



*Using Art to Destigmatize and Celebrate
Biblical Womanhood in Postmodern America*

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Where Have All Our Women Gone? Using Art to Destigmatize and Celebrate Biblical Womanhood in Postmodern America

By Emma Catherine Ream

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Abstract

In the 21st century, young Christian women struggle with understanding and applying practical aspects of Biblical womanhood in their day-to-day lives. Extreme views make it difficult for young women to navigate life in a way that makes sense in the cultural context of the 21st century. Young women today struggle to utilize the full range of talents and gifts that God has given them, and more importantly, they struggle to align their lives with Scripture. The lack of knowledge concerning what Biblical womanhood is, combined with confusion about how it is applied, impacts not only the women themselves, but everyone in their close social networks, their families, their husbands (or husbands-to-be, if applicable), their children (if applicable), and the church body.

The research conducted in this thesis showed that while a plethora of literature, Bible studies, and other resources dealing with Biblical womanhood exist, many of these resources do not address or celebrate the unique situations of young Christian women and the different ways in which Biblical womanhood can manifest itself in the lives of women. Additionally, many of these resources do not account for the unique situations of young women in postmodern America or how these women can embody Biblical womanhood even if they are not married and/or do not have children.

This body of work seeks to acknowledge,

celebrate, and destigmatize the incredible beauty and variety of Biblical womanhood, as well as its common threads, or foundation based on principles found in Scripture through a historical grammatical approach. By working in a modernized 1950s aesthetic, I aimed to accomplish these goals and to celebrate the importance of Biblical womanhood in the church and family; and its beauty. God gifted women in unique ways to reflect His image, bring Him glory, and fulfill God's mission for the global and local church, the home, and society.

Chapter One



Introduction

As a young woman, I read many helpful Bible studies for women that dealt with Biblical womanhood either directly or indirectly, and I found myself asking the same question at the end of each study I finished: “How am I supposed to apply this to my life?” Some studies came close to satisfying my need for an answer, while others simply left me scratching my head and trying to apply lofty theological topics on the ground level of day-to-day life, especially when it came to my life after graduating college, my future as a wife and mother, and how to resolve the tension I felt between the popular complementarian ideal of Biblical womanhood and the other callings that God had placed on my life such as earning my MFA, potentially going to law school, and pursuing artistic endeavors later in life while raising children with my husband.

While I was working towards my undergraduate degree at a secular university, I was a part of a Christian women’s organization on campus. There I met many young women who shared my desire and need for a practical application of the Bible in their lives as women that went beyond our relationships with God and others and into the nitty gritty, practical, daily bits of life. For the most part, both myself and these young women knew what the Bible calls women to be in an abstract sense, and knew that being productive, fruitful, Christ-centered women was how we

were supposed to live out their faith; still, many of us struggled, and still do with applying the wisdom and instruction found in Scripture in a practical way in the specific area of careers, the home, and what the Biblical balance is between these two things.



For the longest time, I was confused about this struggle of knowing what the Bible says about being a woman and being unsure about how to apply it in light of the gifts and opportunities that God placed in my path. Due to the plethora of women-focused Bible studies and devotionals, it took a few years for me to realize that Biblical womanhood is neither a spiritual journey alone nor is it a series of boxes to check on a rigid and uncreative list. Biblical womanhood is multifaceted, dealing with both the spiritual aspects of a woman’s life, as well as the practical areas of a woman’s life and it was in the practical area of Biblical womanhood that I felt a gap in application and understanding and felt I was falling short of who God calls me to be.

Learning how the Bible calls women to act in their day-to-day life, and what the Bible has to say about practical Biblical womanhood, the role of women in society, and the role of women

in the church has shifted my perspective not only on what Biblical womanhood is, but on the ways in which women such as myself can best utilize the gifts God has given us, make an impact for the kingdom of God, and minister to our families, friends, and neighbors. My new perspective opened my eyes even further to the importance of my role, of all women's roles, in the church, home, and society, and how an understanding of the Biblical principles of womanhood can help women make challenging life decisions about careers and other endeavors, in order to honor God in the best possible way with their lives.

The Problem

In 21st century postmodern America, many young Christian women are unaware of the true heart and meaning of Biblical womanhood. Many complementarian Christians view Biblical womanhood as existing within the strict boundary line that surrounds the home and make no allowance for how a woman might apply her gifts outside of this small sphere. Others, with an egalitarian take on Biblical womanhood, see it as being indistinguishable from its male counterpart – Biblical manhood – and therefore are unable to see that a woman is formed by God to be different from a man and thus are unable to see how a woman can

uniquely reflect God's image in her own right. And many more people in between these two schools of thought are confused as to the exact nature of Biblical womanhood.

Succinctly put, the confusion surrounding what Biblical womanhood is, and what it looks like in postmodern America, lies in a misunderstanding of how Scripture defines what a woman is and who she is called to be; as a result, this confusion leads to the stigmatization of women seeking to live out Biblical womanhood by both Christian (egalitarian and complementarians included) and secular society.

Research Purpose Statement

How to best align one's day-to-day-life with what Scripture teaches is an essential topic for any believer, male or female. The further task of applying gender specific Scriptural instruction to one's life is also essential because the degree to which one can accurately apply these principles

directly affects approximately one half of the Christian population and filters out through relational interactions to the other half. Thus, the impact of Biblical womanhood, or the lack thereof, has far reaching implications, positive and negative, throughout the secular social

network, the church body, a young woman's myriad of interpersonal relationships and her familial network. Simply put, the importance of Biblical womanhood and its application to young Christian women cannot be overstated, especially in today's social climate.

Biblical womanhood, especially the degree to which it is understood and properly implemented, directly affects women of all

ages in their happiness, satisfaction, and relationships with God and others. Moreover, this lack of awareness has resulted in a generation of young Christian women who are struggling and trying to resist conforming to a world that is no longer Scripturally based and that lacks adherence to the Biblical teachings on womanhood.

Visual Solution

My visual solution to the aforementioned problem is to develop and design a body of work that shows a more balanced approach to Biblical womanhood. The primary goal of this body of work is to destigmatize Biblical womanhood by showing the multifaceted beauty and pragmatic value Biblical womanhood holds both for women, and also for society.

By using a recognizable art style—the ads of the 1950s—and modernizing it, I aim to redeem the stereotypical “50's Housewife.” This stereotype is what many think of when Biblical womanhood is referenced or discussed.

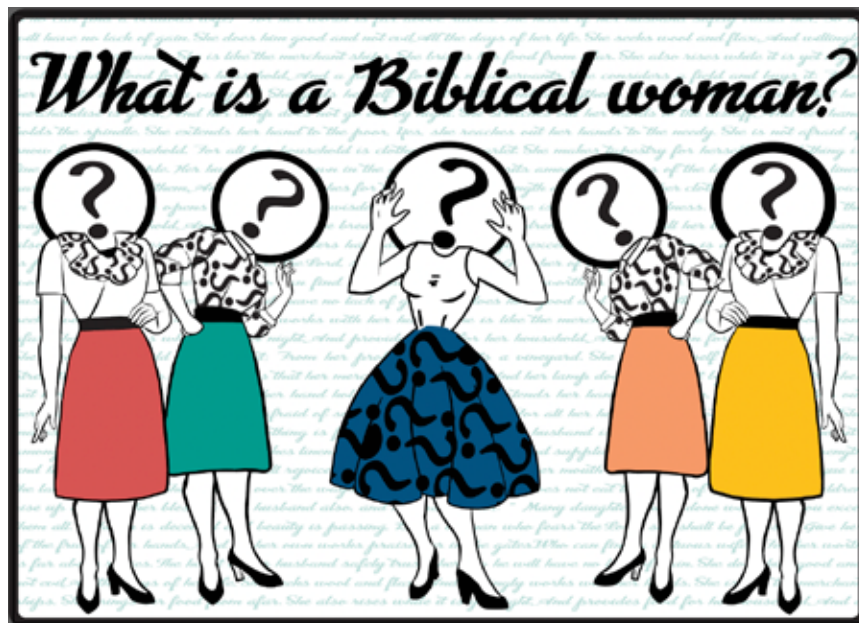


Chapter Two



Research Questions

- How can Biblical womanhood be defined through a historical-grammatical approach?
- What are unifying and consistent characteristics of Biblical womanhood that can be applied to all women and the unique ways in which God calls them?
- How can a visual solution to the problem be designed in a way that targets young Christian women specifically?



Literature Review

Defining Biblical Womanhood

To clearly identify the problem of how Biblical womanhood is stigmatized and misunderstood, a definition of what Biblical womanhood is must first be established. For the purposes of this thesis, a historical-grammatical approach to Biblical texts has been taken, with the goal of showing a Biblical basis for a complementarian

definition of Biblical womanhood and the further goal of defining a more balanced and generous *application* of these gender roles, as there is misunderstanding, misapplication, and stigmatization (positive and negative) on both the egalitarian and complementarian sides of the issue at hand.

Historical-Grammatical vs. Historical-Critical

The historical-grammatical and historical-critical methods of interpreting Scripture have very different applications and approaches. One scholar, SW Becker, wrote an in-depth article in which he defined and compared the historical-grammatical and historical-critical approaches to Scripture, their pros and cons, and how they affect one's reading and understanding of the Bible. According to Becker, the historical-critical method believes that,

“Since the Bible was written by men in a specific historical situation... we must study these writings very carefully and in great detail to determine whether what they say is really factual (Becker).

Proponents of the historical-critical method look at the Bible as a fallible document and seek to interpret it through what is known, or assumed, of the historical context at the time, and seek

to find the disharmony between Scriptural passages and determine, using said historical context, which passages remain the most “valid.” The historical-critical approach insists that “the Bible must be read precisely like every other book in the world is read” (Becker). This approach is problematic for many Christian scholars because the Bible itself does not claim to be merely another book authored by human minds but a divinely inspired collection of writings written with human hands, with God as the true author. Additionally, the historical-critical approach to Scripture

“cannot begin to operate unless the divine authority and inerrancy of the Bible has first ‘been stripped away as irrelevant’ (Becker).

For many scholars, this approach is troublesome because it allows those critiquing and discussing

scriptural passages to read implications, commands, and assumptions into the text that may not have been there and to cherry-pick certain passages as more correct or precise in support of one argument or another.

In contrast, the historical-grammatical approach first accepts

“the Holy Scripture as the verbally inspired and inerrant word of God” (Becker) and “accept[s] the words of the Bible as being the source of truth because they were the very words of God” (Becker).

The historical-grammatical approach seeks to find unity between scriptural passages, using the clearer passages to interpret the passages that are not as clear while also considering the historical context of the passage, the original audience, and how the original language can contribute to a deeper understanding. This approach is commonly referred to as a literal interpretation of Scripture and ultimately focuses on the true history that can be discovered from the Bible (Becker). Speaking in general terms, complementarian scholars tend to favor the historical-grammatical approach, and egalitarians tend to favor a historical-critical approach.

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Value

When discussing gender roles, specifically through a historical-grammatical approach to Scripture, value is a point of contention for many scholars as some readings of key passages can lead them to believe there is a difference

in the way the Bible values men and women, primarily because of the hierarchy of authority that Scripture places with regards to men and women's roles in the church, home, and society.

BIBLICAL TEXTS

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the

earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:26-29 KJV).

COMPLEMENTARIAN VIEW

For complementarians, Genesis 1:26-29 provides the first indication of the equality of value that Scripture gives to men and women and for the divine appointment of gender roles. Owen Strachan, in an article for the Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood titled *Clarity of Complementarity: Gender Dysphoria in Biblical Perspective*, discusses the Biblical basis for gender roles,

This passage [Genesis 1:27] shows us that manhood and womanhood are essential properties. We do not see them as fluid, but in fundamental terms as fixed (Strachan 35).

The value of gender roles themselves, and the unique complementary way in which men and women were designed, is one of the

foundational pillars of complementarianism. In his article on Biblical gender roles titled *Men and Women in the Image of God*, complementarian scholar John Frame states,

Women and men equally image God, even in their sexual differences, even in their differences with regard to authority and submission. The reason is that the image of God embraces everything that is human (Frame 231).

Equality in God's image means equality in the way that image is valued, even though men and women manifest the ways in which they reflect the image of God in separate ways. Additionally, equality is,

not at all inconsistent with the subordination of women to men in the

home and in the church. All human beings are under authority, both divine and human. Their submission to authority, as well as their authority itself, images God (Frame 232).

The Danvers Statement, created by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, discusses complementarian Biblical gender roles in an effort to address the feminist egalitarian distortions of Biblical gender roles, human sexuality, hermeneutical oddities, and the “widespread ambivalence regarding the values of motherhood, vocational homemaking, and the many ministries historically performed by women” (The Danvers Statement), among other goals. *The Danvers Statement* says the following regarding the value of men and women in two points from the statement:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18)...

5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18, Gal 3:28)” (The Danvers Statement).

Author Rod Dreher discusses the sexuality of American culture at length in *The Benedict Option*. One of the crucial points Dreher discusses is how revolutionary, protective, and liberating the Biblical gender roles were for women both in the days of the early church and

women in the days of the 21st-century church. Dreher highlights the exploitative sexual culture in Paul’s time – it was genuinely oppressive for women as their value was not seen in their divine personhood and their image-bearing as females but in their ability to produce children and give sexual pleasure (Dreher, *The Benedict Option* 199). Complementarian, or traditional, gender roles then, as now, elevate a woman’s status in the home, give her dignity and personhood, and protect her from being used and discarded. In the complementarian view, Biblical gender roles do not limit a woman’s value or reduce her to a housebound domestic slave but protect her and give her great honor while acknowledging the differences and similarities between men and women in a positive way.

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EGALITARIAN VIEW

For many egalitarians, the hierarchy of authority found in Scripture is problematic. Patriarchy represents, and is, an oppression of women, their rights, and opportunities, as well as a denial of their personhood and equal value in the eyes of God. Additionally, the predominate egalitarian view on “traditional” gender roles is that these gender roles are obsolete due to Christ’s death and resurrection. Scholar Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. says the following in his article *Male-Female Equality and Male Headship* where he discussed patriarchy, male headship, and equality vs. authority:

Evangelical feminism argues that God created man and woman as equal in a sense that excludes male headship. Male headship [and] domination... was imposed upon Eve as a penalty for her part in the fall. It follows then, in this view, that a woman’s redemption in Christ releases her from the punishment of male headship (Ortlund 95).

Beth Allison Barr in her book, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*, discusses many facets of complementarianism and gender roles. In her egalitarian view, complementarian gender

roles support the oppression of women, abusive treatment, and viewing women as “subhuman,” or as “mutilated/deformed men” (Barr 87). Barr argues that the historical-grammatical interpretation of Biblical texts pertaining to gender roles is simply a result of the cultural context of the oppressive Roman patriarchy bleeding into, and subsequently corrupting, Paul’s instructions to the Christian churches (Barr 47). To Barr, the result of this corruption is a society that does not value women except as housekeepers and bearers of children, and even that value is far below what it should be. Like Ortlund, Barr’s analysis is that gender roles are a form of punishment for women that is nullified with a woman’s new life in Christ “Patriarchy wasn’t what God wanted; patriarchy was a result of sin” (Barr 29), Barr believes that complementarian gender roles are, and should be, a thing of the past. From the historical-critical perspective, Barr’s assertion is correct that most of Paul’s exhortations to women, such as exhorting them to be a keeper of the home, or not have authority over a man, were simply a result of that specific church’s cultural context and established gender roles, and not something that is relevant today.

A BALANCED APPLICATION

In Genesis 2, a definition of Biblical gender roles begins to form in the Creation narrative. From the beginning, the Bible is clear that

men and women are made equally, but how they fulfill God’s design manifests differently according to their gender. In Genesis 2, a more

specific look at the sixth day of Creation is given, specifically focusing on how and why God made women. In Genesis 2:18, in stark contrast to the repetitive refrain “and it was good” that is found throughout Genesis 1, God instead declares that it is *not* good that man is alone – God’s solution to man being alone is a woman – a helper, or help meet, for man. The Lord then makes woman out of Adam’s rib. She is not made separately from the dust, as Adam was, or spoken into existence, as the lesser animals and plants were, instead, she is made of the same substance and even one of the same bones as Adam, giving incredible significance, uniqueness, and weight to her creation (Genesis 2:21-23). Additionally, in the New Testament, Paul explains to the Galatians that men and women are on equal footing and that societal standing, gender, and physical ability are not what God is measuring (Galatians 3:28). Instead, God looks at the heart of a person instead of their physical ability, whether they are male or female or a slave or a free person.

But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one

in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29)

Based on these passages, God made men and women with equal value and equal share in the commands and blessings that He gave them in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 1:28, God blessed them and gave the command to be fruitful and multiply to them both, not just to Adam and Eve individually.

One of the stronger elements of egalitarian arguments such as Barr’s is that through complementarian *application*, women are routinely undervalued in churches and society. For Barr, this manifests itself in areas of society such as the gender wage gap (Barr 19), her critique of the principles of complementarianism does not necessarily deal with the principles behind it and how they *should* be applied. Through a historical-grammatical approach, traditional gender roles are a logical conclusion when reading the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. These gender roles are viewed as something to be celebrated and applied *graciously*. A gracious application of Biblical womanhood is one that will use the principles found in Scripture that define what a Biblical woman is in a way that allows for the different manifestations of those principles by not passing judgment on women who are living a Biblically aligned life but may not be called in the same specific ways that the complementarian dream woman is.



Some of Barr's claims, specifically her claim that,

The Roman patriarchal structure echoed by Paul's household codes... wasn't something that made Christians different; it was something that made them the same (Barr 54),

simply do not follow with the logic and message of the rest of Scripture, especially the rest of Paul's letters to various churches in their different cultures. If what Barr claims in the above quote is true, then this encouragement of "blending in" with the Roman way of life completely contradicts not only Paul's explicit instruction in Romans 12:2,

and be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, (Romans 12:2)

but also negates and contradicts countless other encouragements and passages regarding persecuted Christians to continue living in their counter-cultural ways (Hebrews 10:32, 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4, 2 Timothy 3:12, Matthew 5:10-12, 10:12, Romans 8:17, etc.).

