

Sharon Mennonite Bible Institute

Travail of the Feminine Soul

by

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Thesis Statement: We as women have the responsibility to face how our choices, beliefs, and circumstances are impacting ourselves and those around us. Our impact is received by all either negatively due to our wounded-ness or positively through redemption and healing.

Outline

- I. Introduction
 - A. The Snap Shot
 - B. Thesis statement
- II. Looking Back
 - A. Creation of the Human Race
 - 1. Biblical perspective of womanhood
 - 2. Significance of our view of women
 - B. Fall of the Human Race
 - 1. Eve's Deception
 - 2. Consequences of deception
- III. Deception Continues
 - A. Believing Lies
 - B. Giving place to bondage
 - 1. Living in bondage
 - 2. Negative results in life
 - a. Close relationships
 - b. Community

- IV. Desperation and Hope
 - A. Cry of the soul
 - B. Hope of redemption
- V. Longing of our Creator
 - A. Our Creator's perspective
 - B. Passionate action
- VI. Responsibility to our Creator
 - A. An act of faith
 - B. Results of trust
- VII. Conclusion

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Introduction

“If Eve wouldn't have done it then I wouldn't have to struggle with it!” We've all heard it before and probably thought it ourselves. Girls become woman and we often continue the cycle of living out of the same set of sin patterns that have followed us since the fall. We repeat the same relational sins done to us against each other. The wounds, out of which we live, create patterns of reaction toward each other with the goal of self-protection. These protective ways often keep us from having close relationships, as we make efforts to not be hurt again.

There are many “how to” resources on the subject of women and relationships. However the subject is deeper than personal cosmetic remodeling or modified behavior. The reality of who God designed us to be is amazing! The path to find that woman is deep, challenging, and at times frightening; but it brings life!

The way in which we give and receive relationship with others reflects how we relate to God. Relationship with God is key to true success in life. It effects all areas of our life on this earth. The things we have experienced, the way we tuck them into our heart, effect every aspect of our lives. They especially effect our relationships. In life experiences we so quickly believe lies about ourselves and others. As these beliefs bind us they become our definition of truth.

Wrong ways of relating (self-protection) create a tangle that looks impossible to change or escape. This is where hope of our redemption, healing, and restoration for our own heart, and the hearts of others, brings courage to face our pain and sin.

We personally as women have the responsibility to face how our choices, beliefs, and circumstances are impacting ourselves and those around us. Our impact is received by all, either negatively, due to our wounded-ness, or positively, through redemption and healing.

Content

Looking back to the very moment God thought of and considered creating the world and a human race He had something of breathtaking complexity in mind. We were not there to observe those awesome moments of the world taking shape at the voice of God, but we have the account given to us in scripture. This lays the foundation for the whole picture and plan God had for the creation of the human race. The pleasure God experienced in seeing His created world is expressed as He spoke it into being “...and God saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:10b, 12b, 18b, 21b, 25b). God doesn't stop with just creating the world and the animals. He speaks again and there seems to be passion and excitement when he says “...Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...” (Gen. 1:26a). “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:27). God didn't just speak man into being as He did the rest of creation. Gen. 2:7 gives us more details of the vision, passion, and desire God had for man. “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” God used His own hands to shape and design our being. He had a longing for relationship with His creation that would glorify God the Father. So He designed us with His own thoughts, hands and breath for that perfect relationship with Him, God.

“That was the man,” we say. So what about the woman? It is easy to jump to a negative train of thought as God describes how He designed woman. The negativity comes as the world screams “The woman was not created just to be a helper”. Implying that God's design is flawed. In reaction to that negative thought, women exert themselves in areas meant to be occupied by the male gender to prove that they are worth something by the world's standard. That thinking, however, simply reveals that we have formed an opinion other than what God had in mind; the beauty of the woman being the completer and

helper to the man.

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18). God had designed a need in Adam and was opening his eyes to the need as He brought all the animals to Adam to be named. The animals all had a counterpart and Adam did not; “But for Adam there was not found an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:20b). This was no surprise to God. He knew what His plan was, but he was placing desire and realization in Adam *before* He filled the need of a counter-part or helper. Realizing that he was not like the animals, that his counterpart was missing, gives the feeling that Adam was looking for someone like him. God was preparing Adam for the moment when Eve would be brought to him. “And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh instead thereof ; And the rib which the LORD God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man” (Gen.2:21-23).

