both lived out well...and how culture can twist God's design to make a mess.

2) Men create culture by initiating and protecting worship.

When God put Adam in the garden, he gave him a command to "work it and keep it." As much as I want "work it" to mean "Passionately dance", because the thought of Adam

dancing alone and naked to Rhianna's "Work" is infinitely funny and disturbing... That's not what "work it" means. (although, later in the Bible, King David DOES dance in his underwear in the streets to worship God...so in a round about way WORK IT DOES mean dancing naked..MIND BLOWN!)

Genesis 2:15

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

To work is the idea of moving OUTWARD into creation. This is sometimes translated as "Cultivate". This is making a tree into a house, or taking random sounds and arranging them to make music.

Then there's the call "Keep creation". Keep it means that men are to watch over the culture they initiate...to be sure that things stay on track. It means men shouldn't just start culture...but should make sure that what they create doesn't go off the rails. That it isn't misused, abused, or twisted.

In other words, exactly what God did. He didn't just create the world and then step away from it...he stayed intimately involved.

Ok, now lets take a look at some bad examples of this that we've seen in the book of Ruth.

Ruth 1:1-2

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.

Right off the bat we get this guy Elimelech. And it appears we have ourselves a real man.

After all, Elimelech seems to be initiating and protecting right? I mean he gets his family up out of a land where there's famine. And leads them to a place where they can find food.

Seems like he's doing his duty right?

Problem is, this guy is only providing physically. He's only initiating and protecting physically. But he's neglected to do this spiritually. He's making moves to care for his family's stomachs, but not their souls.

See, the problem in Bethlehem was not physical. That was a symptom of a deeper spiritual problem. During this time the people of Judah were worshipping other gods. As the book of Judges puts it, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes"...instead of looking to worship God, people were being their own gods...defining for themselves who they were and what their purpose was.

So, instead of leading his family to repent and trust God, he just ran. You know where this is best seen? In his sons names.

Naming something is an act of vision. Fathers were supposed to think about who their sons were to grow up to be, and name them accordingly. So that they would grow up into the name.

But Elimelech names his kids "Mahlon and Chilion" which means "sick and dying".

He didn't take his job as a father that initiates and sets vision for his family seriously...and he didn't help them keep the commands of God. And his children suffered for it.

They died spiritually, marrying women who worshipped other Gods, which was strictly forbidden by the law of God. And, true to their names, Mahlon and Chilion died before they had children.

See, Elimelech passively let his children be named by something other than a vision he had for their life, and then didn't watch over and keep them...and it ended in their spiritual and physical death.

Gen 2:19

Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

Did you notice that in the garden of Eden, God had Adam name all the animals. Do you know why? There are 2 reasons...I'll tell you the second one in a minute.

The first reason is this. He was practicing what God made him to be.

Its not like God ran out of ideas and said, "Hey, Adam. You got any thoughts on these things. Because Father, Son, Holy Spirit in our infinite wisdom...we just got stumped with this thing with all the spots. And that one with the long neck."

...and, btw, if you think humans have evolved...if you think we're smarter or more sophisticated than the first man... I'm pretty sure Adam didn't name any of these animals 'Boaty McBoatface'. Group Think, people...its bad news bears.

OK, back TO ADAM...God has Adam practicing his initiation and vision. He sets a name for the animals according to the vision he sees for them which is in line with the way God made them. Then, in his dominion over the animals, his job is to make sure they continue to flourish according to those God-given natures.

Gen 2:23

Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

Of course, ultimately God makes a woman and Adam, in a kind of vision and love that he could never have for any of the animals, now finds his match. His equal...and out of deep love, he names her.

Elimelech didn't initiate spiritually...and he didn't protect spiritually either. He didn't take his job as a namer seriously...and it cost him his life...and the life of his sons.

And then, toward the end of the book of Ruth, there's the guy without a name. Remember him? We called him so-and-so.

He had a calling on his life to marry Ruth and provide for her...but because of the threat to his own reputation...he left Ruth and Naomi alone.

Another example of a man forsaking his responsibility to initiate and protect. Instead of laying down his own name to help his family members...he uses his right of refusal to protect himself...and risks their lives.

Let me ask you this? Have you ever had a dad walk out on you? Ever had a man who says he loves Jesus use you and abuse you? Ever had a passive dad, or husband, or boyfriend who stands by, and doesn't help you to worship God...doesn't ever talk about Jesus or really do anything to make sure you are growing towards Jesus? Ever had a man who doesn't listen...or who demands that you serve him?