What is evident in the previously discussed Biblical texts is that, from the Old Testament beginning and then reinforced in the New Testament through Paul's letters to various churches, women are valuable to God. Therefore, an accurate application of Biblical womanhood must be based on the understanding that neither men nor women are inferior to one

"One of the stronger elements of egalitarian arguments such as Barr's is that through complementarian application, women are routinely undervalued in churches and society"

another; both have been uniquely crafted for specific roles in the family, the church, and in society. Additionally, Paul further establishes the fact that men and women are designed as equals to live in harmony and balance with each other in his letter to the church at Corinth,

Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God (1 Corinthians 11:11-12).

From both the egalitarian and complementarian perspective, women are equal in value in the eyes of the Lord and His church, meaning that how each woman fulfills her Biblical callings is no more or less important than how a man would do the same. Both Adam and Eve were given the directive and blessing to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1:28). Therefore, a woman's ultimate goal in the world is the same as a man's – to honor the Lord in all they do, subdue the earth, and reflect the Lord's image. Where these

two schools of thought differ is that from the complementarianism perspective, women can be equal in value to men and have their roles in the church, society, and the family manifest differently from men's roles in the same. This contrasts with the egalitarian perspective which sees any difference in or definition of gender roles as oppressive to women and indicative of the

patriarchy. As the perspective used in this thesis, the historical-grammatical approach gives a more biblically consistent definition of a woman's value. However, it is crucial to note that there have been some important misapplications on the complementarian side that will be discussed later in this document.

Role in the Family

Women's role in the family and home is another point of contention between complementarians and egalitarians. Complementarians view the woman's role in the home as being the primary keeper or maintainer of the home as well as

the primary nurturer of children, while the egalitarians focus more on men and women being equal in hierarchy and authority and gives no clear delineation between the ways in which men and women should operate in the home.

BIBLICAL TEXTS

There are many Biblical texts that are referenced regarding a woman's role in the family, in the home, and in marriage. Many complementarian scholars who approach the Scriptures from the historical-grammatical approach argue that these scriptures have core principles that, though they manifest differently in the 21st century, should be true of all Christian women and have similar, though not identical, applications. Egalitarian scholars tend to approach the scriptures from a historical-critical perspective or without the assumption that the Scriptures are inerrant. This assumption often leads to the dismissal of certain passages of Scripture that specifically address gender roles. In particular, instructions towards

men and women, and passages where Paul exhorts women to be submissive or keep their homes, are dismissed without looking at the context of the verse. In Scripture, women are given a specific area of Creation that they are primarily concerned with when exercising their dominion over God's creation. Titus 2:3-5 tells us that a woman's primary area of focus should be the home, this particular verse is subject to much controversy, and will be discussed in more detail later in this section, but it is important to note the ongoing debate regarding this passage. Additionally, Titus 2:3-5, a household code passage, succinctly phrases the principles we see in Proverbs 31 in a practical manner of application.

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the Word of God may not be reviled. (Titus 2:3-5 KJV)

Who can find a virtuous woman?
For her price is far above rubies.
The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her,
So that he shall have no need of spoil.
She will do him good and not evil
All the days of her life.
She seeketh wool, and flax,
And worketh willingly with her hands.
She is like the merchants' ships;
She bringeth her food from afar.
She riseth also while it is yet night,
And giveth meat to her household,
And a portion to her maidens.
She considereth a field, and buyeth it:
With the fruit of her hands she
planteth a vineyard.
She girdeth her loins with strength,
And strengtheneth her arms.
She perceiveth that her merchandise is good:
Her candle goeth not out by night.
She layeth her hands to the spindle,
And her hands hold the distaff.
She stretcheth out her hand to the poor;
Yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
She is not afraid of the snow for her household:

For all her household are clothed with scarlet.
She maketh herself coverings of tapestry;
Her clothing is silk and purple.
Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sitteth among the elders of the land.
She maketh fine linen, and selleth it;
And delivereth girdles unto the merchant.
Strength and honour are her clothing;
And she shall rejoice in time to come.
She openeth her mouth with wisdom;
And in her tongue is the law of kindness.
She looketh well to the ways of her household,
And eateth not the bread of idleness.
Her children arise up, and call her blessed;
Her husband also, and he praiseth her.
Many daughters have done virtuously,
But thou excellest them all.
Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain:
But a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall
be praised.
Give her of the fruit of her hands;
And let her own works praise her in the gates
(Proverbs 31:10-31 KJV)

COMPLEMENTARIAN VIEW

WOMEN IN THE HOME

In general, the complementarian view of women's roles in the home falls under a traditional definition of gender roles. A woman's role in the home is to be the keeper of that home and of children (if any) while the husband is at work providing for the home. Darren Sherkat, a professor of Sociology at SIU, discusses in his article *That They Be Keepers of the Home* how a woman's views on Biblical gender roles influence her life decisions. Sherkat conducted a study of a large sample of Christian women between 1973 and 1982 and found that many women who follow complementarian gender roles are more likely to choose to stay at home in order to best take care of their homes and families, and that, from the complementarian perspective, the hierarchy of authority given in the home is an essential element of the family's success and wellbeing stating,

“Keeping the home, or being the manager or watch of the home does not mean that a woman has to have a chore list or do all of the cleaning and cooking”

Without this pattery of authority, many conservative Christians believe that the family cannot function properly and a host of personal and social problems will proliferate (Sherkat 345).

Anglican author Tish Harrison Warren discusses

the importance of order in the home in her book *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*. Warren discusses the importance of daily rituals, from making the bed to brushing teeth, and how there is significant spiritual meaning and insight to be gained (Warren 28). By bringing order to a small section of the world, women can reflect the image of God by taking dominion over their physical world while also making a hospitable environment in which they can exercise other gifts that God has given them. One way in which Biblical womanhood can manifest itself practically is in a woman's ability to make

a welcoming, pleasing, and cozy home. Dreher discusses in his book *Crunchy Cons* how essential aesthetics are, not only in the home as a source of sanctuary and reprieve from the world but also can be an expression of creativity which is a gift from God, as well as a

reflection of His character (Dreher, *Crunchy Cons* 95). Caring for the home is a crucial element of Biblical womanhood because being a keeper of the home is explicitly instructed in Titus 2:3-5. Keeping the home, or being the *manager* or watch of the home, as will be discussed later, does not mean that a woman has to have a chore list or do

all of the cleaning and cooking; rather that her priorities are organized around her family, and she manages the home and primarily oversees that the home is in order. Just as the husband's primary role is provider, and while he may not and does not have to be the only provider in the household, ultimately, that responsibility rests on his shoulders.

Since the Fall of man described in Genesis 3, the perfectly ordered relationship between men and women has been shattered, resulting in awkward, painful, and sin-riddled relationships and interactions. Women step outside of their God-given boundaries, damaging themselves and others, and men do the same. The deterioration of traditional gender boundaries has accelerated in the last 60 years with the aggressive rise of feminism and the sexual revolution. In the words of Sr. Thomas Augustine Becker,

the feminist movement has stolen an identity from several generations of women, and with it, not only the capacity to bring their feminine gifts to the world but even the pleasures of being a woman (Becker 303).

Modern feminism has tried, and to some degree succeeded, in stealing much of the joy, beauty, and honor that is found in the God-ordained and prescribed gender roles and boundaries.

Physiologically, God has uniquely designed women to fulfill specific and divine roles that are no less important or challenging than their male counterparts. The most obvious and

striking of these physiological differences is the ability of women to bear children – this is a vital ability for the continuance of humanity and the completion of God's divine plan to restore creation through the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ. Additionally, God has designed women to be nurturers, whether of children, other women, or by simply ministering to the needs of others. This does not mean that men cannot successfully nurture children, that every woman is capable of the same quality or kind of nurturing, or that every woman will and should have 12 kids, live on a farm, and never seek any career aspirations outside of the home. Instead, women are crafted with different inherent traits that make them better suited to be caregivers and homemakers, and this should be one of their primary areas of focus as it is one of the ways God clearly instructs women to live their lives in Titus 2:3-5. Many complementarian scholars, such as John Piper, Wayne Grudem, and more, will argue that Titus 2:3-5 has Biblical principles that can be applied in the 21st century via traditional gender roles.

In the Greek, the word translated in the KJV as “working at home” in Titus 2:3-5 is οἰκουργός. The Greek word οἰκουργός means

caring for the house, working at home; the (watch) keeper of the house; keeping at home and taking care of household affairs; a domestic (G3626 - oikourgós - Strong's Greek lexicon).

The Biblical woman is to be the watch, the keeper, or, in more modern terms, the manager

of her home. How this manifests will depend on the woman herself; whether she cooks all the meals, cleans all the laundry, and vacuums all the floors will depend on a variety of factors, but the approach she will take to navigating the specifics of her Biblical womanhood will be guided by the fact that she is the manager or overseer of her home.

One scholar, Gregg Johnson, delves into the specific biological bases for gender roles in the Bible through scientific research and analysis. In one study, Johnson discovered a psychological predisposition across human cultures that women are more equipped to nurture and care for children through a large-scale cross-cultural study. In over 250 cultures studied, women were the primary caregivers and were the most actively involved in child-rearing. The overwhelming transcendence of women as caregivers suggests that women being primary caregivers goes far beyond mere cultural norms and education and that it is something that has been hardwired into human beings (Johnson 282).

Opponents of complementarianism's definition of gender roles often mention the unequal distribution of household labor between husband and wife as one of the reasons why these roles are unfair, unnecessary, and damaging to women – with little to no discussion of how the husband's role and workload in providing should be factored in the division of labor. However, in the complementarian worldview, women are called to be keepers at home (Titus 2:5), and thus, the

home is primarily their responsibility. Recently, a study was conducted on how the division of household labor contributes to marital quality and happiness.

This survey drew on cross-national data for 28 countries and drew data from the 2002 Family and Gender module of the International Social Survey Program (Treas et al. 117). In this study, it was discovered that Christian women who are homemakers, taking on most of the household labor, have a “higher marital quality” than those women who do not follow the same traditional gender roles and have a more even distribution of household labor. Additionally, women who worked full-time and were full-time homemakers were *both* less satisfied than women who worked part-time and still kept house. This finding was shocking in light of the researcher's predictions that women liberated from the drudgery and constrictions of keeping house and caring for children when they could be pursuing careers would be happier and more satisfied; women's happiness has declined in the past few decades (Treas et al. 111). While other factors, such as the reason some women were working or not working, were not considered in the scope of this study. Some women may have had to work because of financial needs, or some women may have wanted to work and been unable to, due to health issues with themselves or children, or a variety of other factors. Despite this, the findings of this study are important to note because they could point to support for a more balanced and Biblical approach to gender roles and the Proverbs 31 woman.

The egalitarians claim that complementarian gender roles were instituted merely because of the Fall and that under the redemption of Christ's death and resurrection, these gender roles should become obsolete. Complementarian scholars, such as John Piper, would argue that

[i]t is not a curse that man must work in the field to get bread for the family or that woman bears children. The curse is that these spheres of life are made difficult and frustrating (Piper 50).

In the complementarian perspective, what used to be easy and enjoyable now requires more work and frustration for both the male and female, as fulfilling the roles that once were natural and enjoyable to them now requires more work and the dying of their sinful selves. In the same way that living a sin free life is a challenge, because of man's fallen

and sinful nature, living a life with the proper priorities and within Biblical gender roles is challenging, because it is no longer a part of mankind's natural tendencies.

In the study previously discussed by Gregg Johnson, it was discovered that psychologically, females are generally more perceptive and aware of context (Johnson 285), giving them a potential advantage when caring for children

where high perception is necessary for the children's safety and wellbeing. Women also score higher on tests measuring their verbal ability, compliance, nurturance, and empathy (Johnson 281), which are all qualities essential in raising children and nurturing others. Johnson's findings are significant because it shows that women were intelligently designed to fulfill specific roles, just as men were designed to fulfill opposite and complementary roles to women. Women's unique physical gifts and tendency to be more nurture-minded fit the Biblical gender roles that we find throughout Scripture. From the complementarian perspective, Biblical

womanhood is neither an abstract idea nor a role that can be applied to men. It is not an outdated social construct that can be done away with without damaging God's original design. It is important to note that there will be times when, out of necessity,

"It is important to note that there will be times when, out of necessity, women must step in and fill a role that is outside the scope of Biblical womanhood, such as after the death or absence of a spouse"

women must step in and fill a role that is outside the scope of Biblical womanhood, such as after the death or absence of a spouse, that does not discount the fact that God has uniquely designed women to fill specific roles in the home, society, and churches. The same is true for men as well.

WOMEN AND CAREERS

From the complementarian view, the glorification of careers outside the home at the expense of women's Biblical responsibilities, the pressure placed on women to pursue careers instead of homemaking, and the outright attack on traditional gender roles continue to undermine the very essence of Biblical womanhood and cause many well-meaning women to neglect their God-ordained primary responsibilities (Becker 304). As seen in Proverbs 31:15-17 and through the lives of many working women throughout the Bible, careers are not biblically problematic for women. Just like a man who spends too much time prioritizing his work at the expense of his family, the danger comes when her priorities are not in line with Scripture. On the scholarly side of the argument, complementarianism is relatively open about women working, whether married or not; the main area of emphasis is that a woman has specific God-given areas of focus, as previously discussed, and she is free to make decisions about her career and aspirations but should make those decisions with her priorities in Biblical order. The Proverbs 31 woman is, in the modern sense, a career woman, though her central focus remains firmly on her home and her family. Women, especially single women, are encouraged to work in the complementarian perspective, and though not emphasized as much as marriage, children, and keeping house, many scholars acknowledge the benefits of being single for the Kingdom of God and devoting oneself to ministry and serving the community.

Complementarian women tend to have less career-focused aspirations than women who hold an egalitarian perspective. In a study conducted in 2005 by Colleen Warner Colaner and Susan Warner for the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 271 women were surveyed at a private Evangelical University in the Midwest. Four hundred women were selected randomly from the 1616 female students attending at the time of the study using computer software, and of the 400 contacted about the study, 271 replied. Participants were asked questions about their gender ideology, women's place in the church, home, and family, men's roles in the same spheres, who has the final authority in the home, and the women's aspirations as they pertained to their careers. The results of the study showed a direct correlation between a woman's beliefs about Biblical gender roles (specifically, egalitarian or complementarian) and their career aspirations, or how important a career was to them (Colaner and Warner 225). The women who identified with complementarianism still worked and had career aspirations but did not aspire to the heights of career that their egalitarian counterparts did (Colaner and Warner 227). Additionally, Sherkat in his previously mentioned study noted that many complementarian women believe that "women [are] just as capable as men for most jobs" (Sherkat 347).

This does not mean that, in the complementarian view, it is sinful for a woman to aspire to have a successful career, rather, it shows that complementarian women tend not

to prefer having incredibly high career goals, so they can spend their time and energy elsewhere. These findings seem to support the study on the happiness of homemakers discussed earlier, and are supported by Sherkat's study on women's career choices and homemaking. Many women

successfully have careers and manage their home, raise children, and participate in their church community, each woman is differently crafted by God, and as such, each woman's balance of her priorities will manifest itself differently in her life.

EGALITARIAN VIEW

WOMEN IN THE HOME

One author, whose views on Biblical womanhood are on the egalitarian side, conducted a year-long, intensive case study in intentionally living out her version of Biblical womanhood that she compiled from many passages of Scripture that she claimed to interpret literally—as in the case of her sitting on the roof as a form of penance for her actions, extrapolated from the book of Proverbs

it is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house (Proverbs 21:9).

After her year-long experiment, Rachel Evans wrote her book, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*, detailing her experience and what she had learned. In her book, Evans made the bold statement that Biblical womanhood did not exist, claiming that

the notion that [the Bible] contains a sort of one-size-fits-all formula for how to be a woman of faith is a myth (Evans 295).

Evans found that she, the person that God had uniquely crafted her to be with her unique gifts and perspectives, could not be squeezed into what she perceived Biblical womanhood to be, which was a cookie-cutter version of femininity that she felt checked all the boxes, but left her feeling uninspired, unfulfilled, and did not utilize her full range of talents and callings. Evans interprets verses that call women to be gentle and quiet of spirit in an outward fashion instead of an inward state of being. Within Evans' experiment and subsequent book, an opportunity exists for women of all standings on Biblical womanhood to meet and find common ground. Evans' assertion that cookie-cutter Biblical womanhood does not exist is true and refreshing to women who feel as if following Biblical gender roles come at the expense of their individuality and callings.

WOMEN AND CAREERS

Much of the discourse between egalitarians and complementarians tends to focus on women's

authority in church leadership and careers, with the former being discussed more in-depth.

Egalitarian's views on Biblical womanhood being equal in application to Biblical manhood bolster and further emphasize women having careers and being in the workforce. Proponents such as Barr claim that the complementarian perspective on women in the workforce stems from an assumption that women are not designed to work outside the home (Barr 166), and this assumption colors the rest of complementarian assumptions about women's roles in society. If this was the complementarian position, then this would be problematic as the Bible does not prohibit a woman from having a career or working outside the home. In Barr's book, she discusses how traditional gender roles place undue emphasis on motherhood and wifehood stating, "Being a wife and a mother gives evangelical women credibility" (Barr 168). Many egalitarian sources merely state equality in application as their support for women in the workforce and spend a good deal of time critiquing the errors of complementarianism regarding women and careers. Lee-Barnewall discusses the difference in approach that society has towards women's and men's career paths; for

men, their career can coexist with their marriage and family without negatively impacting either, while for women, upon marriage, her husband, home, and family are to be her career (Lee-Barnewall 44). To Lee-Barnewall, this difference in perspective is one example of the injustices to women that complementarianism allows and encourages. From the egalitarian perspective, this is a fair assessment and completely justifiable since equality is expected to manifest equally in the application for both men and women. Many egalitarian scholars, such as Lee-Barnewall, Evans, and Barr, would argue that the gender-specific statements are not applicable today for a variety of reasons, either cultural context, misreading of the text, or even that the letter itself has questionable authorship, and as such, should be treated with suspicion,

"The possibility that these letters were not written by Paul may lead some modern readers to dismiss them, or ascribe to them less scriptural importance than Paul's undisputed letters" (Lafosse 31).

A BALANCED APPLICATION

WOMEN IN THE HOME

While Evans' assertion that Biblical womanhood does not exist is not entirely accurate to a historical-grammatical interpretation of God's word, she raises an important point worth discussing further, i.e., that the cookie-cutter idea of Biblical womanhood that Evans discusses

is not the entire picture that Scripture paints. Just as there are certain aspects of a Biblical woman that should be true of all Christian women, there are aspects of Biblical manhood that will be true of all men, and more common traits, such as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians

5:22-23) that should be true of every Christian. These common traits, or principles, of Biblical womanhood should be true of every Christian woman no matter her stage of life, relationship status, denomination, or how many children,

if any, she has; however, the specific ways in which many of these principles manifest will be different based on the individual woman's calling, giftings, and lifestyle.