God's original design, described in scripture, is two human beings, created equal but with distinctly different roles. This was all in place before the fall, but sin majorly effected God's design of the roles. God created woman to be a helper to the man and complete him. This brings no difference in value only difference in role and responsibility. Debi Pearl said in the book Created to Be His Help Meet, “God knew that in order for man to survive, and even prosper, he would need a natural armor that would drive him to keep pushing against the odds, while enjoying the challenge.” On the other hand Pearl further states “God designed the woman to be sensitive and vulnerable for the sake of the little ones whom she must nurture” (p. 108).

God's view of women is just what He said in Gen. 1:31 “And God saw everything that

He had made, (*including the woman*) and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day” (*Italics mine*). The Hebrew word *very* indicates a vehemence, often used with other words to create intensity. God spoke with intensity, that all His design complete with the woman, was very good. God took pleasure in His design of the human race. In light of the subject we are looking at, God took pleasure in the woman, the way He designed her, and the completion she brought to His plan of creation. “Now all was made; every part was good, but all together very good” (Matthew Henry) The completion of creation demonstrated the uniqueness of man and woman treasured equally by God.

A biblical perspective of womanhood begins with God. Although the choices of Adam and Eve brought sin and despair to the world, God's opinion of His creation didn't change. In spite of sin, it was through the woman the thread of hope for the human race was born. God spoke of Mary in Luke 1:28-30 “... thou art highly favored, and the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among woman...for thou hast found favor with God.” God's design of woman was still “very good”. Through the woman, God chose to send His own Son to bring redemption and healing to the sin wounds of His created people. Because of the plan of redemption, beauty, which was lost because of sin, has the opportunity to be restored.

Showing us hope, and displaying the uniqueness of design and role, God “needed” the woman to complete His plan for salvation to all people. By design, women are to nurture, give life, and be a helper to her husband. God also wanted a helper to bring his Son into the world. He delighted in His design of woman inviting her to be His helper in the plan of salvation.

The account of Ruth gives another example of a biblical perspective of womanhood. She recognized her role as helper. Ruth embraced the role not only to her husband but to her mother-in-law after her husband died. In the process of Boaz being the kinsman redeemer God again blessed womanhood. “So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife and ...the LORD gave

her conception, and she bore a son” (Ruth 4:13). Through the line of this son, through a woman who was considered a stranger, God again blessed and called women to help in his plan of salvation bringing to existence the line of descendants that would lead to the coming of Jesus.

The significance of our view of women takes us in two directions, a view based on scripture or human reasoning. Creating the question; what is the foundation on which we base our view of womanhood? The key to our belief of who a woman is depends on the foundation of which our belief is based. Based on the foundation of scripture there is incredible value and beauty in the design and position of being a woman. We are affirmed and blessed many times in the “helper” role we were given. However, if we base our foundation on life as we experience it, channeled through what we are told by popular worldly sources, warps our view of womanhood. Our foundation determines our ability to fulfill the role given to us.

While many of us already know these principles in our heads, the way we live reveals some deeper forces at work. Head-knowledge often differs from heart-knowledge. The effort we exert to put on a good front when our head-knowledge differs from our heart-knowledge is exhausting and empty if our heart is believing that God made a mistake when he made me. “For as he (*she*) thinketh in in his heart, so is he...” (Prov. 23:7)(*italics mine*). Gaining a foundation based on God's word takes an honest look at the differences between our head and heart knowledge. Reconciling those differences by healing through God's word and His people results in a true, solid foundation. Until we face what we really believe in our heart, we will default quickly to a warped humanistic belief system based only on our experience of a few short years of life.

God's design of the human race was amazing. God's design of woman was perfect and beautiful. If God designed her so perfectly what happened that Eve chose to listen to the serpent starting the curse of sin? Logic would say, “I could have done better than Eve”. Keep in mind

that hindsight is often better than foresight! God has given us the privilege of observing His interaction with real people so we can learn from their mistakes.

The fall of the human race has affected us from the time it happened, until our generation today. The outcome of our choice to follow God or Satan decides where we will spend eternity.