That's not a man as God defines masculinity. Don't be fooled. Men, you are created to initiate and protect. To NAME. To have a vision for those you love and lead...to point them in that direction...and then to protect them on the journey.

If you don't have a vision for your family, or that vision is more centered on you than it is on God...then you are destroying them...and you are destroying yourself.

But then, there's Boaz who is called a “worthy” man.

Ruth 2:1

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

There's a reason for that. Boaz uses his power and authority to serve others.

Ruth 2:4

And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered, "The LORD bless you."

First time we see Boaz he's out in the field checking on his employees. And his employees love him. He even cares about his employees relationship with God. That's why he says "Lord be with you"

Ruth 2:5

Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?"

And watch him initiate with Ruth. He notices her in the field. Asks about her. And once he hears her story...his heart is to protect and care for her.

Ruth 2:8-9

Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn."

He protects her to be sure no man takes advantage of her. And he provides for all her physical needs making sure she has what she needs to eat and drink.

And don't miss, that all through the story, he calls her daughter. Not "hot-stuff" not "bae"...there is nothing that is objectifying her as a gratification of his sexual desire. In fact, when Boaz has the opportunity to have sex with Ruth before they are married he doesn't. Because he knows that will hurt her and not lead her to worship God.

Ruth 2:14

And at mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over.

Then, of course, there is the conclusion to the book

Ruth 4:9-10

Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day.”

When Ruth and her mother in law Naomi are destitute and rejected, Boaz sacrifices his own reputation, and his own money in order to give Ruth and Naomi a future...in order to set a vision for their life...to protect them at his own expense.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is a godly man. There is absolutely nothing of a man using his power or authority to dominate...only to serve, initiate, and protect. There is nothing about the way Boaz talked, whether or not he played sports well, or had feminine mannerisms. Nothing about how well he grew facial hair or how much he could bench. What we do have is someone who uses every bit of authority and power he has to serve others and point them to God.

Men, time to get in the game. Know your role. Initiate and protect, physically AND Spiritually.

...and now...lets talk, ladies.

3) Women create culture by powerfully helping.

In the Hebrew Bible, The book of Ruth comes directly after the book of Proverbs. Which means, whoever put it together may well have been showing us that the woman that the last chapter of Proverbs 31 talks about is demonstrated in

Proverbs 31:10

An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.

Ruth 3:11

And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman.

In fact the word is used for the ideal woman in Proverbs 31 is the same one used to describe Ruth. Excellent. Virtuous. Worthy.

This is a little different from the word used to describe Boaz as a “worthy” man. The word used for Boaz is Gibbor. It means “Hero” “mighty”.

But this word is different. It’s the word Hayil. It means power or knowing how to use all your abilities well.

Of course, if you have ever read all of Proverbs 31, that’s exactly the kind of description of a woman you’ll find. She’s like a life-skills ninja. She does everything well.

The woman in Proverbs 31 owns businesses, raises children, makes delicious waffles from scratch...she can sew, and even has a great eye for fashion. In other words, ladies, this is the woman you love to HATE on Facebook.

Now, ladies, before you go thinking you have to DO everything...I want you to see something. The goal of being a godly woman is not to DO EVERYTHING...its that everything you do has a certain kind of aim.

Let me show you from Genesis one more time.

Genesis 2:18

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

God sees the man is alone...and says its “not good”.

Genesis 2:21

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

It’s at that point, that God puts him to sleep and takes woman from his SIDE. Not his back so that she is behind him. Not his head so that she is over him. She is taken from his side. Equal. Unified. Together.

And notice the world’s first R&B song in verse 23...When Keith Sweat,... I mean...Adam sings about his naked wife...he first talks about her equality, then he sings about her difference. She is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh- She is equal to me. Same substance. But she is different- She is not a man. She is Woman. She came out of man.

Equality doesn’t mean ignoring differences, it means harmonizing them.

You don’t hear D and then hear a B flat and go “We’re going to have to change that B flat to a D to make music.” No you put them together and USE their differences to make music, to make culture.

So woman is made equal to the man, but different from him in order to help him...make culture. To create. To build. Families, music, ideas...relationships...that should all glorify God.

When God says, "I will make a helper FIT for the man" that word "fit" literally means opposite. It means "counterpart." See, Males and females were created like puzzle pieces. Physically, emotionally, and spiritually to complement one another. In our bodies and our souls, we are created to fit one another.