WOMEN AND CAREERS

Throughout the Bible, women play crucial parts in the furtherance of God's kingdom, just as men do. These women, and many more, show incredible courage, steadfastness, devotion to the Lord and His commandments, a willingness to serve others, and be hospitable, even when the consequences could be life-threatening. To claim that Biblical texts routinely oppress women is to ignore hundreds of Biblical passages where women play integral parts in God's will and plan and are celebrated for the unique way they reflect God's image and further His kingdom.

Additionally, in Proverbs 31:10-31, a beautiful image is given of how God sees a Biblically successful woman. This woman is hardworking, and she is successful in her wise and frugal business decisions. She is charitable, nurturing, kind, and trustworthy. Additionally, the Proverbs 31 woman is many things and fills many roles; she works hard, produces goods that are high quality, sells them, and she strengthens her body. In the 21st century, it might be said that a modern-day Proverbs 31 woman exercises regularly (v. 17), is wise with her finances (v. 14, 16, 18, 20), works hard at her job (v. 19), and she even works into the night (v. 18). This passage could describe many women in 21st century

America, so, what is the difference between the modern-day "career woman" and a woman who embodies Biblical womanhood? The answer to this question lies in Proverbs 31:15:

She riseth also while it is yet night, And giveth meat to her household,

And a portion to her maidens (Proverbs 31:15 KJV).

One of the first actions of this idyllic woman is to care for her home and the people within it. Additionally, throughout Proverbs 31, we see that all this woman's business is centered around what benefits her home and family the most. Does this mean that women in the 21st century cannot seek careers outside the home? Absolutely not! While each woman's situation is different, the principles found in Proverbs 31 offer a decision-making framework that can be utilized by women of all walks of life and circumstances, as further evidenced by the next verse in Proverbs 31:

She considereth a field, and buyeth it:

with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard

She sets about her work vigorously;

Her arms are strong for her tasks.

She sees that her trading is profitable,

And her lamp does not go out at night
(Proverbs 31:16-18 KJV).

The woman described in Proverbs 31 is not sitting at home, unable to pursue her own endeavors or make money to support her family, participate in business transactions, or be entrepreneurial. In fact, she is praised for her productivity, wise investments, and discipline in her finances and labor. She purchases a property and then works that property so it becomes a fruitful and productive place. It can be seen from this passage that Scripture does not ban women from the workforce or chain them to the kitchen, though there are certain limitations placed on specific positions of authority, such as spiritual authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12); instead, it provides direction and points to what the heart of Biblical womanhood should be focused on— the home.

The Biblical woman described throughout Scripture, through a historical-grammatical approach, is a woman who has a heart first for the Lord, then for her family and home, with all her decisions and productivity being centered around these things. The decisions of a Biblical woman may include a career that takes her outside of the home, but her heart and decision-making process will be centered around two primary criteria: 1. What course of action honors the Lord and does not contradict His commands, and 2. What course of action will allow the Biblical woman to continue flourishing and succeeding in her primary ministry – the home and community?

The phrase “working at home” tends to be hotly debated. Some complementarian authors such as Nancy Leigh DeMoss and Debbie Pearl interpret working at home as a directive for women to take care of the home exclusively, with women on the egalitarian side, such as Beth Barr, stating that

Paul says nothing about cooking or cleaning as having unique import for women (Barr 159).

Other egalitarian scholars, such as Mona Lafosse, in an article discussing 1 Timothy and Titus, as they pertain to Biblical gender roles, make the argument that because these commands are given by a man, and as such, allowances must be made because women aren’t given a voice,

They [the letters to Timothy and Titus] are by a man with particular perspectives; women are described and indirectly addressed but not given a voice. Thus, reading what he writes about women entails considering the male values and male assumptions about women and gender roles embedded in what he says (Kruschwitz et al. 31).

While Barr is correct in her assertion that Paul does not give a specific “chore list” for women to follow, she misses the broader picture that the Biblical image of womanhood is more principle-based rather than a chore list and checklist oriented, allowing for an application that not only fits each woman’s unique skillset but her unique life situation. Lafosse raises a point

regarding the personal bias and perception Paul *may* have had; however, in the complementarian view, all Scripture is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and the Bible is itself the Holy and inspired Word of God and God, knowing all, is the ultimate author of these letters, making them relevant and trustworthy. Between the two, Barr's argument is stronger because Paul does not specifically say that women must do all of the cooking and cleaning; however, God still has given women specific domain over the home that they, ultimately, are responsible for.

Does managing a home mean that a woman cannot, Biblically, have a career or endeavors outside the home? By no means. Egalitarians do have a strong point on this specific point; as previously mentioned, Paul does not give women a specific chore list, and complementarianism does not seek to do this either, (though some

of its proponents have pushed for this type of application) rather it seeks to build a framework centered around the family and home from which women can flourish in their unique life situations.

Egalitarians and complementarians agree that a woman does have a role, and an important one at that, in the family. Similar to the issue of value, the issue of women's role in the church community, ministry, and leadership positions, is another point of contention between egalitarian and complementarian scholars. This issue mirrors the discussion about value in that egalitarians believe equal value of men and women means equal opportunity for men and women within the church body, while complementarians believe that men and women's roles in the church are equal in value, but different in manifestation, as will be discussed in the next section.

ROLE IN THE CHURCH

The role of women in the church is an extremely debated subject between complementarians and egalitarians. Many agree that men and women can have similar functions in the church body, but the sticking point for scholars on either side of the issue is whether women *should* have

certain positions of authority in the church. Certain passages of Scripture, such as 1 Timothy 2:11-15, are the center of intense debate, scholarly research, and many divisions within the local and global church body.

BIBLICAL PASSAGES

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. 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. (1 Timothy 2:11-15 KJV)

COMPLEMENTARIAN VIEW

COMMUNITY

Susan Shaw, author of *God Speaks to Us Too: Southern Baptist Women on Church, Home, and Society*, a study on how a specific denomination of women express themselves, reflect God's image, and serve their church community, notes how traditional, or complementarian, gender roles are deeply woven into that specific Southern Baptist community:

For Southern Baptist women, being aware of the daily physical needs of the people in their community is as important as any of the other tasks of the church members. They take seriously the Bible's injunctions to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and care for the sick... most of the women I talked to didn't necessarily see these as women's tasks; men, they explained to me, just wouldn't think to do such things. (Shaw 90).

The women that Shaw talked to in her research lived out Biblical womanhood in a way that only they could. In the context of the above passage, the women in the church brought food, helped with funeral arrangements and cleaned the house, stopped by, talked with, listened to, and otherwise cared for Joan, a woman who had lost her husband. These women utilized their

unique feminine design and gifts to comfort a woman who had suffered an incredible loss through the ministry of food, homemaking, and companionship. As Shaw puts it,

"[p]roviding meals and other forms of nurture is an important part of how these women embody gender and express their complex identities" (Shaw 91).

This study is helpful but limited in scope as it only deals with one denomination of Christian women. However, the principles in this study can be applied to a broader audience. Women are free to have many roles within the church, with very few being reserved solely for qualified men, not just men of any caliber. The Village Church, a large church within the Southern Baptist Convention, led by Pastor Matt Chandler, a leader in complementarianism, says in their statement on women in the church:

We deny that the role of elder being withheld from women diminishes their importance or their influence in the church. The indispensable help women were created to give can and should be exercised in all manner of roles/offices in the church, excepting those reserved for qualified men (The Village Church).

MINISTRY AND LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

Women's qualification for specific roles is another issue brought up to discredit complementarian

gender roles. Complementarian scholars argue that many egalitarians do not fully understand

the difference between *can* and *should* when referencing the limitations placed on women in the Bible, specifically regarding positions of spiritual authority over men. Nothing in Scripture states that women are less intelligent, less spiritual, or less able to do many things that men are instructed to do. However, just because women can perform tasks outside of the Biblical gender roles, such as becoming a pastor, does not mean that women should be performing those tasks.

Qualification is not the issue; instead, the issue is one of divine appointment – a topic that is dealt with extensively in William Weinrich's article *Women in the History of the Church: Learned and Holy, but Not Pastors*. In this article, Weinrich discusses how women have performed many functions within the church that men have, but the critical difference between men's and women's roles in the church is the divine, gender-specific appointment and ordination that lay on men to lead and teach the congregation at large,

[W]omen have done almost everything men have and have done it just as well (Weinrich 273).

In an article titled *Ten Things You Should Know About 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and the Relationship Between Men and Women in the Local Church*, author Sam Storms, a lead pastor at Bridgeway Community Church in Oklahoma, breaks down ten commonly held misconceptions and ideas about 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Storms first addresses the widely held egalitarian assumption that Paul was only prohibiting uneducated women from

teaching men; he states that

Since Paul prohibits all women from teaching men, the egalitarian view must assume that all the women in Ephesus were uneducated. But we know this isn't the case as the example of Priscilla would indicate (Storms 10).

Storms continues to point out issues with this argument in his article, stating,

why would Paul prohibit uneducated women from teaching and not also uneducated men? If the lack of education was the principal obstacle to teaching, then Paul should have extended the prohibition to both genders (Storms 11).

Another issue that is frequently brought up on the egalitarian side regarding this passage is that in 1 Timothy 2: 11-15, Paul is merely exhorting women who were teaching false doctrine and heresy. Storms addresses this issue as well in his article, posing the question,

If Paul's prohibition was provoked by some women teaching heresy in Ephesus, why did he prohibit all women and only women from teaching? (Storms 11).

Many egalitarian scholars will argue that so-called out-of-date gender roles and commands in Scripture were only suited for the culture and era in which the Bible was written or that they are only the result of the Fall and should be ignored as a result. These arguments are faulty from the complementarian perspective for two primary reasons:

1. If Biblical gender roles existed solely because of the Fall, we would see no evidence in Scripture of Biblical gender roles existing before the Fall or exhortations to conform to Biblical gender roles in the New Testament, which was a completely different culture than that of the Old Testament; and

2. The assumption that because Biblical gender roles are not explicitly stated in Genesis 1 and 2 (pre-Fall), they must not have been a part of the original design and can be disregarded has the same logical reasoning as the argument that because murder is not explicitly forbidden in Genesis 1-2, it was not a part of God's original design for humans to not murder each other.

The lack of commandments in Genesis 1-2 is because Creation was perfect; death and sin had not yet entered the world. Therefore, commandments designed to protect a fallen creation were not necessary.

In general, the complementarian view leans more towards providing guidelines, or principles, for women to follow in regard to positions of ministry that are not explicitly

reserved for qualified men. John Piper writes,

There are thousands of different jobs in the church and in the world with an innumerable variety of relationships between men and women. More appropriate than a black-and-white list of 'man's work' and 'woman's work' is a set criteria to help a woman think through whether the responsibilities of any given job allow her to uphold God's created order of mature masculinity and femininity" (Piper 61).

This principle-based approach is the approach that this thesis takes and seems to contradict the egalitarian perspective on the issue, which is that complementarianism gives women strict boundary lines that are non-negotiable and not subject to change based on the woman's unique life circumstances. Complementarianism, as discussed earlier, does not limit women to only working in the home, rather it provides a framework, or outline, of where her priorities should be and encourages women to make decisions about their careers, lives, and homes, within that framework.

EGALITARIAN VIEW

COMMUNITY

Egalitarians generally view women's role in the church body, as a whole, to be of equal *value* and *application* to that of men, in contrast to the complementarian view that men and women have equal value in the church body, but

different applications of their God given gifts and talents. One scholar, in the book *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, claims that an equal in value but different in function approach to gender roles

in the church is an oxymoron in that the very nature of distinct functions creates inequality because

the existence of gender role differences neither entails nor justifies a permanent hierarchy of male authority (Pierce, Groothius, and Fee 314).

This claim is justified by the analysis that,

advocates of male authority seem to have difficulty acknowledging that the *reason* for the difference and the *nature* of the function determine whether such a difference can logically coexist with equality of being (Pierce, Groothius, and Fee 315).

In this view, a difference in authority is equal to a difference in value, and the conclusions

that complementarianism draws from their equal value/unequal function argument are invalid because, in the egalitarian view, the authority of men and subordination of women in the context of marriage and the church is due to a perceived deficiency of women that requires some sort of authority over her in order, because this deficiency or “inferior ability” cannot be overcome (Pierce, Groothius, and Fee 316). Therefore, women’s equality in the church body and full participation in the church community is tarnished by the fact that, due to certain roles being prohibited for women, there is a lesser value placed on women’s role in the church; subsequently, the subordination of complementarian gender roles leads to inequality in the church body.

MINISTRY AND LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

For egalitarians, equality under Christ extends to the roles that men and women have in ministry and leadership in the church. One scholar in her critique and examination of egalitarianism and complementarianism, notes

for egalitarians, it is an equality in which there are no restrictions on women’s roles in ministry and leadership, and they share equally in decision making in marriage” (Lee-Barnewall 83).

Egalitarians draw on the dignity that Jesus treated women with, and generally operate under the assumption that gender boundaries in the complementarian definition were implemented

because of sin. Egalitarians frequently draw on women being Jesus’ disciples in the New Testament as another justification for women in positions of authority within the church,

Women were part of this larger group that followed Jesus. One of the most remarkable features of the Gospels is the way in which women are portrayed as disciples... women appear significantly in this role (Lee-Barnewall 93).

Beth Allison Barr sees complementarian restrictions on women in leadership as a result of the patriarchy that was an established social practice at the time of Paul’s writings,

the household codes seem to sanctify the Roman patriarchal structure: the authority of the paterfamilias (husband/father) over women, children, and slaves (Barr 46).

With this perspective, it is natural to assume that, since Paul was exhorting women to go with their

specific cultural expectations for women, that the same can apply to 21st-century women. Thus, in this perspective, women are free to behave in a way that follows the gender norms of the 21st century in regard to their marriage, home, children, church life, and ministry opportunities, and not violate Scriptural principles or commandments.

A BALANCED APPLICATION

Obviously, there is a fundamental divide that is impossible to balance between the egalitarian and complementarian viewpoints on the role of women in the church. The complementarian view of women's role in the church is one of full participation, with the understanding that certain positions of spiritual authority, such as elder or deacon, are reserved solely for qualified men. Egalitarians generally view passages such as 1 Timothy 2:12-15 as culturally bound with the peculiar situation of the Ephesian church (Adámek). This view is problematic to many complementarians because this type of approach

“destroy[s] the authority of the Bible. It becomes a matter of an individual who decides whether to accept or reject particular New Testament writing based on his/her subjective literary and redaction criticisms” (Adámek).

Though complementarianism is often misapplied, many times in a way that puts too many limitations on a woman and what she can Biblically do, this does not mean that the essence of complementarianism is not Biblically based. Complementarian gender roles allow for

a great deal of freedom within the church body. Some churches, such as egalitarian scholar Beth Allison Barr's former church, extend 1 Timothy 2:11-15 to high school-aged young men as well as older men, while other churches allow women to teach young men through their high school years but not afterward. This is an example of a grey area within complementarity that may be applied in specific churches as they feel called to apply it. These grey areas are opportunities for grace on all sides and opportunities to grow and learn from other Christians in their application of complementarian gender roles, so long as these boundaries are applied in a way that is not abusive, denigrating to women, or inconsistent with Biblical principles.



Women in the Bible

How can a woman take dominion over the earth in a Biblically appropriate way? How can a woman reflect God's image? These questions, too, can be answered with Scripture. Looking at the

examples of women found in Scripture, a picture of Biblical womanhood is formed by looking at the hearts of these women, their actions, and how the Lord used them in their unique situations.

DEBORAH & Jael

Deborah and her story give principles by which women can live their lives. Even though many aspects of her story are descriptive of Deborah's unique situation in Biblical history, there are prescriptive elements in her story that can be applied to women's lives today. The stories of Deborah and Jael take place in Judges 4-5. Deborah is a wife, prophetess, and the judge of Israel (Judges 4:4-5), but who her husband is and how and why she came to judge Israel is information that is not given. In her time judging Israel, Deborah prophesies that because the men of Israel, led by Barak, will not go into battle without her, God will essentially take the victory away from the men, leading to their shame, and deliver Israel through a woman (Judges 4:9). While their biographical backgrounds are not discussed in totality, the inclusion of both women in Judges suggests that their stories are important

Jael fulfilled Deborah's prophecy regarding women's role in the fall Sisera and played an important role in the historical military narrative of the text. When Sisera chose to flee the battlefield instead of dying with his men, he looked for refuge and hospitality in Jael's tent.

After promising to hide him, she waited until he was asleep and instead murdered him by driving a tent peg into his skull. Much like single mothers must fill the role that a man would in raising children and providing for a home, Deborah and Jael step up to fill a vacuum left by the men of Israel, to the men's shame, and step outside their normal, God-given boundaries to ensure the safety of Israel and bring peace to the land, which Israel enjoys after these events for 40 years (Judges 5:31). In Judges 4-5, Jael uses her hospitality to draw Sisera into her tent, and once he falls asleep, she kills him.

The account of Deborah and Jael in Judges 4-5 gives some principles by which Christian women can structure their lives and decision-making. Both Deborah and Jael are willing to do the work of the Lord and are willing to be used by the Lord to bring about His will. While much of what is described in Judges 4-5 in regard to gender roles is primarily descriptive of the unique circumstances being described in Judges 4-5, these two women are courageous, they take action to protect and defend those in their charge, and they are willing to step up when circumstances demanded it to fill a need that was not being met.

ESTHER

The book of Esther is another example of a historical account in the Bible that is descriptive of unique situations in the Biblical narrative while also being prescriptive of principles and ideas that can be lived out in women's lives. The text suggests that Esther was taken to the king's palace against her will and purified for one year. As a Jewish woman and a foreigner in the land, Esther would have been at risk and fearing for her life, something that is alluded to with multiple references throughout the book of Esther stating that she had not made it known that she was a Jew, Esther responds to her unique situation with grace, gaining the favor of Hegai, the eunuch placed in charge of the women (Esther 2:8). In fact, she finds such incredible favor in the eyes of Hegai that she is given seven maidens from the king's palace and the best place in the harem (Esther 2:9). Additionally, Esther exercises wisdom in her willingness to listen to the counsel of Hegai when she is preparing to see the king; as a result, she is viewed favorably by all who see her (Esther 2:15). When Esther is taken to the king, he loves her above all the women in the harem and makes her queen in place of Vashti. Esther's virtue and courage in the face of difficult circumstances continue throughout her time as queen; first, when Mordecai discovers a plot to harm king Ahasuerus, she acts quickly and decisively to ensure his safety (Esther 2:21-23).