The serpent approached woman rather than the man, taking advantage of the more vulnerable, trusting design of the woman. God did not design the woman with the same role he gave the man, to “subdue and have dominion over...” (Gen.1:28) the things He had created. She was designed to complete the man, giving her a softer side. That softer side of the woman is more likely to be susceptible to deception, since our nature is to be trusting.

Did the serpent know he wouldn't get any where with Adam? Adam would question him out, and strength would wrestle with strength. So the serpent slid up to Eve. Reasoning. Questioning. Persuading. What had God really said? The serpent slightly changed God's word, implying that God was placing severe limitations on them. “Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden” (Gen 3:1)? The serpent played with her mind. Seeds of doubt were planted in her mind about God's word. Did God really love her? If he did, why was he keeping something back from her? Eve's mind seems to be swinging back and forth between God's word and the serpent's reason. Eve began using her mind against God 's word. It was exactly what the serpent wanted. Eve listened to error and opened herself up to deception. Listening to error seemed attractive as she considered what was offered. “And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil “ (Gen. 3:4-5). The excitement of this “new truth” momentarily blinded her to the perfectness of what God had already provided.

Deceived, Eve took of the fruit, ate and gave some to Adam. The consequences of that deception have followed us ever since.

Slightly changing what God has said, to better fit our own thinking, comes easily. Why do we find it easy to change truth that has been spoken to us? The core, I believe, is trust. Trust in what God has said or NOT trusting what God has said. Distrust attacks us from all angles. Life gives us many reasons to not trust anyone. When we receive pain in life, we begin to distrust. Indirectly, we begin to distrust God; because “if He is good, why am I hurting?” It becomes easier to alter what God has said in attempt to make our pain seem logical in our own mind. Pain often drowns the truth that God's ways are not our ways. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isa 55:8-9).

To alter what God has said, changes the biblical perspective God gave us. Eve changed God 's word slightly when talking with the serpent, and took herself farther down the path of deception. “And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said Ye shall not eat of it neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die” (Gen. 3:2-3). God originally said, in Gen. 2:16-17 “...of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”. Eve took Satan's implications of severe limitations by God, and added to what God really said “..Neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die (meaning immediate, physical death)” (Gen. 2:17). She minimized God's provision and love for her, while exaggerating the limitations.

Consequences of deception are far reaching. Imagining all it effects is overwhelming. Faced with deception our, emotions are often our guide. We feel so logical when strong passion

is present. The choice *seems* accurate. My mind and emotions against God's word quickly become confusing. Doing the logical thing appears to be the best way to avoid confusion. Thus we can give in to deception almost before we think.

The picture takes an ugly turn when we as women allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking we are right. The ways we exercise our “right” feelings usually become relationally un-redemptive. “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety” (1Ti 2:14-15). Jesus never leaves us stranded. Hope is here. The price? Trust. It seems illogical, but the promise of salvation holds true. “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Php 1:6).

The confidence that Jesus is working in our heart gives hope as we face our tendency to imbalance. Our design to be softer and more spiritually sensitive swings out of balance when sin (self-protection, self-preservation) moves us to action. We tend to be the ones that spiritualize everything. This isn't bad, only misused. Self-protection becomes a motivation for over-spiritualization.

Women usually are the leaders and spiritualists in cults and other Satanic functions. Could it be that we *do* have a more sensitive spirit? Again, this is not bad, only misused, and taken advantage of, by Satan. Revelation describes a woman named Jezebel who taught and seduced the church into sexual immorality. “Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works” (Rev 2:20-23).

Under the pretense of being a prophetess, Jezebel worked her way into the church. and corrupted it with sexual immorality. Seemingly Jezebel believed she was in the “right”.

Observing scripture we see she was deceived and used by Satan to deceive the church. It is sobering to consider our vulnerability to deception. Pearl states it this way:

“That a man is less sensitive than a woman does not make him inferior to her, nor does her being more subject to deception than her husband make her inferior to him—just different natures. It is in recognizing that difference that wives should fear God and distrust their natural tendencies.”