Now, you might not like that word "helper" because it makes us think of uselessness or weakness.

But The Bible refers to God as our help, and our strength.

This implies that Adam has weaknesses that Eve does not have. The woman has something the man doesn't. And man needs it.

Think of it this way. I can help my son w his homework because I have knowledge that he doesn't. And I can use that power in 2 very different ways. I can use it to EMPOWER him. To HELP him. I encourage his thoughts to work the math problem. Gently remind of things he's missing, but all along I'm using my power to help HIM work the problem

Or I can use my power to REPLACE him. I can just shove him out of the way and do the homework for him. Which will get the job done, it will get the paper graded, but it really won't accomplish the POINT of the homework...to help him grow in his math skills...because he's been cut out of the process entirely.

Being a helper, in the way God is, means to run your power THROUGH another person instead of AROUND another person.

In fact, When Jesus describes the Holy Spirit that he's leaving with his followers after he ascends to heaven. Remember what he said?

John 14:26 & 15:26

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

The Holy Spirit is called the Helper. And do you know what the job of the Holy Spirit is? Its not to go around you. Its not to do the work FOR you? What does the Spirit do?

He bears witness IN YOU that you are a child of God...he reminds of what the truth is...And

he bears witness THROUGH YOU. God himself, in the Holy Spirit is at work to empower US to be his witnesses...to show and tell the world about the glory of God.

So if the word helper sounds demeaning or offensive, you've got some theology to take care of. Because if you are going to say being a helper makes you lesser...than you have to say that the HOLY SPIRIT is less god than the Father or the Son. Or even worse, the HOLY SPIRIT is less than humans.

But the Holy Spirit IS GOD. God is FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT, co-equal...One God in 3 persons.

If you asked me to boil down the subtle difference in the way Men and Women are called to work...it would be like this. Men are called to use their power FOR OTHERS. Women are called to run their power THROUGH OTHERS.

...and that brings us back to Ruth.

There are 3 women I want to draw your attention to in the Book of Ruth.

Ruth 1:11 & 20-21

But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands?"

She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

First, there's Naomi. She believed her traditional culture, that her only hope was in having babies. And because the Lord took away her family, she thought she had lost all reason to believe God loved her or cared about her. Her salvation was in family....and it failed her.

Ruth 1:14

Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

Then there's Naomi's other Daughter-in-law, Orpah. Instead of going with Naomi back to Bethlehem like Ruth did, she stays in Moab. Because she believed what her culture told her. That without children, she wasn't worth anything. That without having kids, she had no hope. She saw her salvation in having kids. Two women who allowed the culture to define what it means to be a woman.

But Ruth is different.

Ruth 1:16

But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

Ruth committed and attached herself to Naomi...for Naomi's good, as a helper...even when that meant, as far as she knew, she'd never have kids...which again, was one of the primary markers of female identity in this traditional culture.

Ruth 3:10

And he said, “May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.

In fact, we find out in chapter 3 that Boaz is no spring chicken. He commends Ruth for not simply looking for a younger man who would more surely “give her children”...instead, she is committing to marrying Boaz, because she knows that in so doing, Boaz will be able to provide for Naomi.

Ruth 4:13 & 15

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son.

He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”

Of course, at the end of the book, Boaz marries Ruth, and they have a child. But the child wasn't going to be used as a validation of Ruth's womanhood.

In fact, at the end of the book, in a culture that believed the greatest validation of a woman was having sons, the women of the village say something very counter-cultural.

They don't look at Ruth and say, “Ahhhh, look at you, you've had a son. You are truly a woman. Now we can respect you.” No, they don't say anything to Ruth at all. Instead, They look at Naomi and say, “You thought your salvation was in having sons, but we're telling you, having a daughter-in-law like Ruth, who ran her power through you...who committed herself to your good because she loved you and trusted God...that's better than having 7 sons. Having Ruth love you like this is better than having the perfect family!

Now, we don't live in a traditional society, but ladies, you certainly have a story of salvation being sold to you. Be independent. Don't run your power through another person, instead

show 'em how tough you are. You don't need a family! You don't need a man!

See, the message is different, but you are still being sold an identity...a salvation...a purpose that avoids God.

Finding your salvation in being independent or tough or dominant over men is just as enslaving as finding your salvation in getting married and having children.

It's a rat race that never satisfies.