One of the most notable and widely discussed parts of the book of Esther is how she saves the

Jewish people from genocide at the hands of Haman by risking her life to make a request to the king and exposing Haman's plot. Though she is queen, Esther still cares for Mordecai,

*"Much like single mothers
must fill the role that a
man would in raising
children and providing for
a home, Deborah and Jael
step up to fill a vacuum
left by the men of Israel,
to the men's shame"*

assumed to be her only living family member, and when he is mourning in the midst of the city, she sends men to discover the cause of his grief (Esther 4:4-5). Upon learning of the upcoming extermination of her people (Esther 3:13), Esther asks her people to pray and fast; she prays and fasts herself and prepares to go before the king, knowing that she very well may die as a result (Esther 4:8-17). Because of Esther's selfless willingness to die trying to save her people, Israel is saved from Haman's plot, and the line of Abraham that eventually leads to Christ can continue, leading not only to the saving of Israel but the saving of all peoples and nations who trust in Christ.

Esther's life and noble response to the no doubt challenging and incredibly painful and stressful circumstances she was in show how a Biblical woman is courageous, as in the case of

Deborah and Jael, but also willing to stand up for what is right and for people who have little to no representation or protection and doing so at the potential cost of her own life.

JEZEBEL

Looking next at an extreme example of what happens when womanhood is used for immoral and evil purposes rather than for constructive and Biblical purposes. Jezebel is often referred to as the embodiment of womanly evil. Jezebel appears throughout 1 and 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and is briefly mentioned in Revelation 2:20. Jezebel is identified as the daughter of the Zidonian king. 1 Kings 11 states that the Lord had explicitly commanded the Israelites and their kings not to intermarry with the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites. King Ahab's marriage to Jezebel is blatant disobedience to the Lord's commandment and an extreme amplification of King Solomon's downfall through his wives' pagan religions (1 Kings 16:31, 1 Kings 11:1-2). Throughout king Ahab's reign, Israel is brought into increasing turmoil in part due to his blatant and unprecedented wickedness, which his wife spurs on:

“But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up (1 Kings 21:25).

Jezebel routinely set herself up against the things and people of the Lord, becoming the sworn enemy and antagonist of the prophet Elijah (1

Kings 19:1), murdering in order to gain property (1 Kings 21:4-16), murdering the prophets of the Lord, except for the 100 that Elijah was able to save (1 Kings 18:13), and leading her children astray to sin in the same manner that she and her husband did (1 Kings 22:52). Jezebel stirs up wickedness in others, tears down those who block her path, and she not only is opposed to the Lord and His commands but actively persecutes, hunts down, and murders those who are of the Lord.

Jezebel's life is the antithesis of Biblical womanhood. As shown in 1 and 2 Kings, structured life around her own gain and power, whereas a Biblical woman's life should be structured around serving others and the Lord; Jezebel led her children astray to sin in the eyes of the Lord, whereas a Biblical woman is instructed to raise up her children in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6); Jezebel routinely persecuted and murdered the people of God, whereas the Biblical woman is nurturing and builds up the people in her community, and Jezebel is a violent and rage-filled woman, whereas the Biblical woman is peaceful, patient, and seeks to forgive, rather than revenge.

MARY (MOTHER OF JESUS)

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is one of the most esteemed women in Scripture. She is first mentioned in the Gospels, specifically in Luke's gospel where more details of the conception of Christ are given. From her introduction in the New Testament to her last mention in Acts 1:14 describing her as one of the many who devoted themselves to prayer after Christ's ascension. Many are familiar with Mary's story because of Christmas, but there are some key elements of her later life that are often overlooked. Mary is presented with an extremely unusual and challenging set of circumstances, when an angel appears to her and tells her that she will soon be pregnant with the Son of God, her response is

one of humility and willingness "And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). Mary offered her body up as a sort of sacrifice to the Lord. Childbirth was an incredibly dangerous thing in the ancient world, and pursuant to Jewish law, she could have lost not only her marriage to Joseph as a result of her pregnancy, but also her life. Throughout Jesus' ministry, Mary is there supporting him, treasuring up things in her heart (Luke 2:19), and was even present at his crucifixion (John 19:25-27). Through all of the trials that Mary experienced, even seeing her son die in a painful and humiliating way, she remained faithful to the Lord.

RUTH

The book of Ruth gives the account of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, and is often cited as one of many echoes of Christ in the Old Testament. In the text, Ruth is described as one of Naomi's daughters-in-law. She was married to one of Naomi's sons, but the text does not specify whether she was married to was Mahlon or Chilion. What the Bible does tell us is that Ruth was loyal to Naomi even after her husband died, even though she would have been completely justified in doing so. Ruth instead pledges her loyalty to Naomi:

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy

people shall be my people, and thy god my God (Ruth 1:16-18).

After Orpah, Naomi's other daughter in law, decides to go back to her own people, Naomi and Ruth travel to Bethlehem in search of food. Once they arrive in Bethlehem, Ruth begins going out to glean the fields – a common social practice during this time where farmers would leave portions of their fields unharvested so that the poor and widowed would be able to eat. Providentially, Ruth ends up gleaning in the field of Boaz, a man who was a kinsman of Naomi's husband and would be able to redeem Ruth according to the social practices of the time. Ruth continues to glean in Boaz's field for protection, at his request (Ruth 2:8-9). Boaz also

instructs his servants to leave extra grain in her path and allows her to eat and drink with his servants in the field (Ruth 2:9-16). Ruth responds to this kind treatment from Boaz with humility and grace (Ruth 2:10) and takes the initiative in her engagement to Boaz based on Naomi's wise advice. Ruth is praised by Boaz for her

willingness to serve Naomi, her selflessness and how well she took care of Naomi (Ruth 2:11-12). Ruth is an excellent example of a woman who, in a less than ideal set of circumstances, was willing to go into a strange foreign place to care for her mother-in-law who had no other family to care for her, based on the context we are given.

MARY & MARTHA

Mary and Martha are mentioned throughout the Gospels as supporters of Christ's ministry. In the account of the raising of Lazarus, and Mary and Martha are mentioned after this account when Mary anoints Jesus' feet with expensive perfume before his death on the cross (John 12:1-8). In this latter account, Mary serves Christ by anointing him and wiping his feet with her hair, while Martha served dinner (John 12:2-3). Not much else is mentioned about Mary and Martha, other than their brother Lazarus, no family is mentioned, and Mary's identity has been debated by many scholars as to whether she is Mary Magdalene or a different Mary. In Luke 10, the well-known story of Mary and Martha, one worrying about the housework, while the other is faithfully listening at Christ's feet. In this story

it is easy to frame Martha as entirely wrong in her concern. However, Martha had the proper priorities in mind, she may have placed them in the wrong order. Martha is an example of what happens when the priorities of the family and home surpass the priority of serving and honoring the Lord. Mary is willing to let the house be a little less clean, and let dinner take a little longer because she is prioritizing her time with the Lord. While many would argue that Mary presents the better picture of a Biblical woman, when you combine the two women, both who served Christ faithfully through his earthly ministry, Mary who anointed Christ's feet and faithfully served in Christ's ministry, and Martha who received Christ into her home (Luke 10:38).

SUMMARY

Looking through Bible, there are many more accounts of women who, though they are not featured heavily in Biblical narratives and accounts, play crucial parts in the progression of the Biblical story, such as the women explicitly mentioned by name in the genealogy of Jesus:

Ruth, Bathsheba, Tamar, and Mary (Matthew 1:3,5-6,16). In the New Testament church, women play a crucial part in supporting, contributing to, growing, and setting good examples for other young women. Ruth's faithfulness and trust in the Lord, coupled with Boaz's willingness

to redeem her continued the line of Christ. Tamar's actions, though strange to our time and culture, led to her being counted as more righteous than Judah when he refused to give his youngest son in marriage to her (Genesis 38:26) and through her faithfulness, the line of Jesus continued further still. Mary's willingness to bear the Son of God, even when it was shameful for a woman to be pregnant outside of wedlock, and then remaining faithful through her life, even witnessing her son's crucifixion, not only physically brought Jesus Christ into this world, but devoted herself to Christ's ministry, even after his death. Tabitha, in Acts 9:36, was full of good works and charity; Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James (among other women), ministered to and cared for Jesus during his ministry on earth (Mark 15:40-41), Priscilla was a fellow worker with Paul and suffered with her husband and Paul as fellow prisoners (Romans 16:3-4), Mary Magdalene brought the Good News of Jesus' resurrection to the disciples (John 20:18), Miriam, Mary, Deborah, all have songs of praise recorded in Scripture (Exodus 15:21, Luke 1:46-55, Judges 5), Lydia volunteered her home, time, and hospitality to Paul and those traveling with

him, at the risk of imprisonment by the Roman authorities in order to serve them and further the Gospel (Acts 16:14-15).

These women represent very unique moments in the Biblical story. Only one woman bore the Son of God, was a judge in ancient Israel, or was able to represent the Jewish people in their persecution. Jezebel represents a unique perspective as the antithesis of a Biblical woman. Mary and Martha show how to balance the spiritual with the practical aspects of life. Ruth shows how perseverance, patience, and the importance of listening to wise counsel. These women no doubt can provide principles by which women can live their lives, despite the very unique circumstances, both in history and in the Biblical narrative. In addition to the unique moments that these women represent, they also represent principles of Biblical womanhood that transcend culture and time. Now that Biblical womanhood has been examined from the historical-grammatical perspective and through a survey of women in the Old and New Testaments, a more complete and balanced definition of what a Biblical woman is can be made.

A Balanced Definition of Biblical Womanhood

Looking throughout the Bible, a Biblical woman can be defined as someone who primarily puts God, her family, and her home at the top of her priority list, making decisions based on what is best for them and what honors the Lord. A Biblical woman is made in the image of God and

is valuable because of that, she fears the Lord, cares for her body as a temple, dresses modestly, and is wise with her finances. She works hard and is disciplined, cares for and nurtures those around her, and centers her life around her home, the people in it, and how to best love and

serve them. She is full of good works and charity, is faithful to the end, brings the Good News to those around her, and volunteers her home, time, and service to her church and community. A Biblical woman is courageous and is willing to live a life that honors Christ even if it means losing her life. The above Scripture references are by no means the only verses in the Bible

referencing these character traits, but they still form a picture of a principles-based woman who embodies Biblical womanhood beautifully and practically. This definition of Biblical womanhood can be applied to any Christian woman, regardless of her employment status, number of children, marital status, or individual callings and giftings.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

DEFINITION VS. APPLICATION

Biblical womanhood has routinely been misunderstood in the egalitarian perspective, leading to a negative perception of an oppressed and restricted woman who must stay at home, ignore her spiritual and practical gifts, and live a life restrained to her home and the church, this last with extreme limitations placed on it.

On the complementarian side of the issue, an equal value of men and women with differing applications often manifests with a stereotyped woman (often a married, stay at home mother with many children and a spotless house) being idealized to the extreme positive, often at the exclusion of other ways in which Biblical womanhood manifests. The focus on this manifestation of a Biblical woman leads many women on both sides of the issue to feel they are not fully supported by the church, despite the incredible Biblical evidence that supports life choices such as singleness for the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 7). This tunnel vision regarding the definition of Biblical womanhood

also leads to the exclusion, or lack of support, single mothers, women who cannot have children for one reason or another or are called to have a career. Thomas Schreiner, a Biblical scholar, and complementarian, in his article *The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples of Teaching*, acknowledges the effects of misunderstanding of the value of Biblical womanhood:

men have often hurt women. They have treated them as lesser citizens of the kingdom, and some men have denigrated or overlooked their contribution in ministry (Schreiner 209).

It is important to acknowledge that the misunderstanding and subsequent misapplication of Biblical womanhood can be so damaging to women, and men, because it establishes the importance that such a topic has, as well as the implications of not handling these issues in a Biblical way.

This misunderstanding of Biblical womanhood is not only found on the egalitarian side of the issue. Often the complementarian view on women's role in the home is taken to an extreme with the woman being viewed purely as a means of sexual gratification for the man, the sole caretaker of the house, and essentially being denigrated to a house servant instead of an equally valuable and precious representative of God's image. Authors such as Debbie Pearl, author of *Created to Be His Help Meet, Preparing to Be a Help Meet, To Train Up a Child*, and more, and cofounder of No Greater Joy Ministries with her husband Michael Pearl, are frequently critiqued by complementarians and egalitarians alike for their one-dimensional depiction of men and women, the extreme legalistic directions and guidance given to young women on gender roles, and the misrepresentation of certain passages of Scripture while ignoring others that do not lend themselves to such an extreme view of Scripture. Pearl's book is a good example of the main issue that surrounds complementarianism, which manifests primarily in the ground-level application and non-scholarly writings, such as Pearl's Bible study, and not so much in the scholarly discourse and discussion on the issue. Tim Challies, an associate pastor and contributor to the "Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood", writes in his review of *Created to Be His Help Meet*,

the broad theology of complementarity is a consistent thread from the first chapter to the last and, when combined with some wise and clever insights,

assures that there is some value in this book. Alas, these nuggets of gold are surrounded by too much waste, too much folly masquerading as biblical wisdom (Challies 41).

Representations of Biblical womanhood such as the view Debbie Pearl puts forth in her book are damaging to the perception and application of *true* Biblical womanhood as defined by complementarianism. Pearl's Biblical womanhood, on the surface, seems quite lovely, but it places too much of what is the *shared burden* of a marriage's health and home solely on the wife,

She seems to have no category for a woman who does her absolute best, who does everything by the book... and who still has a failing marriage Challies 45).

Additionally, Pearl's representation of marriage as the sole reason for existence and avenue for women's fulfillment is incredibly inaccurate to Scripture and potentially damaging to those women who may never get married, are divorced or widowed, or are dealing with a failing marriage. Pearl's statements such as the following,

If you are a wife you were created to fill a need, and in that capacity, you are a 'good thing' a helper suited to the needs of a man. This is how God created you, and it is your purpose for existing (Pearl)

The only position where you will find real fulfillment as a woman is as a help meet to your husband (Pearl),

offer an incomplete and skewed view of what Biblical womanhood truly is, and how it is supposed to manifest in the lives of women in all different walks of life.

On the egalitarian side, Biblical womanhood is misunderstood, misapplied, and often treated with hostility as Biblical gender roles are treated as something toxic or even sinful because “[p]atriarchy wasn’t what God wanted; patriarchy was a result of sin” (Barr 29). Women’s ability to fully participate in the church body and their equality in God’s and the church’s eyes are tarnished by the fact that, due to certain roles being reserved only for *qualified men*, there is a lesser value placed on women’s role in the church; subsequently, the subordination of complementarian gender roles leads to inequality in the church body. Misunderstanding Biblical womanhood takes many forms, such as Rachel Held Evan’s creative interpretation of Proverbs 21:9 and living out that passage of Scripture by sitting on the roof as self-given punishment for her sins and disobedience to her husband during her year-long experiment with her version of Biblical womanhood. Taking certain passages of Scripture that are clearly meant to be allegorical or didactic in nature as gospel truth when defining Biblical womanhood, especially when the verse in question does not deal with principles of Biblical womanhood. This type of misunderstanding unintentionally makes a mockery of true Biblical womanhood in all of its beauty, power, and potential and presents a view of it to the world that causes such

negative stigmatization of Biblical womanhood. Additionally, many egalitarian scholars will claim oppression when discussing Biblical womanhood, rather than intelligent design, because of the historic misapplication of the principles of Biblical womanhood.

Egalitarian scholar Jennifer Sims, in her thesis on the detriment of the Christian patriarchy, defines Biblical womanhood as follows:

The virtuous wife must also submit to her husband, dress conservatively to his satisfaction, bear and rear large broods of children, at least six but often more, homeschool all the children, keep the home tidy and clean, and be intimately available to her husband at his whim. She must comply with all the above responsibilities, as well as adhere to his strict limitations. She must not work outside the home, she must not attempt to thwart her husband’s authority, she must not attempt to have authority over any man, she must not complain about her lot in life, she must not use any form of birth control. She must submit to her husband in all things. She must leave all final decisions to her husband and not argue. All of the above is to be accepted and executed graciously. Only then can she truly be a virtuous wife (Sims 3).

As has been shown through Scripture and scholarly discourse, this definition of Biblical womanhood is not only inaccurate, but the “virtuous wife,” a phrase most likely originating from Proverbs 31, is nowhere close to the *actual*

woman described in Proverbs 31, Titus 2:3-5, 1 Timothy 2:11-15, or any other Scriptural passage that defines what a Biblical woman is. Sims' definition is incredibly derogatory to those who have actual Scriptural backing and convictions that Biblical womanhood, in *any* manifestation, makes women weak, puts them in a position of what is essentially slavery, and places undue burdens on women to be considered a good wife and woman. Additionally, Sims' definition of Biblical womanhood does not understand or allow for the different ways in which Biblical womanhood can manifest in the lives of women while still holding true to the principles by which Christian women should live their lives. This is but one example of how Biblical womanhood is routinely misunderstood and stigmatized by society.

In society at large, Biblical gender roles are routinely misunderstood, in part because of a misunderstanding as to what the Bible says, as well as a general misconception of the culture in which Biblical women existed. An article for the

Manchester Historian, a university newspaper, states,

[w]omen have sadly been at the Bible's mercy for too long in an attempt to sustain an agenda of days past

The definition of Biblical womanhood based on Scripture is in no way a woman who is a victim, powerless, or under the control of any human agenda, as has been discussed in previous sections. Based on these statements and definitions, it is plain to see that Biblical womanhood, especially regarding homemaking and the practical application of the principles of Biblical womanhood, has been stigmatized negatively in society and in the church. Therefore, there is a great need for a solution that addresses this stigmatization and counters it by showing Biblical womanhood for what it actually is, why it is relevant to Christian women in the 21st century, and celebrating the myriad of ways it can be implemented in the lives of women today.