What should we as woman do? Distrust our natural tendencies(women's intuition)? That seems to go against everything we've been told. Our struggle lies in that we trust our natural tendencies more than we trust God. We are more familiar with our natural tendencies and less familiar with God. Trusting our natural tendencies often feels better than trusting God. Trusting God requires faith, with the outcome often unknown. A visible end makes trusting our natural tendencies appear easier.

Because a choice “feels” better (resulting from self-protection), we can become deceived into thinking we know better than God. We can, if we are not careful, pull our husbands and families into ruin using over-spiritualization for self-protection.

Ponder the following questions and scriptures: Do we know God?

“Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him” (Psa 45:10-11).

Why is it so important to protect ourselves?

“The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee” (Psa 45:13-14). “Blessed is the man (*woman*) unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile (*deceit*)” (Psa 32:2)(*italics mine*). God is so great! He desires our beauty and worship.

What makes deception continue in our lives? Satan's scheme to dupe and cheat women of the glory of God's kingdom is accomplished when we believe lies fed to us from the world. Lies such as; what defines beauty, being your own person, and knowing what is right for you, come from the world. These lies become so common to us we no longer recognize them as lies. They lead us to doubting God and thinking our husbands don't have a clue what they are doing.

Lies and deception come to us at all angles. Lies about God, ourselves, and others disfigure the plan God designed in the beginning.

Believing lies turns the focus on me rather than on glorifying the Father. Believing lies creates distrust. Distrust bonds with wrong choices. Distrust bonded with wrong choices brings conflict in relationships, especially between husband and wife. Choosing to dishonor God's design of headship breaks up the channel God created for relationship with Father God and our husband. The hold of deception in our lives is as great as our potential for good in God's kingdom.

Believing lies about God is an offense to His character. “And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed” (Deu 31:8).

Yet, the source of the choice to believe these lies is within us. Distraction by my own pleasures or desires can foster lies. The world offers many pleasures to fill deep soul longings. The capacity God designed in us to have relationship with Him, will only be filled by Him. We

do not always understand that longing. It thirsts and hungers, begging us to fill it. What fills deep soul longings? Jesus cries the true invitation, void of any lie. “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa 55:1).

The children of Israel demonstrated many times how vulnerable we are to pleasures that promise to fill the longing. They didn't jump into being close buddies with ungodly nations. The shift happened gradually. Curiosity tickled their senses, while they observed the nations around them. Questions grew out of curiosity. Did God really say? Distrust resulted from questions. Lies about God and His care were formed then believed. Long, painful years of bondage were the consequences reaped because of choosing to believe lies.

In spite of all this, Jesus longs for and calls us to love and trust Him with all of our heart. “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deu 6:5). “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Mat 5:6). While there are obvious guidelines and principles God laid out for us, His heart is for us to love him with our whole being. Created with the desire to love and be loved He longs so show himself strong to us. Yet in the corruption of this world we look for filling in the lies it offers.

We give place to bondage when lies offered to us enter our soul as truth. Pain is at the center of most of our lies. It results from being sinned against as well as from my own sin against others. Eve was sinned against by the serpent, and it hit her in the core of her being. She doubted her dignity, the perfect design by God, and gave in to her ability to choose. She chose against the Word of God.

When we are sinned against the pain goes somewhere. We convince ourselves we will be “ok”. Everything is fine! What really happens to that pain? It goes into the core of who we

are, shattering the perfect image He designed. The shattering of this God-given picture often happens when we are very young. It is unavoidable living in a fallen world. God's original design was for parents to give a child his view of God in an unmarred way. Our world is fallen. We are wronged as children. Thus, our picture of God becomes marred. With our God given image shattered we believe the lies the enemy speaks to us in our pain. "I am not wanted", "No one cares for me", "I don't count", "I am a big mistake", "I can't do anything right", "I'm a useless failure"... and the list could go on. As these lies keep swirling in our heart and mind, we begin to live out of them. Living out of lies creates choices and actions subconsciously designed to prevent the pain from happening again. Beneath the self-protective choices, are vows, which must be kept religiously to maintain our safety. Instead of living in freedom, with joyful purpose to serve God, we live with the purpose of preventing more pain. Living in that bondage, we are no longer free to be who God designed us to be. So we make a "new" person who is safe, and appears "nice". Who we really are feels too painful to face or seems very unlikable and unlovely.

