

Susan Hunt

The **True
Woman**

The Beauty and Strength
of a Godly Woman

Foreword by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth

Updated Edition

“Susan Hunt is a friend and mentor to many, including myself. In *The True Woman*, she comes alongside women to encourage and equip them with a theological framework to live out their womanhood to the glory of God. May Susan’s exhortations here equip another generation of women to reflect their redemption in their home, church, work, and community.”

Christina Fox, Women’s Ministry Advisor, Presbyterian Churches of America; retreat speaker; author, *A Heart Set Free*; *Closer Than a Sister*; and *Idols of a Mother’s Heart*

“‘True (adjective): genuine, faithful, steadfast, consistent, and loyal.’ If you desire to understand these characteristics of your true God and long for these words to be a descriptor of your life, then you have picked up the right book. Susan Hunt courageously unpacks the multifaceted dimensions of the calling of a true woman. I have seen firsthand how this book has stood the test of time, not only in its content but also in the contours of the life of its author.”

Karen Hodge, Coordinator of Women’s Ministries, Presbyterian Church in America; coauthor, *Life-giving Leadership and Transformed*

“Certain books stand the test of time and serve as guidebooks for the next generation. Susan Hunt’s *The True Woman* is such a book. A classic ‘must-read.’ Bold, countercultural, and more relevant than ever.”

Mary A. Kassian, author, *Girls Gone Wise*

“In this book, Susan Hunt articulates profound biblical truths clearly, from a heart nurtured for many years under the authority of Scripture. You will be challenged to think more biblically about God’s redemptive calling and to become a ‘cultivator of true community.’ These are the marks of the true woman—a beacon of hope and faith. As the wife of a minister for over forty years, I am thankful for this invaluable resource.”

Karen Loritts, speaker; coauthor, *Your Marriage Today . . . and Tomorrow*

The True Woman

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By Design

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Your Home a Place of Grace

The True Woman

The Beauty and Strength
of a Godly Woman

Updated Edition

Susan Hunt

The True Woman: The Beauty and Strength of a Godly Woman (Updated Edition)

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To our daughters and daughter-in-love

Kathryn Barriault

Laurin Coley

Shannon Hunt

With gratitude that they are true women

To our granddaughters and granddaughter-in-love

Mary Kate Barriault

Suzie Barriault

Sara Barriault

Heather Hunt

Cassie Coley

Maggie Coley

Kate Coley

With the prayer that they will be true women

And in memory of our granddaughter

Annie Grace Barriault

My mother

Mary Kathryn McLaurin

And my great-grandmother

Cassie Barnes

True women who gave us the legacy of true womanhood

The children of your servants shall dwell secure;
their offspring shall be established before you.

Psalm 102:28

Older women . . . are to teach what is good, and so train the
young women . . . that the word of God may not be reviled.

Titus 2:3–5

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Acknowledgments

1997

This book is a family affair. My family saturates me with their love, support, and prayers. My husband, Gene, read every word, talked me through the rough places, and watched ball games with me when my mind was on overload and needed a break.

Our children cooperated superbly—no one had a baby while I was writing. This was a first! Baby Cassie arrived after the manuscript was turned in, but just in time for her name to be added to the dedication page. Good timing.

Three of my sisters in Christ made huge investments in this book. Lynn Brookside, Karen Grant, and Barbara Thompson read each chapter as it was written. Their reactions and suggestions strengthened the book and reassured me. These true women are true friends.

My church is a place where believers share their gifts and graces with one another. I am especially blessed by the fellowship of my Sunday school class, the patience of the Tuesday morning women's Bible study as they allowed me to teach what I was writing, the prayer support of the men's Wednesday morning prayer group, and the godly leadership of our elders.

Thank you to the prayer warriors across the country who faithfully surrounded this project with prayer protection.

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I am especially grateful for the true women who opened the pages of their lives and allowed us to read what the Lord has done for them. Their stories are their gifts to us, and it is a costly gift. An exorbitant amount of emotional and spiritual energy was required to open and share this portion of their life-diaries, but I am confident that this investment will reap rich rewards in God’s kingdom. As you read their stories, I am sure you will join me in praising God for his grace in their lives and in thanking them for touching our lives with that grace.

Foreword

My journey to grasp, embrace, and treasure God's distinctive design and calling for men and women has not been without its twists and turns over the years.

From my early childhood, I loved Christ and his Word and pledged to them my life-long, whole-hearted allegiance. But during my twenties and into my thirties, I sometimes struggled to align my heart for ministry with what I perceived to be limitations placed on me by Scripture.

Over time, as I pressed into the Word and sought to faithfully minister to the women in my path, I grew to believe in my heart what I knew in my head: that God's ways are not only true and right, but they are also good and beautiful. I came to see my womanhood as a gift rather than a limitation, as a means by which I could glorify my Creator and proclaim the gospel story. God's plan that had once made me chafe became a source of rich joy.