Stakeholders

The target demographic for the proposed solution is the young Christian woman who is caught between the two extreme views on what womanhood is. This woman will have a vague understanding of what the Bible says about Biblical womanhood pertaining to the home and family, but also have callings in other fields

that she wants to utilize for the Lord and will not know how to rectify them with either of the two prevalent extreme views on what Biblical womanhood is. This woman will be considering each view and deciding where she falls in relation to the two extremes.

Research Implications

The expected research implications are that young Christian women will be able to apply the practical aspects of Biblical womanhood more effectively, and be less stigmatized by society and the church as a result of their choice

to live a life based on the principles of Biblical womanhood, which will positively impact their sense of satisfaction and happiness and help them live more productive and fulfilling lives in line with Scriptural teachings..

Case Studies

In order to determine successful methods of communicating through visuals, designing for women, and incorporating subject matter/ symbolism in a way that enhances the content

of the text while remaining cohesive, additional research was conducted through case studies and visual analyses.

EDUCATING THROUGH VISUALS

To determine the best way to effectively educate young Christian women through the final deliverable, additional research was conducted on how visuals impact the retention of complex topics, as well as how to successfully implement the communication of complex topics, in a way that is both usable and visually pleasing to young Christian women.

Following design guidelines for creating engaging infographics is essential to communicate and visually appeal to the reader effectively (Scott et al.). One key element of creating successful infographics is striking a balance between visuals and text (Scott et al.). When this balance of visuals and text is thrown off frequently, the reader is either overwhelmed by the dense blocks of text, or due to the oversized or overcrowded visual aids, the reader has to hunt for the text. However, when the balance of text and imagery is in

harmony, the reader can more fully understand and thereby retain the information given because there is a concrete mental picture to accompany the information.

According to scientists, the human brain can process visual information up to 60,000 times faster than it can process textual information (Gillett); therefore, using visuals when communicating increases the likelihood of understanding and retention of the presented information. Furthermore, when creating infographics specifically, one group of scholars state in an in-depth article covering the creation of successful infographics that

text should be used sparingly... and should provide clarity and understanding of the concepts that are presented visually (Scott et al.).

Consequently, the visuals in an infographic should be relatively self-explanatory within the infographic with text being used only where necessary to clarify essential points further or explain data briefly. Additionally, in the same article referenced above discussing the successful design of infographics, seven guidelines are laid out using the acronym GRAPHIC.

By applying the aforementioned guidelines, successful infographics and didactic visual aids can be achieved for the final deliverable that are easy to understand, pleasant to look at, and add depth and quality to the final deliverable while the infographics and didactic visual aids ensure that the visuals created are cohesive and refined.

Beyond infographics, the coupling of text with imagery has immense benefits for learning due to the fact that 65% of the population is estimated to be visual learners and visual information comprises 90% of the information sent to one's brain (Gillett). Failing to properly utilize visuals effectively could result in a poorly

executed final deliverable that fails in educating young, Christian women. Additionally, studies conducted on different learning formats have shown that learners retain 80% of what is seen versus a mere 20% of what is read and 10% of what is heard. To best educate the target audience, using visuals in combination with text is crucial to the success of the final deliverable.

Instead of making a visual solution that is crowded with unnecessary imagery, or largely text-based with scant room for visual aids to assist in the learning process, here the final deliverables will incorporate a balance of text and didactic visuals to best assist women in retaining the information presented in the manual, providing clear instructions and other helpful information. The GRAPHIC acronym (figure 1) discussed previously will serve as one of the guiding tools for creating posters, and other visual content, that will educate young Christian women on the practical aspects of Biblical womanhood and the research conducted on designing for women specifically, as discussed in the next section.



DESIGNING FOR WOMEN

When designing an item, book, website, app, etc., it is crucial to know the intended audience's expectations, biases, and general preferences as well as the current or primary visual language being used by others in communicating to the target audience. To best design for young Christian women, additional research was conducted on gender-specific marketing and product design. Additionally, visual analyses of existing, popular young Women's Bible studies and devotionals were conducted which will be explored in depth in the next section.

A large portion of products designed for women incorporate what is generally thought of as a "feminine" color palette. In an article on design stereotypes related to the gender of the target audience, the author, Ana Darstaru, discusses how women generally prefer brighter, more vivid colors, incorporating reds and pinks to greater degrees than men who tend to prefer darker, more toned-down colors. Compositionally, women tend to prefer cheerier, more open layouts that incorporate smooth lines and organic shapes (Darstaru) in aspects of design ranging from icons to visual aids to font choice, whereas men prefer more subdued, simplistic, and bolder fonts that have very little ornamentation, and, in general, men tend to favor geometric designs and shapes.

Regarding subject matter, many women's Bible studies and devotionals rely heavily on floral, pink, and bubbly imagery. For example, *The Beautiful Word*, a 365-day devotional, features a

wealth of floral imagery and lettering; *Beholding and Becoming* by Ruth Shou Simons, *True Woman 201* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss and Mary Kassian, and the covers of many non-illustrated women's studies such as *In His Image*, *Women of the Word*, and *None Like Him*, all books by Jen Wilkin, use floral imagery either as the sole visual image, or as the primary influence and inspiration for the covers, the interior design of the book, and the overall color scheme. Because of the overwhelming use of floral imagery in these resources, floral designs will be largely avoided; however, organic shapes, warm colors, and other feminine design elements in this section will be incorporated.

When designing any product, it is crucial to properly utilize the basic elements of design to create visually pleasing, user-friendly, and communicative content. Poor design choices such as overloading the page with distracting visuals, a color palette that is too broad, and even poor font choices can, and will, significantly undermine the success of a design. In an article on gender-targeted advertising by Richard Johnson, the author describes how men and women respond to advertisements differently, with different intentions and motivations. Johnson states that communicating to women is more successful when messages tend towards being descriptive (Johnson). With women being more verbally communicative than men (Johnson), the proper use of words, instructions, and descriptions is crucial to appealing to a

female audience. Therefore, the final deliverable will use a balance of text and images in a way that appeals to women specifically.

Beholding and Becoming, a Bible study written and illustrated by Ruth Chou Simons, is an excellent example of how to design specifically for women, without crossing the line into cliché visuals, as will be discussed in the visual analysis section that follows. Additionally, Simons' approach to the layout of her study is incredibly successful, especially considering the previously discussed research on designing for women. One of the most successful parts of Simons' study is the two-part approach that Simons takes with each chapter: the first section focuses on God and Scripture, and the second section shows how to practically apply what was learned from the reader's study of and subsequent reflection of the first section. Because this approach focuses on the why and the what, a similar approach will be taken in the final deliverable to create content that is memorable, grounded in Scripture, and accessible to young Christian women. Additionally, the intentional use of symbolism in a way that not only complements the text in the study but that enhances the content and makes it more memorable is a tactic from Simons' study that will be utilized in the final deliverables.

The Weekly Faith Project, by Zondervan, is another Bible study that is laid out in an effective way to address women specifically. *The Weekly Faith Project* will be analyzed more closely in the next section, but the study's layout was also analyzed and studied here in order to determine successful ways to design the final deliverable.

The Weekly Faith Project is a year-long, weekly Bible journal published and designed by Zondervan. The motivation and intentions of *The Weekly Faith Project* are to provide Christian women with a resource that nourishes their faith and helps them thrive and grow in their relationship with God. *The Weekly Faith Project* 52 weekly parts that have been divided into five larger sections. Each of the five sections deals with an aspect of faith; specifically what it is, what it does, when that particular aspect of faith is difficult, etc.

Each weekly portion of *The Weekly Faith Project* begins with a Bible verse followed by a brief devotional with prompts for the women readers to reflect on and journal about in the space provided. There are two prompts per week, presented either as questions about what the verse means, journaling prompts, or opportunities for the women to specifically list or journal about how they can apply the weekly verse to their lives. This study has been designed in such a way where the user will slowly be learning more about faith, beginning with a 13-week section defining faith and ending with a five-week section that discusses the fruits and rewards of living faithfully.

The Weekly Faith Project does not specifically address Biblical womanhood, though the focus of the devotional is faith - one of the major components in the spiritual facet of a Biblical woman. *The Weekly Faith Project* also deals with God, specifically how to know God and how faith reflects, honors, and obeys Him. In this way, *The Weekly Faith Project* addresses parts of

the relational aspect of Biblical womanhood, though not in a way where Biblical womanhood is clearly being taught and addressed. One of the challenges that a devotional book such as *The Weekly Faith Project* faces is how to encourage consistent engagement resulting in consistent use.

Due to the once-a-week nature of *The Weekly Faith Project*, it is potentially difficult for busy women to stay on track. Potentially in response to this problem, *The Weekly Faith Project* has not included a calendar or a time constraint other than the 52-week recommended format, in an effort to encourage women to simply fit the devotional as best they can into their lives without the stress of falling behind that tends to come with a more strictly structured yearly devotional plan.

The final deliverable is directly targeted at young, Christian women, therefore, the visuals and aesthetic choices will need to be specifically designed to attract and assist young Christian

women in understanding and applying practical Biblical womanhood. However, with the target audience, designing a unique visual solution that does not blend in with the plethora of Biblical resources for young, Christian women that currently exist will be an added challenge and incredibly important if the final deliverable is to stand out and be impactful.

In conclusion, the research conducted on designing for women will influence the color scheme, font choice, and iconography used in the final deliverables which will incorporate a feminine color palette with vivid, warm colors while also incorporating organic shapes and fonts that are stylistic and easy to read. Additionally, incorporating the basic elements of design into the final deliverable is crucial for producing a visually appealing product that is eye-catching and will keep the viewer engaged long enough to communicate the intended message.

VISUAL ANALYSES

TRUE WOMAN 201: INTERIOR DESIGN

True Woman 201 was written by Mary A. Kassian and Nancy Leigh DeMoss and published by Moody Publishers. The text is a ten-week Bible study designed to be used in a group setting that deals with ten specific areas of Biblical womanhood. The study is a blend of text, images, and interactive sections including fill in the blank pages and crossword puzzles that

utilize keywords and Bible verses to promote memory, engagement, and learning. This study focuses primarily on Titus 2, with each chapter addressing a different facet of Biblical womanhood from Titus 2; however, the study does pull from other Scripture passages to provide additional specific examples of Biblical womanhood and provide more context by

allowing Scripture to interpret itself.

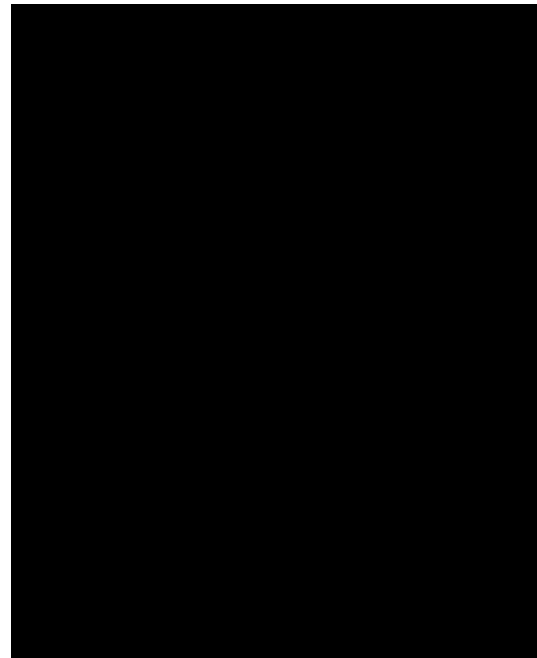
The audience for this resource appears to be young, Christian women who desire guidance in the ways of Biblical womanhood. However, the study is written for older women, single women, and married women, etc. as it makes special note in each section of how that section's aspect of Biblical womanhood applies to women in different life stages and situations. In this study, complex ideas are illustrated through storytelling, analysis of Scripture, and interactive word activities as mentioned above, such as crossword puzzles, fill-in-the-blanks, and physically crossing out words associated with behaviors not appropriate for a Biblical woman. The iconography used throughout the study consists of domestic/renovation subjects such as cloth, baking, and painting walls. There is additionally, a heavy floral theme running throughout the study, with watermarked floral patterns filling gaps in the pages and accenting otherwise unadorned spots on the pages.

The composition of the study comes across as slightly chaotic and overwhelming. The amount of color and quantity of images is overly stimulating at best, and at its worst a distraction from the text itself. However, the composition is cohesive throughout the study, and the color



scheme and design elements repeated throughout are not distracting from each other, and any given page does not stand out from the others.

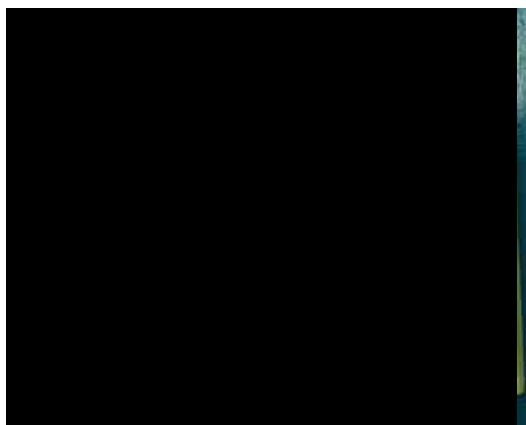
In short, the design and composition of the study are consistent, though the intensity of the decoration and visuals are distracting and pull focus from the content of the study. While this study is effective and has been widely acclaimed, the visuals are overwhelming and often distracting from the content itself and are not being used in a way that emphasizes the text and the topic at hand. The images and illustrations throughout the book are merely accents that are in the same general topic or area as the texts. Therefore, the images are underutilized



as an educational tool that adds to the content without distracting from the text.

On the topic of Biblical womanhood, *True*

Woman 201 addresses the spiritual aspect of Biblical womanhood in-depth, as well as touching on the relational aspect of Biblical womanhood as it flows from the relational aspect. Practical Biblical womanhood is addressed briefly, primarily in the context of Paul's exhortation that women be keepers at home in Titus 2; however, specific ways in which women can best implement practical Biblical womanhood are not discussed.



Beholding and Becoming was written and illustrated by Ruth Chou Simons and published by Harvest House. *Beholding and Becoming* is a sixteen part women's study focused on the art of everyday worship. Each of the sixteen chapters is split into two sections titled "Beholding" and "Becoming." In the "Beholding" section of each chapter, Simons discusses and studies the chapter's topic, specifically as it relates to God, how the reader should perceive, or behold, God, and what the Bible has to say on that topic. Subsequently, in the "Becoming" section of each chapter, Simons discusses how that chapter's topic can be applied, in a practical way, in day-

The primary takeaways from analyzing True Woman 201 are the importance of simplicity in design, as well as the importance of having a balance between text and images to bring out the best of both. Having a balance between images and text will allow the readers to fully benefit from the study and retain the information more effectively, while using the images in a way that highlights the important topics in the and provides clarity.

BEHOLDING AND BECOMING

to-day life and how that topic relates to the modern Christian.

Each page of *Beholding and Becoming* is accented, and sometimes filled with illustrations that augment and highlight important phrases, ideas, and words from the accompanying text. Challenges that this book faces are the balance of the text with images as some of the images are exceptionally busy and risk distracting the reader from the text, and using symbolism and colors that are cliché and overused when designing for women. The two-part separation of each chapter is effective however and serves to transition the mind of the reader from a time of reflecting on God and His character, and worshipping Him, to a time of rubber-meets-road application with discussion of how the "beholding" should take shape in the "becoming."

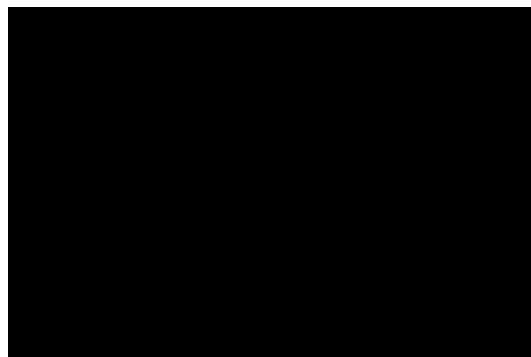
Though the book is designed for women, there is very little specific discussion of Biblical womanhood. While the book does discuss many

of the spiritual aspects of Biblical womanhood, and in some cases, their application to the relationships in a woman's life, again, the practical aspects of Biblical womanhood are not addressed. Additionally, while the study is clearly meant for a female audience based on the visual content alone, the text itself does not highlight woman-specific aspects of faith, worship, or relationships with God and others.

The Bible study begins with a glossary detailing the symbolism of the icons and subjects that have been painted, the purpose of said symbolism as it relates to the study, and why the imagery and illustrations have been included in the study. The illustrations throughout *Beholding and Becoming* were intentionally designed and included not only to decorate and add visual interest to the study but also to highlight and further emphasize certain important topics or ideas in the study to make the content in the study more memorable through this pairing with the illustrations. Additionally, the tone of the images is loose and flowing while still maintaining structure and order.

The color palette used is warm and distinctly feminine, with floral arrangements, fruits, and insects illustrated in soft pinks, purples, greens, yellows, and blues. This soft, organic style of the illustrations also contributes to the distinctly feminine aesthetic of the study

that is fitting for the study and eye-catching for the target audience. The subject matter used in the illustrations for this study has the potential to verge into cliché, with the overused floral imagery. However, the author has largely succeeded in avoiding overused floral imagery by limiting the types of flowers and intentionally including fruits, insects, fish, and even garden plants, and successfully tying the imagery thematically to the content of each page. Here, with this successful blending of feminine subject matter and symbolic, thematically relevant imagery in mind, the final deliverable will not include a wealth of floral imagery and will feature subject matter that is symbolic and thematically significant for each page and topic. Additionally, organic shapes, subject matter found in nature that is not primarily floral, and a color palette that is warm and natural will also be incorporated into the final deliverable, in order to best visually engage the target audience.