As a result the bondage in our soul hardens our emotions and actions. We are often unaware of the self-protective methods we use in relationships, yet they govern the way we manage our life. Saddest of all, God gets locked out as we protect ourselves. To expose our soul to God for healing can be very difficult.

The negative results, which grow out of bondage, affect our closest relationships the most. Immediate family relationships are often the toughest, yet most crucial. These are the people we love most. Our impact on their lives is life-forming. In these close relationships, triggers to our own pain are often hit. We tend to think the person who triggered my anger is the problem. Pointing fingers is easier than looking into our own heart. Pain and bondage in our own heart is the trigger that trips our anger.

We have been moving a lot recently. Our family is on sabbatical from Fresh Start. There have been multiple stages of packing preparing moving from place to place. I (mom) shoulder the bulk of getting suitcases, toothbrushes and toys packed. Several months into our sabbatical, we were packing for a camping trip. I noticed feelings of frustration in me, toward Jeremy. I felt like he was just “playing” on the computer. Yet he likes to be ready to go on time. The children packed the van and we were ready to go on time. This feeling of frustration still simmered in my heart. Camping went well. I forgot about the frustration, until we were packing for our next family move, a six week Bible school term. Again, I was busy packing and organizing. Jeremy asked how he can help. I didn't have an answer. In my mind, I was thinking “any thing he does I will have to redo to make sure we have every thing we need.” This wasn't the first time he had felt this from me. Only this time he chose to address it, refusing to let me play my control game. He said “It feels like any attempt I would make to help, I would mess up so bad you couldn't handle the results. So it's just easier to be passive and let you do it.” Bingo! He hit the nail on the head. I hated to admit it, but it was true. My heart feeling was that he would make such a mess of things, it would be easier if he wouldn't touch it. This leads to the lie and bondage in my heart, distrust for the men God placed in my life. I often felt they were not there for me (shattering the God-given picture). I believed the lie that I had to take care of myself all by myself. In this case I had to take care of my family too (bondage). The effect of this lie and bondage caused Jeremy to feel disrespected, frustrated, and helpless. I felt lonely, and complained about his lack of help. I was believing the lie that I have to do it all myself. Out of that loneliness I pushed Jeremy to help me. All the while, I pulled myself away in an effort to keep myself safe from disappointment of his failure.

Initially, I was angry with Jeremy for bringing it to my attention. I reacted by saying “Well, then you pack this family for six weeks and don't complain if something is forgotten!”

My response only highlighted the bondage in my heart. It was a reality check to look again at what is really going on in my heart. How is it affecting the ones closest to me?

As I began to take the situation apart, I was struck with the enormity of the hole I was digging for myself. I accepted the lie that I have to take care of myself all by myself. In accepting that lie I often rejected, doubted, and deflated Jeremy's ideas or direction for our family. This placed me in the leader role of our family. Doing this, I refused and blocked the very path God designed for me to receive truth--through my husband--to bring freedom to my heart.

The very core of the lie is that I am my own god. I chose to believe that I know better than my husband, and ultimately God. How sick is that? But doesn't it sound familiar? Remember, in the garden the serpent told Eve. "...you will not surely die. For God knows that in the day that you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil"(Gen. 3:4-5). She chose to believe the deception that she knew better than God. I put myself in the "God" place of our family believing I knew what was best. The curse Eve received in Gen. 3:16 "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you." is clearly illustrated in my life. I desired to have the say in our packing and plans, because thought that I knew better than my husband. This is sobering, and brings repentance as I realize the deception of my heart.

Our responses to the lies we have believed directly effect our husbands, children, and community. The reflection of what we believe about ourselves is mirrored to our family and friends. Since I radiate my lies and beliefs directly into my close relationships, what are we going to do with the reality of who we are?

As lies and bondage affect our close relationships, so they effect our community

relationships. By community, I mean our relationships in our churches and acquaintances. We do not relate as closely to those in our church and community. It is easier to keep ourselves looking nice as we go in and out of those relationships. The question is, how real (life-giving) are those relationships? A mirage in the desert brings hope to the thirsty traveler.

Disappointment wracks his mind when it disappears right before his eyes. The mirage has no water to give the thirsty traveler. So we have little to offer a thirsty sister or seeking neighbor when we are preoccupied by “looking nice”.