But trusting in the God who loves you, whether you have kids or not, whether you marry or not, whether you become a successful businesswoman or not....Trusting the God who loves you whether you ever live up to a single line of Proverbs 31...

Truly, there is nothing that will ever satisfy you more.

If you are going to run your power through others...you better have an unending source of power...one that doesn't depend on you.

And, men, if you are going to use your power FOR others...you better know that someone has done that for you.

The thing about both Boaz and Ruth that's incredible is that each of them look away from their own needs, their own wants...and their focus is on loving the people God loves.

Both of them have a deep concern for Naomi, the widow. This marriage, in fact is more about caring for her, than it is either of them getting what they want.

...And there you have what's common to both genders. God is calling you to forsake yourself, and love the ones he loves.

So, let me ask you? Do you love the people God loves? What does a person God loves look like? Does God want you to dress a certain way first? Act a certain way? Perform up to his standards for gender before he loves you?

Well, you actually don't have to get any further in the Bible than Genesis chapter 3 before you have the answer to that question. See...

4) God uses his power for you and runs it through you, before you ever get a gender role right.

Did you know, that it was a reversal of gender roles that broke the world? And I'm not talking about something that happened this year, but something that happened in the garden of Eden.

See, God made a man to worship and obey him. To trust and love him. And then from the man, made a woman. He was supposed to initiate, lead, and protect her. To point her to worship God.

And the woman was supposed to help the man create culture, and care for the creation... specifically by having dominion over the animals.

But a creature, a snake came into the perfect garden, and went to the woman, while the man passively stood by. He didn't initiate. He didn't protect. He just watched it happen.

And instead of the woman helping the man have dominion over creation, she led him to listen to the voice of a creature...who convinced them both, that God wasn't good. Wasn't to be trusted. That he didn't love them, and indeed, they could have dominion over God.

You see, the whole thing got flipped upside down.

...and because of that sin, because of that role reversal where humans put God under their feet, everything else reversed. Instead of things tending toward life, they moved toward death.

Instead of the garden going out into the wilderness, the wilderness came into the garden. Instead of God's people shaping culture...culture shaped God's people.

In shame, both man and woman hid. From God. And from each other. They weren't just confused about gender roles, now they didn't even understand what it was to be human.

Genesis 3:15

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

But God, in his infinite love and mercy, gave them a promise. He would send a son...to crush the head of the serpent. To restore order. To have dominion and rule. To set things right side up again.

But though he would crush the serpents head, he would be bruised on the heel.

Jesus Christ is the Son that set things right again. God himself descended. He turned culture upside down. He didn't ride into Jerusalem as a domineering king, he came humbly, as a servant. He put himself under the feet of men, washing their feet, instead of crushing our heads. And then, on the cross, we crushed Jesus.

But on the cross, Jesus was crushing the serpents head. He was reversing the curse.

He was taking the justice we deserved for doing things our way...for seeking fulfillment outside of him. On the cross, our Good Father took the initiative to give us a name, but not according to what we had done, but according to the life Jesus lived in our place. No longer would we be "Mahlon and Chilion"...sick and dying...instead we would have the name of Ruth and Boaz's son. Obed...which means worshipper. In Jesus, we can finally fulfill our human role...as worshippers of God.

And when Jesus resurrected...he rewound creation. He started a new creation...one where death and sin are not welcome. One where we will no longer be moving towards death, but instead ...eternal life...where everyday is newer than the one before. Where every day we are more alive, not less.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

And now, because of he laid down his life for us, because he used his power not against us, but FOR US, he redefines our identities. Not as men or women...but instead, we all become IN CHRIST. And we become a part of his NEW CREATION.

And then...then...

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

He runs his power through us. The church. We become the ministers of reconciliation. We become the ones through him he makes his love known. We become ambassadors, representatives of his new creation...and we implore everyone...EVERYONE... no matter what they think about gender or sex, or politics, or anything else...we go to them and implore them to be reconciled to the God who died for them.

So, who does the church love? We love who God loves.
Who does God love? Every person that bears his image...and got it wrong.

That means everyone in this room... and it means everyone who's confused about gender... it means every man, every woman, every person regardless of how they are identifying or what clothes they are wearing.

...and how do we love them? By representing Christ.

By initiating with them in love...and then protecting them on the journey to know Christ more.

There is no room for hate in that great commission. There is no room for alienating people. There is only room for TRUTH and LOVE.

Is it easy? No. But Jesus never led us to believe that following him was easy.