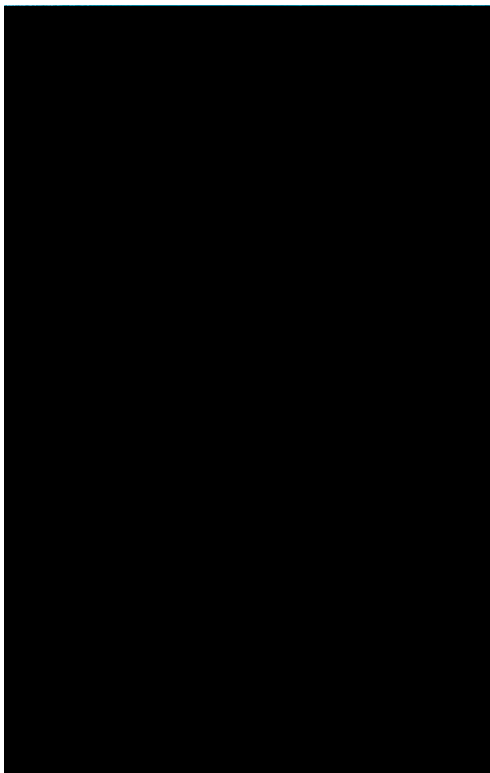


THE WEEKLY FAITH PROJECT

The Weekly Faith Project, as with many of the Bible studies and devotionals designed for

women, uses a plethora of floral and rustic imagery. *The Weekly Faith Project* blends images

and watercolor illustrations using a cohesive color palette – primarily greens, browns, and pinks with a rustic and plant/floral theme. The audience for this study appears to be young, Christian women looking for a supplemental devotional rather than an in-depth, topical Bible study. *The Weekly Faith Project* is designed to be used once a week over the course of a year, allowing space for brief reflections on both the Bible verse and the weekly devotional. This book was designed to be a touchstone for women throughout their year, rather than a more intense or localized study, and is not specifically designed to be used in a group setting. However, one could meet and discuss each week's prompt, if desired.



The iconography in *The Weekly Faith Project* is heavily plant-based. While not overdoing the floral theme that seems to dominate most devotionals and Bible studies meant for women, it includes some flowers, but the majority of the illustrations, with at least one on each two-page, weekly spread, are of succulents, cacti, and/or potted plants. The soft, watercolor style of the plants lends itself to an approachable, relaxing overall aesthetic, though it does tend to blend in when viewed on the shelf with other women's studies. In addition to the watercolor potted plants featured on the weekly pages, the five sections in *The Weekly Faith Project* are separated with rich, earth-toned photographs that complement and mirror the imagery found in the weekly pages in a way that is cohesive with the watercolors and the text, rather than distracting and jarring. The combination of photography and illustrations is successful largely because the color schemes are cohesive, the watercolor is realistic enough that the style change from photography to illustrations is not jarring, and since the photographs and the illustrations are kept on separate page spreads throughout the entire devotional, there is no conflict of medium between the two.

As far as the aesthetic choices relate to the content of *The Weekly Faith Project*, there is a loose connection between the content discussed, growing in faith and in relationship with God, and the plant imagery that is repeated throughout the devotional. These aesthetic choices are primarily successful, they are not distracting and tend to be cohesive and pleasing to the eye; however,

there is a potential missed opportunity with the illustrations and other visual content in that the content could have been more specifically designed to reflect each week's devotional and Bible passages to better engage the reader and enhance retention.

Overall, the main takeaway from *The Weekly Faith Project* is the success of the cohesive and compatible blending of different media; a blending/technique that will be employed in the final deliverables. *The Weekly Faith Project* is successful in its design as far as its interactive nature of journaling, allowing for women to physically engage with the devotional through writing, thinking, and reflecting on God in order to increase comprehension, retention, and reflection.



Chapter 3



Process

My visual solution was to develop and design a body of work that shows a more balanced approach to Biblical womanhood than is currently provided by existing literature and studies. The primary goal of the body of work is to show that Biblical womanhood can be destigmatized by raising societal awareness of the multifaceted beauty and pragmatic value of Biblical womanhood both to women and society. My secondary goal with this body of work was to choose media and processes that I could do at my house to make it easier for me to take care of my own home and my husband. By using a recognizable art style – the art deco stylization utilized in the ads of the 1950s - and modernizing it, I aimed to redeem the stereotypical “50’s Housewife” image that many think of when Biblical womanhood is referenced or discussed. This visual redemption solution consists of a roughly 120”x144” quilt, five magazine covers discussing and explaining Biblical womanhood engagingly and excitingly, four linocut prints, and five aprons with five corresponding custom dress form displays

Before I started the design process, I gathered images and resources that were directed towards young women or that visually embodied a 1950s aesthetic. I created separate reference boards for the quilt, aprons, and prints compiled from the resources above. I created the color scheme for my project after gathering a myriad of reference images, but prior to any major design planning as I wanted to begin the process with a color scheme firmly in mind.

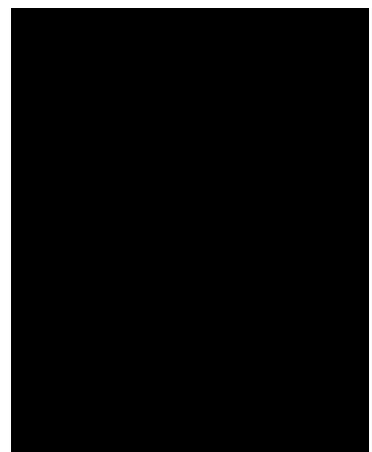
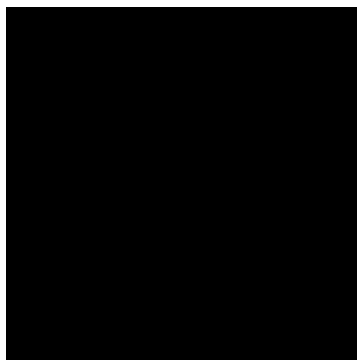
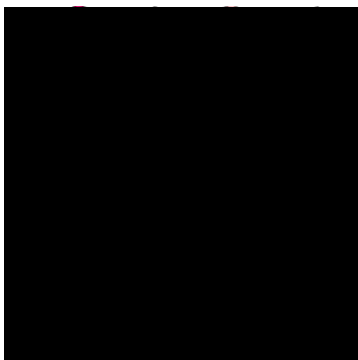
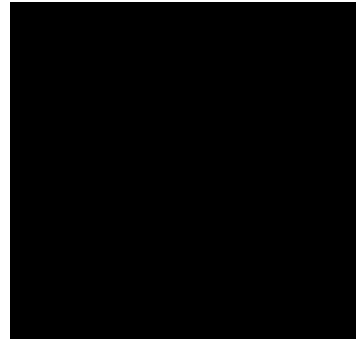
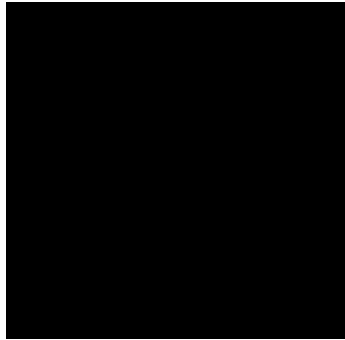
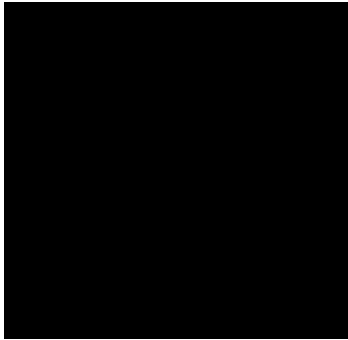
After the reference boards were compiled, I made sketches for each of the planned elements and researched the types and amounts of materials I would need for each.

After designing the aprons and the quilt, I purchased the requisite materials for both and began cutting out all the quilt squares and the pattern pieces for the aprons. The quilt squares were cut out first, as I needed the most fabric for, the quilt and if I ended up being short on fabric, it would be simpler to adapt the apron designs rather than the entire quilt design.

Color & Fabric Scheme Reference Board



Quilt Reference Board



Quilt

REFERENCE IMAGES AND INSPIRATION

When I was researching for the quilt, I compiled a variety of quilt block patterns as reference materials for when I eventually made my own quilting patterns. I leaned more towards simple, organic quilt designs and looked for designs that would be relatively simple to tweak and edit to fit my needs. Quilt patterns from the 40s and 50s were of particular interest to me.

In deference to the research, a single floral pattern was utilized in the orange and coral colors, but the pattern is small and underwhelming, and the fabric itself blends well with the other fabrics I used. The dark blue fabric was chosen because it has an abstract, swirling pattern that gives an element of chaos and movement to the pieces, reflecting how

Biblical womanhood can often feel chaotic and constantly moving. The white fabric was chosen because it had a subtle pattern that provided a bit of visual texture to the aprons and quilt while having a pattern that was subtle enough to allow for printmaking and to provide a visual break from the other more heavily patterned busy fabrics. Additionally, the coral fabric was chosen because the pattern was simple, and the color fit with the established color scheme and blended well with the other fabrics. I chose the yellow and teal fabrics because their patterns were simpler in comparison to the dark blue and floral pattern and the combination of the strict geometric patterns with the more organic patterns of the other fabrics provided good contrast and a well-balanced “fabric palette.”

DESIGN

I designed the quilt in Adobe Illustrator, constructing each quilt square/pattern out of 1”x1” blocks, grouping them by color/fabric print, and building from there the individual blocks. Designing the quilt in Adobe Illustrator was a challenge for me as I was not entirely familiar with the software prior to using it for this project, and overcoming this unfamiliarity was a significant hindrance in my workflow and design process. After working with the software, and researching specific functions and settings,

I was able to achieve a functional design for the quilt which allowed me to change sections of the quilt with incredible efficiency. In order to get an accurate pictorial representation of the finished quilt in my initial quilt design process, I went online, found the fabrics I wanted, and used screenshots of those fabrics to make patterns in Illustrator; this process allowed for even greater flexibility in tweaking the color scheme for the final quilt design. By making each section/design element of the quilt a group in Illustrator,

I was able to change the pattern all of one element of the design (i.e., all of the center rings or the background color in the cross) and create color studies in order to determine the best color composition for the quilt. Once I finalized the quilt pattern and established the fabric/color scheme, I compiled research images for the aprons and began begin their design process.

The fabric designs for all the final deliverables were explicitly chosen to be within the color palette yet distinct from one another. Additionally, because of the visual analyses done earlier in this process, I decided to stay away from floral imagery for the majority of the fabric prints and for the

illustration designs to best ensure a final product distinct from what is currently on the market. Each fabric color is markedly different from the other colors as well as from the fabric patterns.



CONSTRUCTION AND MAKING

QUILT & QUILTING BEE

For the first part of assembling the quilt, I held a quilting bee at my house with a few women from my church. Quilting bees have traditionally been held to make quilts for newlyweds, assemble quilts to sell for wartime efforts, and as community building projects where women gathered to sew and brought about social change with their unique voice.

The first step in assembling the quilt was to assemble the pieces that had half of one fabric and half of another. Most of our efforts during the quilting bee went towards assembling these

triangle pieces, as these made up a substantial part of the quilt design. Throughout the 4-hour quilting bee, we were able to assemble roughly 70% of the triangle pieces.

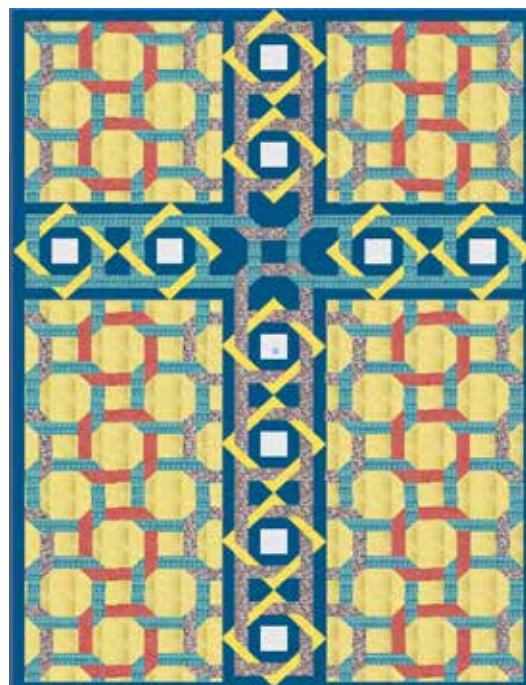
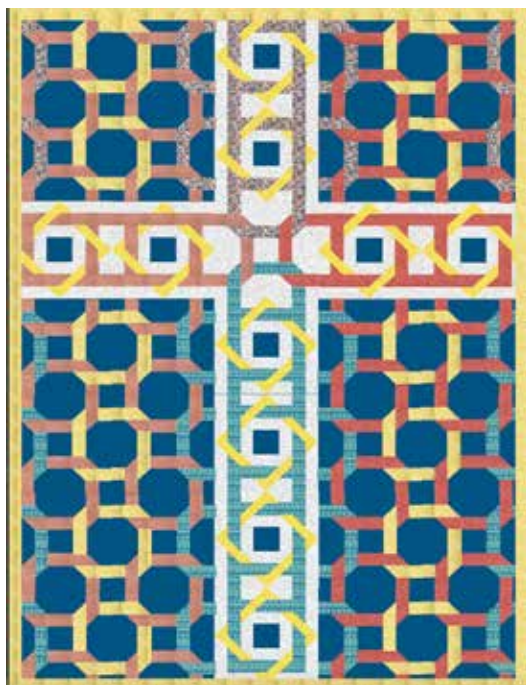
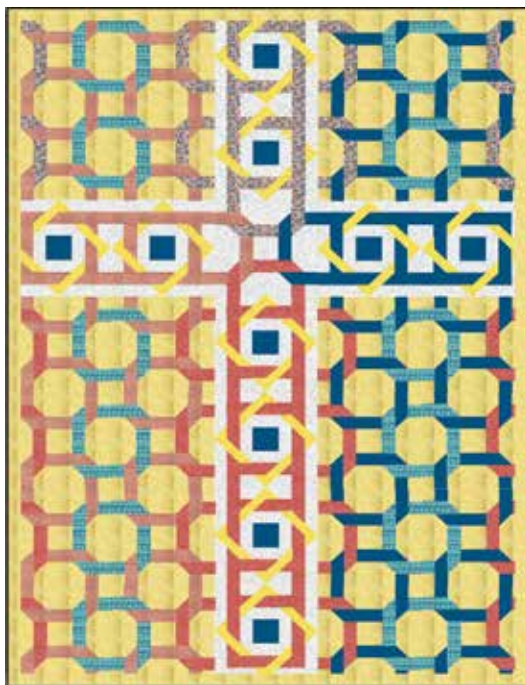
Once the triangle pieces were put together, next up was piecing together the quilt blocks. The first step in making the quilt blocks was to assemble a plethora of square strips. Initially, I had issues making sure all the different strips were lined up and consistent with one another because, when I began making the quilt, I was making one complete block at a time. This

problem was solved by making each type of strip all at once; this process ensured uniformity and consistent spacing throughout the quilt blocks. Subsequently, I pieced together and sewed all 40 of the top/bottom pieces of the red/background blocks at once and checked them against my sample block for consistency. Additionally, I adjusted the seams and seam allowances as needed, specifically when individual squares did not line up correctly. This construction approach allowed for greater consistency across the quilt squares and thereby improved the end result of the quilt blocks and the overall appearance of the finished quilt. Assembling all the strips was a process that took approximately 40 hours. Once all the strips were assembled, I could then turn my attention towards assembling the 30 quilt blocks.

Assembling the front of the quilt went very quickly as there were significantly fewer seams to sew and, having taken care to ensure that the middles and end of each quilt block were lined up, there were minimal issues with the quilt assembly. Once I had assembled the quilt blocks, I prepared the back of the quilt followed by the batting. Because of the enormity of the quilt and its non-standard size, I was unable to purchase a single piece of quilt batting with the correct dimensions. Utilizing and applying creative problem-solving methods, instead, I found a two-pack of quilt batting squares that were 45"x60" and bought 3 of them. I then sewed all three pieces of quilt batting together by bumping them up against each other and doing a saddle stitch as a traditional seam



Quilt Color Studies



method would have resulted in bumps in the quilt wherever there were seams. Next, I began pinning the front of the quilt to the batting and the backing. I had previously stitched the backing together from 3 huge pieces of fabric remnants.

The sheer size and weight of the quilt made it practically impossible to stitch the quilt together on any of the tables in my house as they were all too small and the weight of the quilt pulled on the needle, causing it to break. The needle also broke if there was too much tension on the fabric when stitching for whatever reason. I solved this problem by moving all the furniture against the walls in my mom's living room and doing all the quilting seated on her floor with the sewing machine between my legs and the quilt covering both myself and the entirety of the living room floor. Even though the sewing while seated on the floor was incredibly awkward, working on the floor allowed me to move my machine around the room to get to various quilt sections with greater ease. When it came time to stitch challenging areas, such as the middle of the quilt, the quilt was rolled up and placed in the arm of the machine so that I could access the center areas of the quilt. To do the quilting stitches, I used a free-motion quilting foot. The use of this foot, in combination with disabling my feed-dogs (the toothed metal piece on the base of the sewing machine that moves the fabric along), allowed me to do the quilting stitches significantly easier and faster than I otherwise would have been able to do.

The easiest part of the entire quilt process was sewing on the quilt binding. After the quilt had been completely pieced and sewn together, I



trimmed the excess fabric from the backing and the batting, pinned the satin blanket binding in place, and stitched it down. Upon completing

on this task, I added five loops on the back of the quilt so I would be able to display the quilt correctly.