The nice person we created for ourselves can be kept picture perfect. Keeping that image in place is a lonely life. Life is not given or received. Jesus offers life abundantly, but not “safely”. “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (Joh 16:33).

As women, we are created to be life-nurturing. We have twisted the concept of nurturing, believing we need to present a perfect image in order to be a life-giver. By being so careful to give the “correct” image to our sisters, we keep our heart hidden from them. In reality, we steal from each other the gift of giving and receiving life. The enemy has deceived us in our concept of being able to give. Jesus said “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Mat 10:39).

“But when Jesus saw it,said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them” (Mar 10:14-16). The honesty and wholeheartedness of a child is the picture Jesus gave to us. He did not despise their dirty faces. They wholeheartedly went to Him. Did the children sit on the edge of His knee and fuss about a dirty fingernail? No! They wholeheartedly went to Him. They believed Jesus loved them

because of who they were. There were no brave acts to earn the place on his lap. Jesus offered His arms, all the children had to do was climb in.

Contentment. Have I accepted the way Jesus made me? Do I trust His arms even when life is messy?

It's not about getting it right. It's not about looking right. *It is* about learning what God truly wants from us, His women. We receive pain. We believe lies. We try to make ourselves and our world “safe”. Under the pain and deception is the person we are. Who is that woman? What is God's design for her?

Our Master Designer knows us. He is the One Who will restore us. We only must trust Him to do the restoration.

Learning who Jesus made us to be, while accepting the pain and wounds in our life, is the beginning of healing. Jesus designed us to offer so much to people around us. This journey is not easy. Being the person we believed ourselves to be, feels much safer than changing.

Why not stay with what feels secure? Because we are created to worship. We will worship something. A fake religion brings some security because we are worshipping. Our fake “self” also brings a sense of security. We create our own “god” that feels comfortable. Breaking out of that fake security is difficult. Our comfort is in what we believe.

However, Jesus is calling us out. Out of our fake security. Out of our deception. Out to life by His design! We are His. Created for His pleasure. How can we grasp Jesus vision for us? The mix of our deception and sin with the call to freedom creates desperation. We begin to search for life. There has to be something more! There is a solution! God offers amazing restoration for our sin and wounds. Restoration isn't for our glory, but for His name's sake.

“...Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake... And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the

heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes” (Eze 36:22-23).

“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Eze 36:25-27).

“I will also save you from all your uncleannesses...” (Eze 36:29).

“Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord GOD, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel. Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded” (Eze 36:31-33).

“And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden;... Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the LORD build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it” (Eze 36:35-36).

The Lord has spoken it and He will do it!

Out of our thirst and desperation hope germinates. Beginning to believe that I could be deceived, is the spark of hope. Beginning to allow Jesus to touch the depth of our soul, opens the door for His life to enter. Philip Yancey describes it this way:

“In many ways the act of Re-creation is “harder” than creation, for it relies on flawed

human beings. Surely, it has cost God more: the death of his Son. Still, God insists on healing the world from the bottom up, rather than from the top down” (Disappointment With God).

The cry of desperation comes from the very bottom of the soul. Out of the depths of our pain and misery the hand of our Creator reaches out to touch us. Scripture voices desperation and despair, as those who were writing wrestled with the agony in their soul, and the sin around them. Jeremiah expresses his grief and God's heart cry over His people. It gives voice to the cry of women today. We feel the pain of wrong done to us and the agony of sin we have committed.

“Mine enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause. They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me. Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off. I called upon thy name, O LORD, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not. O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life. O LORD, thou hast seen my wrong: judge thou my cause” (Lam 3:52-59).

Call on the name of the Lord. Cry out. Put words to the desperate longings struggling inside our soul.

We wonder, does God really care? Why am I in this place of despair? These places of despair, that we dislike immensely, are the very places hope can grow. The Psalms also put many words to the desperate cries of the soul.

“Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah. And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.

Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people. Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah”(Psa 77:7-15).

Being in this place of desperation calls us to think. Remember. Ponder. What has been happening in our life? The Psalmist cried with sorrow, pain, and agonizing questions, then he said, “Selah”. Pause. Think on what was spoken. He uses the word “remember” three times and the word “meditate” once. The Psalmist was thinking on the deep pain and sorrow of his soul and reflecting on the works of the Lord. Why did he remember and think on those things? Shutting down our feelings, forgetting about them, or hoping they go away is often our attempt at getting out of despair.