Aprons & Dress Forms

REFERENCE IMAGES AND INSPIRATION

Initially, the aprons were challenging to design because they needed to be both unique enough to avoid being repetitive yet similar enough to provide cohesion and set recognition. After performing additional visual research on aprons and apron designs from the 40s, 50s, and 60s,

I found 5 distinct vintage apron patterns that fit my desired aesthetic and could be slightly updated with modern fabric choices. I designed the aprons to incorporate at least two different colors of

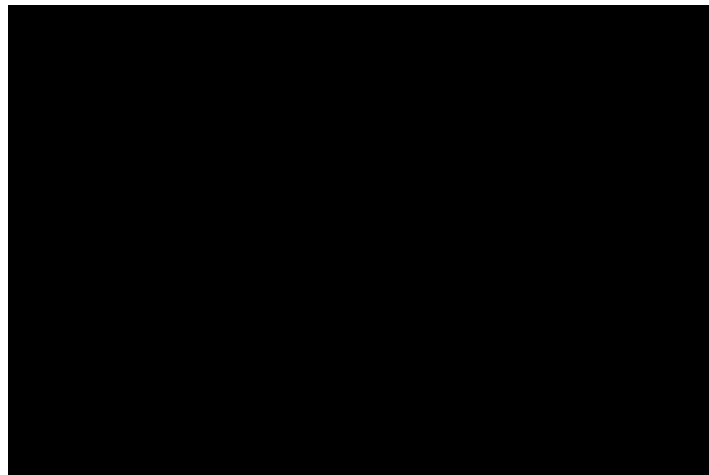
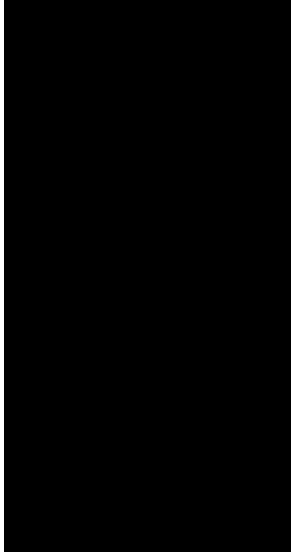
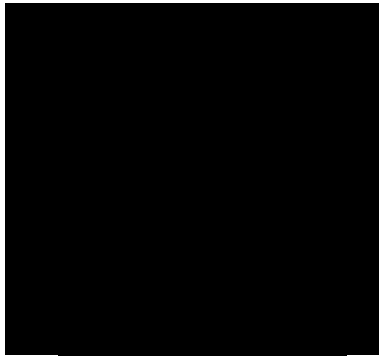
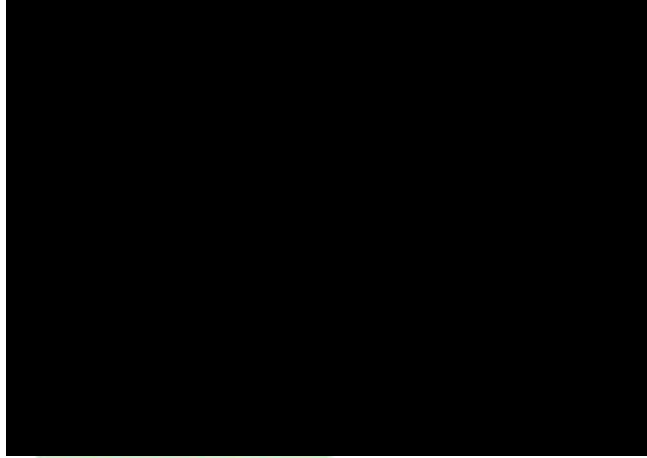
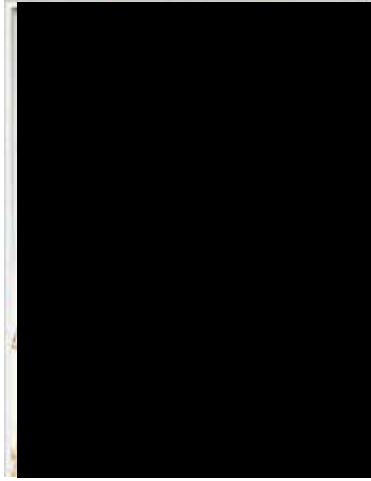
DESIGN

I then moved on to figuring out how the aprons would be displayed. In the initial stages of this project, I planned to display the aprons either by hanging them on a wall or on a rack; however, I was not pleased with this solution as

both of these options failed to show the aprons' details and one of my primary goals for the aprons was to present them in such a way that the target audience – young Christian women - could imagine themselves wearing and working in these aprons. To best succeed in optimally showcasing the aprons, I concluded that I needed to make five dress forms out of a



Aprons Reference Board



thicker, canvas-type fabric that were silhouettes of the female form. Making the dress forms myself, versus buying them, allowed me to be more specific in the body type I wanted for the displays, to have great control over the materials and resulting aesthetics of the dress forms, and keep the materials' cost within my financial means.

Initially, the aprons were challenging to design because they needed to be both unique enough to avoid being repetitive yet similar enough to provide cohesion and set recognition. After performing additional visual research on aprons and apron designs from the 40s, 50s, and 60s, I found 5 distinct vintage apron patterns that fit my desired aesthetic and could be slightly updated with modern fabric choices. I then moved on to figuring out how the aprons would be displayed. In the initial stages of this project, I planned to display the aprons either by hanging them on a wall or on a rack; however, I was not pleased with this solution as both of these options failed to show the aprons' details and one of my primary goals for the aprons was to present them in such a way that the target audience—young Christian women - could imagine themselves wearing and working in these aprons. To best succeed in optimally showcasing the aprons, I concluded that I needed to make five dress forms out of a thicker, canvas-type fabric that were silhouettes of the female form. Making the dress forms myself, versus buying them, allowed me to be more specific in the body type I wanted for the displays, to have great control over the materials and resulting aesthetics of the dress forms, and

keep the materials' cost within my financial means.

As mentioned above, instead of sketching the aprons and then finding a sewing pattern that best fit my design sketches, I researched existing sewing patterns from the 40s, 50s, and 60s, and based my designs and subsequent sketches on these existing sewing patterns. The patterns I ended up using and modifying were Simplicity 8571, 9311, R11336, and S9496. Making the aprons was significantly less problematic and the only issue I ran into was running out of fabric; by this, I mean running out of fabric with no additional fabric available to ship or within a 120-mile driving radius. All the aprons I made for this body of work are fully lined with visible seams, and, as a result of these extra steps in the sewing process, all the aprons are reversible. Besides the benefit of being reversible, I did not want any of the seams on the aprons to be visible as hidden seams usually denotes higher quality. Additionally, the reversible nature of the aprons lends itself to a thicker apron which also denotes higher quality. Due to these design decisions, my fabric requirements for each



apron doubled; however, the result was aprons that were more refined, durable, and able to be

displayed two separate ways, as the lining fabric was complementary to the rest of the fabrics.

CONSTRUCTION

The aprons were assembled per each pattern's instructions; however, some changes were made to the patterns specifically regarding the piecing of the fabric to best fit my design choices. In order to keep my process as streamlined and organized as possible, and to ensure I had enough fabric for all of the aprons, I cut out all of the pattern pieces at once and organized the pieces from all 5 apron patterns by the fabric they would be cut out of. This allowed me to visualize how much fabric I would need and help me best lay out the pattern pieces to minimize fabric waste.

The dress forms were significantly more problematic to construct than the aprons. The fabric choice had to have little to no stretch

because I needed them to be stuffed firmly without warping, and the pattern I was using did not include seam allowances. Rather than add seam allowances, which, in hindsight, is what I should have done from the start, I sewed the dress forms with as little seam allowance as possible, keeping the needle in the same place and marking where the fabric lined up with my presser foot in order to keep the seam allowance consistent throughout the process. For the fourth and fifth dress form, I ran out of fabric and switched to a different kind of fabric. This fabric had some type of foam backing and was upholstery fabric, similar to what I was using, but I was not able to tell until I had stuffed the dress forms, that it was not strong enough to



hold its shape without deforming when stuffed. After trying to fix the stuffing and hand-stitch problem areas, I eventually decided that I had to just remake the two dress forms out of a different fabric that was closer to canvas than the fabric I had switched to. This change ended up working out well because I was able to switch to a darker fabric that complemented the two lighter stands I had made for the dress forms. The stands for the dress forms were made from wooden coat stands. The coat racks were assembled, the dress form fabric was stapled onto a 12"x1" wooden disc which were then placed on the coat racks and secured. The dress forms were then stuffed, and the top of the necks was sewn on by hand.

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out of fabric with no additional fabric available to ship or within a 120-mile driving radius. All the aprons I made for this body of work are fully lined with visible seams, and, as a result of these extra steps in the sewing process, all the aprons are reversible. Besides the benefit of being reversible, I did not want any of the seams on the aprons to be visible as hidden seams usually denotes higher quality. Additionally, the reversible nature of the aprons lends itself to a thicker apron which also denotes higher quality. Due to these design decisions, my fabric requirements for each apron doubled; however, the result was aprons that were more refined, durable, and able to be displayed two separate ways, as the lining fabric was complementary to the rest of the fabrics.

Magazine Covers

REFERENCE IMAGES AND INSPIRATION

For the magazine covers, as well as the linocuts, I compiled a reference board of magazine covers from the 1940s-1960s to use as inspiration when I began my design process. I researched a number of magazines that dealt with topics such

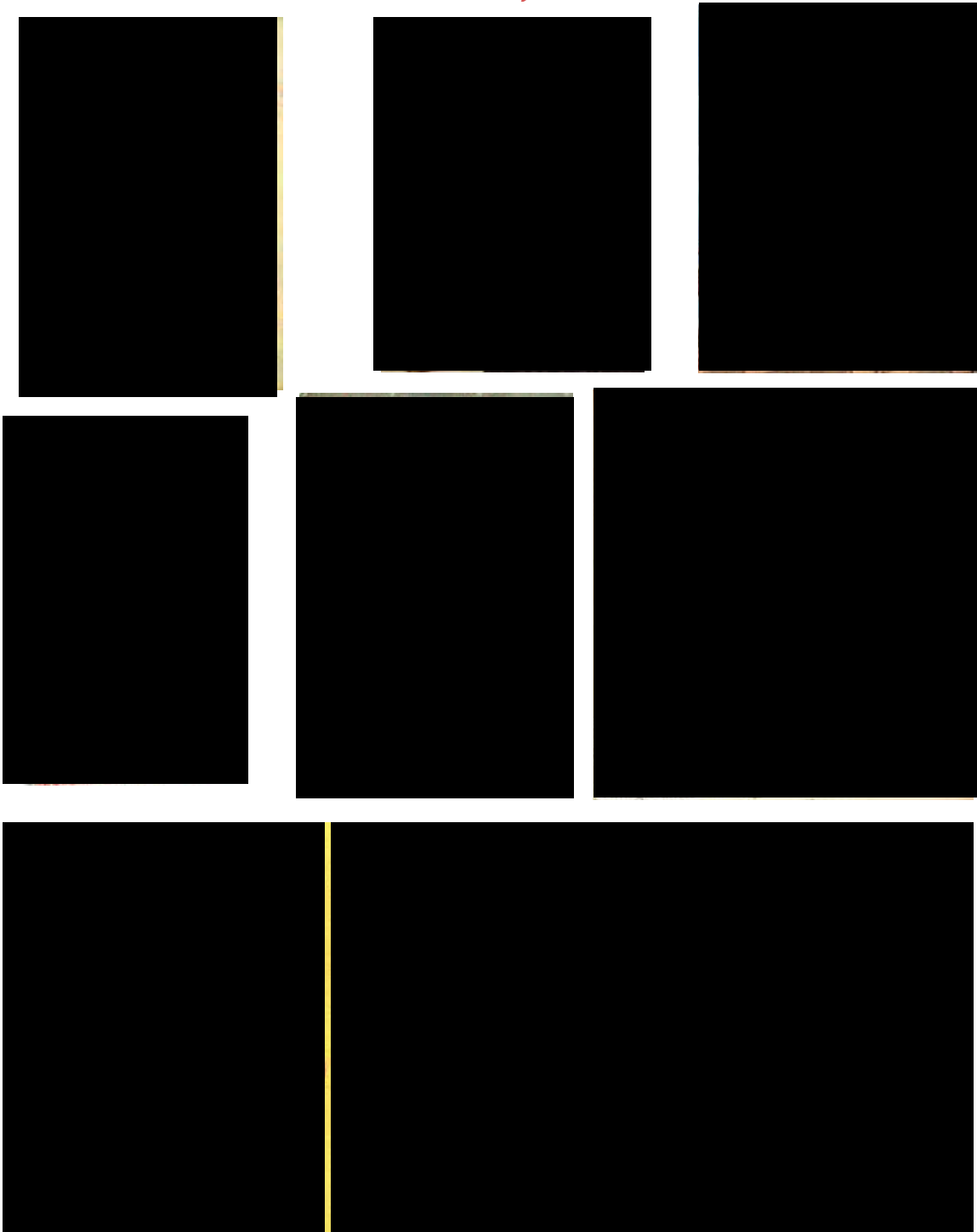
as homemaking, fashion, various hobbies and crafts, and eventually decided that magazine covers that had a female form on them would be more impactful for the final deliverable.

DESIGN & MAKING

As stated above the aprons were fairly easy to construct compared to the quilt process, but the illustrations proved more challenging. In fact, the illustrations were the most challenging

part of the whole deliverables process. Initially, I planned to make 5 posters in a 1950s style aesthetic that illustrated the principles of Biblical womanhood as outlined in the

Illustrations Reference Board

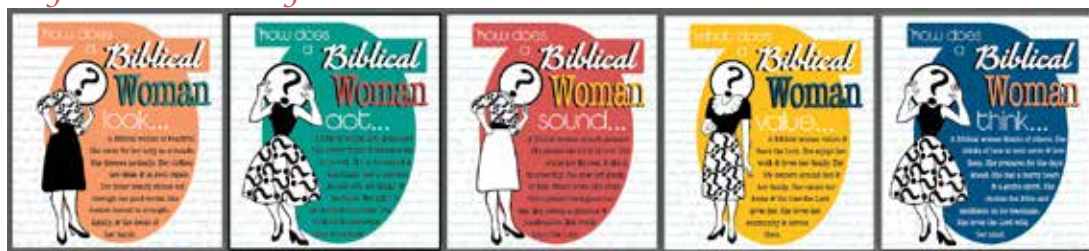


literature review. After reworking the posters multiple times, I decided to switch gears and take a different approach with the posters. I was unsatisfied with the poster designs as they were too repetitive and I did not like how disconnected they felt from the other deliverables, i.e., the aprons and quilts, because of the medium. The aprons and quilts are coherent and unified in design because they were made of fabric, were more naturally occurring, and were more substantial in medium when compared to the posters. Additionally, the posters were designed to purely inform and be seen versus the quilts and aprons that were designed to be more fluid and interactive, inviting touch and invoking more of the 5 senses. I solved this disconnect by making linocuts of the figures in the in the illustrations and turning the posters into magazine covers that were much more energetic and fluid. Additionally, the posters were too “on the nose;” by this, I mean that the posters spoon-fed the information I wanted to communicate to the viewers invoking a passive response instead of an active one. Moreover, removing all the text from

the posters except for the question portion left the posters feeling too empty and open-ended in nature.

After discussing the issue with my thesis chair, I decided to change the posters to magazine covers styled after magazine covers and ads from the 1950s. This modified approach to the illustrations brought about a better balance as there was now enough text to communicate the basic principles of Biblical womanhood I wanted to convey in an interactive fashion. My end goal with these illustrations was to pique the viewer’s interest in my content and the related Bible verses and, once the viewer’s interest was piqued, address the problem at the heart of this thesis project. Additionally, the new format for showcasing the illustrations provided an interesting avenue to explore for potential future applications of this thesis project, i.e., covers of an actual magazine devoted to Biblical Womanhood. I also framed the magazine covers in the same frame style, in order to have a cohesive look throughout the whole finished body of work.

Original Poster Designs



Linocuts

DESIGN

The linocut prints were made using some of the same figures from the posters and served as a bridge between the illustrations and the quilts and aprons. Additionally, the linocuts, through their use to bring some of the figures from the illustrations onto the fabric, give a more tangible and physical presence to the pieces while also allowing for the use of printmaking techniques and unique water-marbled elements to mimic the flow of the dark blue fabric and to give a more organic

backdrop to the linocuts. By having pieces in the final deliverable that were not as clearcut in their imagery and what they were representing such as the magazine covers and the linocuts, I hoped to bridge the gap between women who may feel very strongly opposed to complementarian gender roles and women who are more comfortable with these roles and concepts, by representing the heart of this thesis project in a more abstracted and gentle way.

CONSTRUCTION

After creating a simple line art design for each woman, I reversed the design and printed it in order to transfer to linoleum. Once transferred, I carved each of the designs out of the linoleum. For the paper, I printed on rice paper that was hand-marbled using the suminagashi method. Suminagashi involves taking a large bowl or container, filled with water, and using brushes dipped in either water with small amounts of dish soap mixed in, or a special sumi ink that floats on the surface of the water. The ink and clear water spread out over the top of the water and can be stirred, blown on, or otherwise disturbed in order to create completely unique patterns.

Once I had followed these steps, I placed sheets of rice paper on the top of the water

which absorbed the ink, then patted the sheets of paper to remove excess water and ink and hung them up so they could dry. Once I had marbled approximately 40 sheets of paper, I started printing the linocuts. Because I was printing at my house, I did not have access to a printing press but, because of how thin the rice paper was, I did not want to use a printing press because it would be easier to print by hand and avoid any indentations that a press would normally put into the rice paper. I used the back of a wooden spoon and Speedball professional ink.

Once the linocuts were printed, I was not entirely happy with them. The figures in the linocuts did not feel as at home on top of the water marbling as I would have liked them

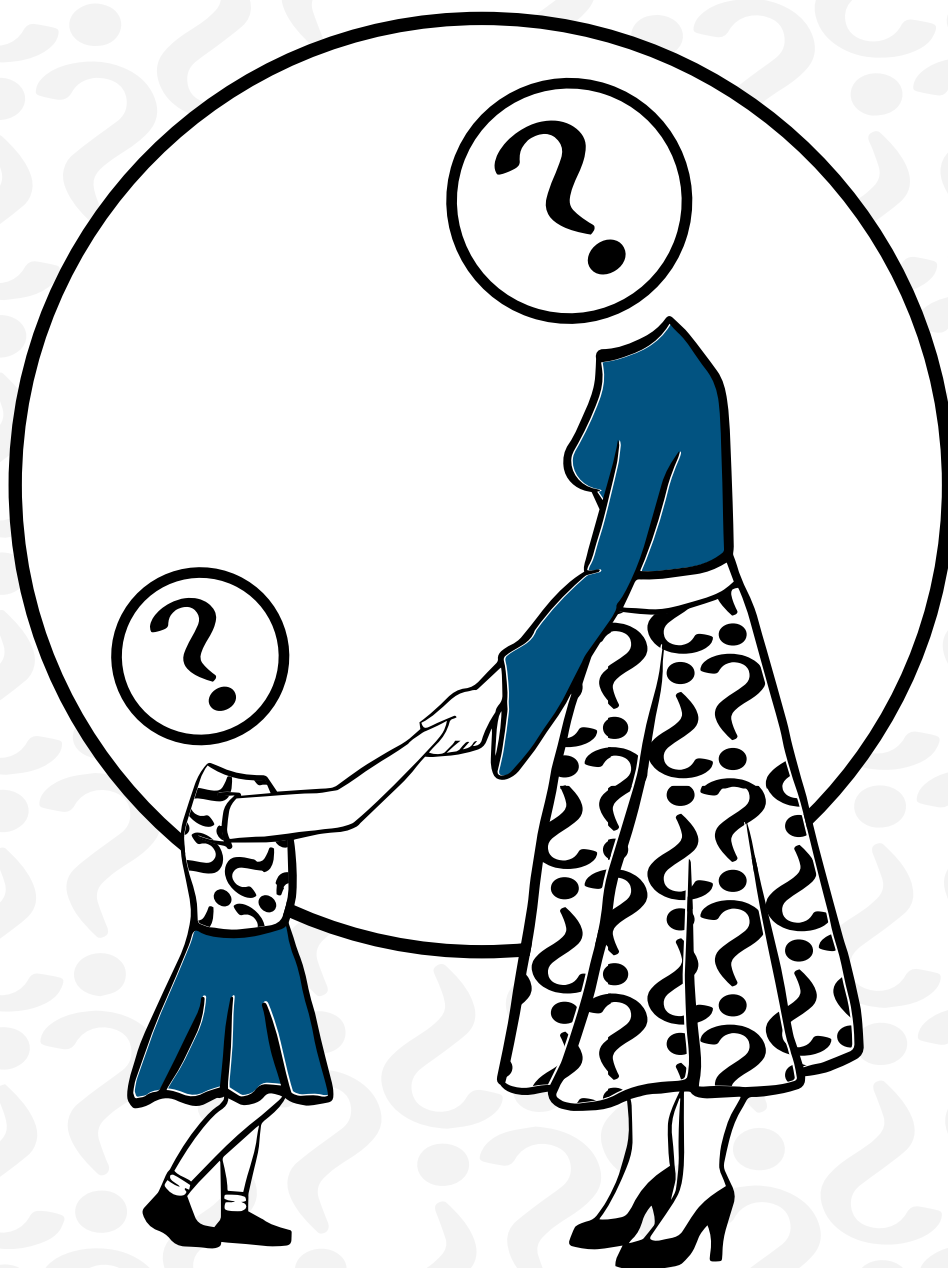
to. My solution to this was to hand paint the primary color in the water marbling into the tops that the figures were wearing, in order to tie everything together. This solved the problem I was having and I was much more satisfied with the prints as a result.

Once the linocuts were dry, I editioned, trimmed, and framed the best one from each edition. I ended up only printing three of the figures from the magazine covers because I only wanted to print full body figures, and I wanted to keep things as balanced as possible for the final display. I ended up with approximately 30 prints that I was pleased with, roughly 10 from each design.





Chapter 4



Visual Solution

From a design standpoint, all the deliverables for the final visual solution were designed to emphasize smooth lines, organic shapes, and an open layout, as the research revealed that this approach would best reach the target audience (Darastu). Additionally, based on the visual analyses of *The Weekly Faith Project* and *Beholding and Becoming*, this approach was also utilized when choosing and designing the quilt block patterns and the overall quilt pattern to best reach the target audience, young Christian women. I chose to make most of the final deliverables out of fabric and soft, more traditionally feminine media in response to the feminist artists of the 1970s, such as Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, and Faith Ringgold.



Since the 1970s and the postmodern feminist movement, feminists have laid claim to what is known as domestic media, such as sewing, soft sculpture, embroidery, and quilting. Feminist artists generally used these media as a source of empowerment and to take traditionally feminine and domestic media of expression and move them “away from [their] derogatory designation as ‘low art’ or ‘kitsch’” (Brooklyn Museum). By reclaiming these domestic media from feminist artists, I hoped to redeem the beauty and respect of traditionally feminine forms of expression in a way that embraces the root of these media – the home – without presenting it in a negative or oppressive light.

Holistically, I chose to make a quilt primarily because of the history and traditional associations that quilt-making holds for women, their involvement in social change, and their communities. Quilts have long been a medium of change and expression, “[q]uilts have shown great rhetorical and social value as they have evolved from mere decorations... to art objects” (King 27). Additionally, quilts have been a form of expression primarily dominated by females, so it seemed fitting to use one in the context of this project (King 27). The background of the quilt design was selected because it linked together, symbolizing the importance of linking community and daily life of women, i.e., a visual representation of the interconnectedness of Biblical principles in women’s lives, and because

this pattern was an open, organic pattern. I chose to design the quilt center in a cross-block design, more structured than the background blocks but still incorporated an organic and dynamic design.

The quilt and apron fabrics were chosen to have a cohesive color palette that was warmer and more vivid, per the research conducted, as well as an organic and open composition, as the research showed that this approach would be more successful with the target audience (Darstaru). Many products designed for women incorporate what is generally thought of as a “feminine” color palette. In an article on design stereotypes related to the gender of the target audience, the author, Ana Darstaru, discusses how women generally prefer brighter, more vivid colors, incorporating reds and pinks to greater degrees than men, who tend to prefer darker, more toned-down colors. In addition, the fabrics were explicitly chosen to be distinct from one another because, based on the definition of Biblical womanhood and the examples of women found in Scripture, how Biblical womanhood manifests in the lives of women will differ from woman to woman. Because of this research, I chose to have not unique colors of fabric but different patterns on each fabric to show a more extensive range of metaphorical women through my fabric choices.

My choice to make aprons was in response to the research I conducted in the literature review, specifically to Rachel Held Evans’ assertion that Biblical womanhood is a cookie-cutter one size fits all idea (Evans 295). By making the





aprons using different patterns and dressing the dress forms in various clothing from a range of professions and occupations, I sought to rebut Evans' assumption that the Bible's definition of womanhood is a one size fits all definition. Some dress forms wore more casual attire, while others were dressed in more formal or business attire to reflect that, in the historical-

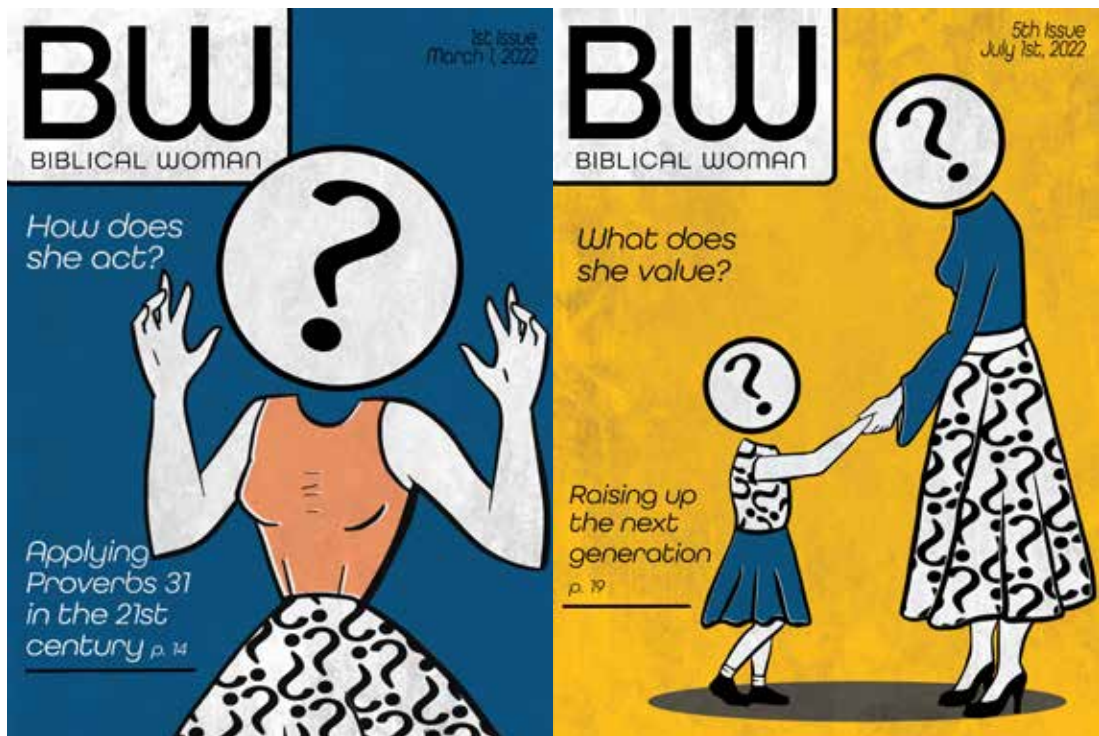
grammatical/complementarian view of Biblical womanhood, women can have careers and other endeavors that are not solely based around the home. The decision to have each dress form/ woman wear an apron was made to emphasize that, regardless of her walk of life, each woman still concerned herself with her specific, God-given area of dominion and responsibility –

the home. Additionally, the fabric choices for the aprons, and the quilt, were made to reflect the myriad of ways Biblical womanhood can manifest, based on the definition of Biblical womanhood discussed in the literature review and the survey of Biblical women I conducted.

Additionally, based on research that one of a Biblical woman's primary areas of concern should be the home, the aprons were a primary area of focus when I was constructing my visual solution. I chose aprons for their symbolism of the home and traditional gender roles and the symbolism of a protective garment. Aprons function primarily as a protective garment of clothing when cooking, cleaning, or otherwise participating in messy tasks. This symbolism was significant when designing and

implementing my visual solution because, in the complementarian perspective, Biblical gender roles protect men and women rather than exploit or oppress them; because this specific point is controversial between egalitarians and complementarians, I wanted to highlight the true nature of Biblical womanhood through emphasizing their protective nature, as well as their beauty.

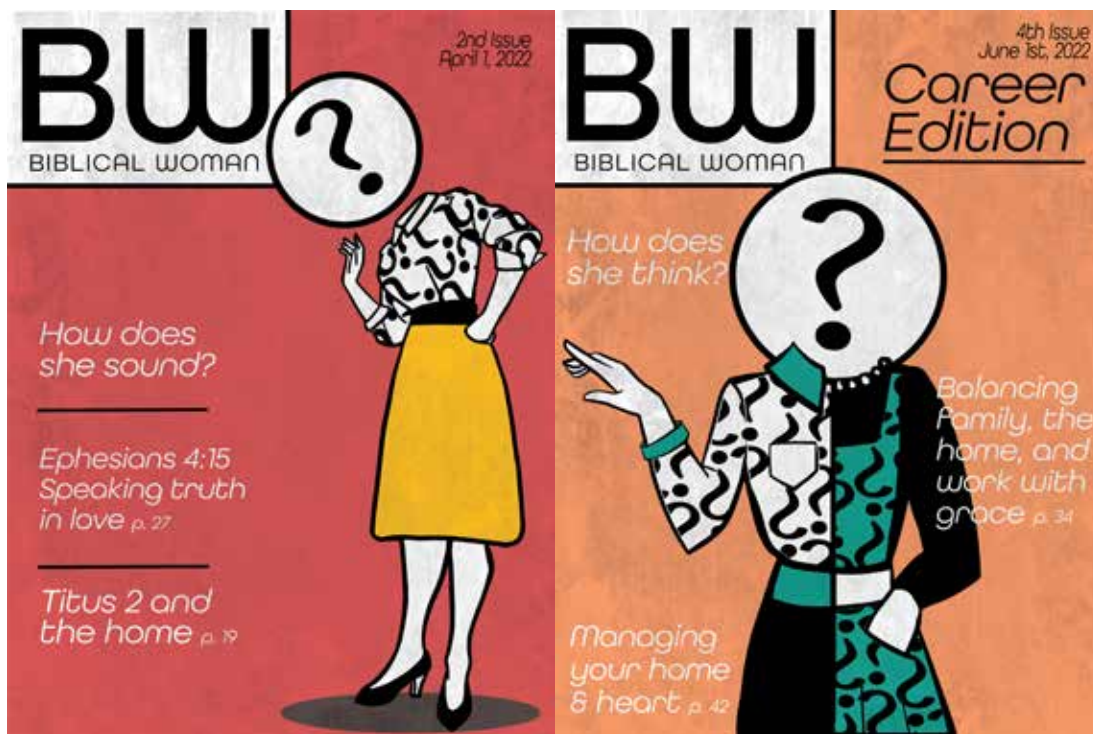
The aprons and dress form displays were designed to reflect the different ways in which Biblical womanhood could manifest. Based on research from the literature review, explicitly involving women's careers and roles in the family and church, the dress forms were clothed with different clothing categories.



The style of magazine covers was chosen because magazines represent a popular item that women and men read worldwide. Magazines can range in their subject matter, but magazines for women, such as Vogue, Cosmo, and Allure, frequently deal with beauty issues and areas of women's lives. By making graphics for women in a recognizable and popular medium, but substituting the expected content with content, I sought to make a surprising set of images that would cause women to stop and consider the questions posed on the covers. Each of the five illustrations/magazine covers posed a question to the viewer about an aspect or defining characteristic of the Biblical woman:

- How does she act?
- How does she sound?
- What does she value?
- What does she look like?
- How does she think?

These five questions are asked either of or about women every day in one form or another. When a woman cannot answer the questions above about how she should act, sound, look, think, and what she should value, this uncertainty often leads to doubt, confusion, and misunderstanding about her Biblical calling as a woman. These questions were chosen because these specific areas of a woman's life are often difficult to



define and can spark much debate, especially between egalitarians and complementarians, as the research showed. These questions were what I was thinking of when analyzing passages of Scripture and the lives of women in the Bible to come to the definition of Biblical womanhood that is given in chapter 2. With great intentionality, these questions are posed to the viewer in a positive and encouraging setting intended to spark conversation and communication about the potential answer to those questions. Furthermore, the visuals and accompanying Scripture references, along with the topic choices and linocut and magazine cover illustrations, provide needed context and guide the viewer towards an understanding of what the Bible says about the issue of Biblical womanhood.

The amount of text on the magazine covers was chosen because it struck a balance between just a question and informative content, piqued the viewer's interest more than either a single question or a question and a long answer, and also because research showed that because women are more verbally communicative than men (Johnson), the proper use of words, instructions, and descriptions is crucial to appealing to a female audience. The magazine also covers combined text with imagery based on the research that showed the human brain can process visual information up to 60,000 times faster than it can process textual information (Gillett); therefore, using visuals when communicating increases the likelihood of understanding and retention of the presented



information. Additionally, the coupling of text with imagery has immense benefits for learning because 65% of the population is estimated to be visual learners, and visual information comprises 90% of the information sent to one's brain (Gillett). The balance of text and imagery within the magazine covers was essential because

Following design guidelines for creating engaging infographics is essential to communicate and visually appeal to the reader effectively (Scott et al.). One key element of creating successful infographics is striking a balance between visuals and text (Scott et al.).

I designed the linocuts to have the same organic flow, open layout, and warm color palette as the rest of the deliverables, again based on the

research from Darastu. I used the exact figures in the linocuts as three of the magazine covers, though I only used the outline of the figures and not the other colors in those designs. I decided this because I wanted to have a clean, solid image to print onto the hand-marbled paper, which would be very organic and loose in design. This contrast between the solid, black lines of the linocut and the organic, water marbling added visual interest to the linocuts and mimicked what was observed from the visual analysis of *Beholding and Becoming*, where the artist coupled stronger, ornate lines of text with organic imagery and designs to create a visually appealing and attractive composition. I chose to use suminagashi to marble the paper for the linocuts to reference one of the fabric



prints I used in the aprons and the quilt, but also because the organic feel of suminagashi, coupled with the solid, more geometric lines of the linocuts, was representative of the organic nature of Biblical womanhood discovered in the research; in that there are elements of Biblical womanhood, specifically in the ways it manifests

in women's lives, with more solid principles and characteristics that should be present in the lives of all Christian woman, which are represented by the solid, black lines of the linocut.



Chapter 5



Conclusion

In summary, research showed that the topic of Biblical womanhood is controversial and misunderstood by many modern Americans, men and women alike. Additionally, both secular and Christian societies tend to strongly stigmatize women who seek to live a countercultural life that adheres to the principles of Biblical womanhood as delineated in Scripture. Through the literal interpretation of Scripture and an in-depth analysis of the women who inhabit the pages of the Bible, a workable balanced definition of Biblical womanhood can be found and then implemented in the day-to-day lives of Christian women. However, providing young Christian women with information about Biblical womanhood is not enough; the stigmatization of the homemaker, Biblical womanhood, and traditional gender roles in modern society, by both the church and the secular world, must be addressed and countered with an accurate, balanced, and Biblical response that draws women in and equips them to embrace God's design for Biblical womanhood instead of shunning God's design.

To address this issue above and provide a rebuttal for the plethora of arguments against Biblical womanhood found in modern America, I conducted extensive research into the topic itself. Furthermore, I investigated various forms of visual media related to the topic of Biblical womanhood to best address

how to destigmatize Biblical womanhood and to present it as something that is beautiful, Biblical, and of incredible practical value to Christian women everywhere.

My final visual solution is supported by, and supports, the research done on Biblical womanhood and contributes to the conversations on traditional gender roles and a woman's place in the home, in society, and in churches, and destigmatizes Biblical womanhood. My visual solution illustrates, in a constructive and beautiful way, how Biblical womanhood is a uniquely feminine calling that glorifies God's original design for women while also addressing how women in the 21st century can apply the principles found in Scripture about Biblical womanhood to their day-to-day lives.

Additionally, the final deliverable is multi-purpose, i.e., designed to be displayed as art but also to be used in daily life. The aprons and quilt were designed and made to be durable with crucial seams reinforced and special care taken to make sure that the items are not only functional, but comfortable as well. The care and construction of the quilt and aprons further emphasizes that the topic of Biblical womanhood should not be reserved for lofty theological debates but is readily accessible to the everyday woman. The embracing and embodiment of Biblical womanhood be a

further emphasizes that the topic of Biblical womanhood should not be reserved for lofty theological debates but is readily accessible to the everyday woman. The embracing and embodiment of Biblical womanhood be a young Christian woman can be both a practical and beautiful endeavor that can and should be desired by Christian women everywhere as this embodiment will utilize not only all a woman's gifts, talents, and passions, but also their unique feminine heart for the Lord and for His creation.

- Potential ways in which this project could be built upon or expanded in the future could include:
- The founding of a magazine like the one the illustrations were made for herein;
- Creating a line of high-quality aprons thereby bringing a tangible representation of

the beauty of Biblical womanhood into the homes of many young Christian women; or

- Developing a quilting ministry that raises money for churches, families in need, or other charities, while bringing Godly women together in community.

One of the impetuses behind this project, and one of the things I love about this project as well, is the myriad of ways that Biblical womanhood can manifest in the lives of women. Additionally, I love the incredible diversity and wide range of opportunities available to women who desire to embrace and embody Biblical womanhood and, through that, reflect God's image as they practice their dominion over Creation, live in community with one another, and serve one another in love.



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