But, it is in entering the sorrows and pain in our heart that hope and redemption begin. Feeling the pain of wrongs done to us stirs the longing to be whole. We begin to long for the good God designed us to experience. Fulfillment of relationship with Jesus can be reality. Hope grows as we experience truth in the wounded places of our heart. The experience of truth and healing in our wounded places issues a stream of joy and freedom that cannot be hid. Encountering freedom opens our eyes to the ways that we have sinned against others. Often we just confess our sin. Peace comes for a time, but sadness and despair can creep back to haunt us. When we recognize that Jesus died for our sorrow, grief, and pain, as well as our sin, we can receive healing to our whole person. Jesus has already borne our grief and carried our sorrows. It is by faith we continue allowing Him into the sorrow, and transferring it to Him. Do we understand how He can carry our grief and sorrow? No! By faith we receive His mercy and glory in His miracle.

Isaiah writes, “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him

not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:3-5).

Jesus does care about the desperate feelings of our soul. He offers healing and hope to them, as much as to our sin. Yet, accepting healing to our pain and sorrow brings us face to face with the lies and bondage we have allowed in our heart. To continue on the path to freedom we have to identify the lies and replace them with Truth. Jesus' truth brings light and buoyancy to the place of bondage. As we replace lies with Truth, the bondage of the lie must also be broken. Bondage becomes visible to people around us. Like a dress made with a damaged pattern, the finished product does not fit well, no matter how we tug and pull at it. Replace the damaged pattern (bondage) with the correct one (Truth) and the outcome is much different. There may still be minor defects, but the garment fits well. Our ways of responding, and habits we have formed out of self-protection, may need special attention to be dislodged. Forgiveness and repentance is God's recipe for dislodging lies. Bitterness settles in easily when we are hurt. As bitterness settles into our soul it becomes a stronghold. As much as we hate to admit it, bitterness will drive and control our life. Only through forgiveness (releasing others) can we continue the path of healing, hope, and freedom. Imagine an untamed bird in a cage. The cage is in your bedroom. The unhappy noises are tolerable during the day, but night-time is a different story. Only by taking the cage outside and releasing the bird will peace come. So too, only through true, soul level forgiveness, will peace come to our hearts. Jesus prayed, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Mat 6:12). Scripture also says “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh

patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom 5:2-5). Choosing to release someone who sinned against, us opens the door to “glory in tribulation”. The choice to release others opens our spiritual eyes to the miracle Jesus is working in our heart. We can rejoice in the growth of character, accept new measures of grace, and drink the hope Jesus offers of abundant life.

God offers grace to extend and receive forgiveness. By exercising forgiveness we grow in patience, experience, and hope. It takes patience on the journey of forgiveness and healing. As we journey we gain experience, and hope grows out of experience. As hope grows, it flings off the cloak of shame, because the love of God sheds his Truth in our hearts, giving us the identity we were designed to live.

True hope comes only from Jesus, but it is often carried to us through other people. Hope carried to us through other people who love the Lord Jesus gives us glimpses of the passion God has for us. This takes us back to a question from the beginning. What did God have in mind when creating the human race? What was the longing of our Creator while allowing us the power of choice? Gene Edwards pictures it this way “Our God cannot have a counterpart; nonetheless, he saw within his eye what she might be...*if ever she could exist...the counterpart of God. ...Then he held that vision before him, vision of his own mate... and then fashioned the bone of man into a counterpart*”(The Divine Romance chapter 6).

Using our imagination helps us glimpse the passion God has for us. Often we view God only from our earthly perspective. What about God's perspective illustrated through scripture? Have we ever wondered through the vista of God's heart, soaking up the passion and desire He expresses for us? God illustrated His desire through creating Adam and Eve. Eve was in Adam; being one, then separated, yet still one by marriage. There was a completion in marriage. Two

separate roles joined together, making a complete picture. We were in God, created by Him, but placed us on earth for a time. We are still His, waiting for the time we will be married to Him. God will complete the picture when Jesus returns for His bride, the church. Scripture is the love story of God for us, describing the passionate desire he has for us to love him back.

“Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD'S thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day” (Deu 10:14-15).

Chosen. Called. Wanted. Delighted in. Desired. Passion from the heart of God spills all over His word.

Passionate love moves Him to action to win our love in return. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved”(Joh 3:16-17).

Our language does not describe well the incredible love and longing God has for his bride. Scripture illustrates God pouring Himself onto His people. He made ways of escape in trouble. Gave wisdom to avoid Satan's traps. Offered mercy for sin. Dealt judgment on the unrepentant. Punished enemies. Restored broken places and ultimately offered the final sacrifice through Jesus.

Amazing love! How can we grasp it? How can this sacrifice mean something to us, giving us a heart of love in return to His love?

A friend of mine, Elizabeth, described it this way. “Giving love, care, and compassion is good; yet sometimes in the midst of it, we hurt and bleed. If in that hurt and bleeding, we offer it to God as a sacrifice, it is a sweet smell to him.” “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psa 51:17).

By offering those sacrifices to him, we open ourselves to allow Him to enlarge our heart. He expands our heart with greater capacity to give love, express compassion, and exercise understanding.

Passionate action from God, to draw us to himself, is not always pleasant. “My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth”(Pro 3:11-12). If we can grasp Jesus' passion and love, our hearts will turn to Him. We will desire to return the love and devotion He offers.

Our responsibility to our Creator is to respond to His call. It is an act of faith. Accepting the gift Jesus offered on the cross is the first step, planting the seed of faith in our heart. To trust what God has spoken even, though we cannot see Him, is faith. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb 11:6). There may be times in our pain and confusion that we do not recognize God. “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him”(Job 13:15). Philip Yancy tells us:

“We may experience times of unusual closeness...God seems intimate and caring. And we may also experience “fog times”, when God stays silent, when nothing works according to formula and all the Bible's promises seem glaringly false. Fidelity (that hang-on-at-any-cost-faith) involves learning to trust out beyond the parameter of the fog, God still reigns and has not abandoned us, no matter how it may appear”
(Disappointment With God, pg. 231-232)

Faith is the action of believing that the pain and suffering I am struggling through, is worth something to God. Jesus values the heart that is willing to feel, struggle, and battle through emotional messes, until there is healing. Staying in the battle brings us to a place where we know for a fact that God is there, was there, in those times of extreme loss and pain. “And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and

brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD” (Eze 37:13-14).

Journeys of faith, though blindingly painful, usually bring us to a recognition of God. A backward look reveals His love during our suffering. Recognizing God and His care births gratefulness. The joy of His care becomes the fountain of our words and actions. “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted”(Psa 89:15-17). The result of our healing is praise and worship to the Healer. Out of suffering the melody is written for a song to the Savior of our soul, our life.

Through it all, the results of trust appear in our every day lives. We take steps of trusting Jesus by learning to trust people through whom He sends His love. Replacing self-protection with willingness to trust, allows the flower of redemption to bloom wider in our heart. The fragrance of forgiveness wafts from our words and actions. The beauty of trust is the song that blesses our Redeemer and draws others to Jesus. “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Rev 12:11).

Choosing to loose our “life”, our self-protective ways, is trust; is faith! Whether neatly stacked and organized, or haphazardly piled together, releasing “our life” to Jesus brings sustaining relationship with Him, magnifying the work of God.

Conclusion

The travail and journey of the feminine soul continues as life continues. But, we are not left comfortless. Jesus said, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you,

that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you” (Joh 15:16).

Our hope lies in Jesus for redemption from the bondage we received and created. It is our responsibility to face the choices, beliefs, and circumstances that have effected our lives. Our choice brings us to one of two places: 1. staying in the state of deception or accepting our situations (staying in deception brings only negative results). Or 2. accepting our pain and circumstances allows them to become a testimony of redemption, illustrating the power Jesus has to change a life.

Dr. Georgia Purdom concludes “Genesis provides us with the foundation for biblical womanhood. Women are image-bearers of God. We should embrace the qualities we possess uniquely as women and show the Creator God to the world”.

Therefore we have assurance that we as women are valued. Our wholeness comes not by our own efforts but through accepting the path and plan Jesus offers to us.

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