Then, in 1997, God began to birth in my heart a vision of what he could do in our day if Christian women would say "Yes, Lord" to whatever he called them to do and be. With eyes of faith, I envisioned the difference that humble, joyful, faithful, prayerful, Christ-exalting, grace-filled women could make as they reflected the beauty of Christ in our world. I began to

dream of a great army of women going to battle for the souls of family members, friends, colleagues, and neighbors . . . homes, churches, communities, and nations. *True women* of God, not bound by tradition or human reasoning or political correctness or cultural dictates, but by the truth of his Word and the leading of his Spirit.

As the Lord would have it, that same year, a pastor's wife named Susan Hunt wrote a book called *The True Woman: The Beauty and Strength of a Godly Woman*. This book painted a compelling picture of how our lives as Christian women were intended to be a reflection of our redemption—women whose authority is God's Word, rather than ourselves, and whose purpose is God's glory above all other desires and motives.

Within the next year or so, I had the privilege of meeting with Susan for the first time. I witnessed firsthand her heart to see women in the local church become flourishing, fruitful servants of the Lord.

A few years later, some friends and I got together in my condo for a girlfriend evening. That occasion proved to be unforgettable for two reasons: (1) I was miserable, having come down with some sort of bug, and spent the evening sprawled across the couch in my bathrobe; (2) we ended up talking about the need for a great work of the Spirit in the hearts of Christian women around the world, to take back the ground that had been given over to unbiblical ways of thinking and to make the gospel believable. We dreamed about what all this might look like, talked about others such as Susan who had a similar passion, and prayed that God might use us collectively to help further this "counter-revolution" in our day.

That night at the condo, that whole season, and Susan's book (among other seminal resources), were all significant markers in my journey.

Fast forward to 2008. Flowing out of this growing burden in my heart, *Revive Our Hearts*, the ministry I founded and have

served for many years, hosted its first national True Woman conference. More than six thousand women gathered to seek the Lord at True Woman '08, in Schaumburg, Illinois. With one heart, we worshiped, searched the Scriptures, and affirmed our longing to see God spark a movement of revival and true, biblical womanhood in our day. Thousands of women expressed this heart by signing the “True Woman Manifesto” (see pages 233–237) that you may also wish to sign. Susan Hunt was one of the speakers for this momentous event.

I have long looked up to Susan as a role model. She reflects the loveliness of Jesus, and I, along with many others, would say, “I want to be like her—like *Christ*—when I grow up!” (When she spoke several years later at Revive '17, another conference we hosted, she brought the audience to tears and to its feet with her deeply moving message on aging.) She is a woman of grace and wisdom, and has often encouraged me on my journey. She has been a faithful, tireless servant of the Lord and of his people. She has poured her life into helping women understand and live out God’s mission for their lives.

I have often called Susan the “grandmother” of the True Woman movement. Whether in the front row, or from afar, she has rejoiced and cheered and prayed as this movement has developed.

Now, more than twenty years since the initial release of *The True Woman*, I was delighted when Susan and our friends at Crossway expressed an interest in releasing a fresh version of this book as part of the True Woman imprint. How fitting this is.

I am grateful that this message will be heard by a new generation of women. The insights and passion Susan shares in this book will deepen your understanding of God’s calling for your life and will fuel your desire to let him fulfill that calling in and through you.

If you will ponder and savor the picture Susan has laid out from God’s Word, I believe you will find it to be ravishing and

Foreword

powerful. It is a vision of the beauty and strength that characterize women who aspire to live *Coram Deo*—before the face and in the presence of God. For truly . . .

Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. (Ps. 96:6)

Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth
September 2018

Introduction

Twenty-Two Years Later

It was almost the end of the twentieth century when I wrote this book. I was fifty-seven. Now it is the twenty-first century and I am seventy-nine. There have been remarkable changes during those years, but one of the most shocking has been the growing rebellion against the biblical design and standard of sexuality; so when Crossway suggested a reprint of *The True Woman* (TTW) I wondered if twenty-first century Christian women would see it as irrelevant.

Shame on me.

God's Word is always relevant and whatever specific issues in the Word are being challenged are the very issues we need to fearlessly and lovingly address, so I am grateful to Crossway for their decision to revive this book.

Over the last twenty-two years, the concepts I wrote about in TTW have not changed, but my understanding of them has definitely expanded. That's the way it is with God's Word—we never exhaust it. Admittedly, some of the examples and quotes regarding characteristics of the culture at the time I originally wrote TTW are now outdated, but I chose to leave them so you can consider how our current culture is the consequence of that time. *But,*

God's truth is timeless; it transcends generations, cultures, and ethnicities. No matter how familiar a passage is, we can be continually surprised by new understandings and applications.

The more I learn about biblical womanhood, the more passionate I am to provide resources to encourage and equip women to think biblically and live covenantally, to celebrate our creation design and redemptive calling, and to obey the Titus 2 mandate to give the legacy of biblical womanhood to the next generation. I hope this brief summary of how my understanding of these concepts has developed will give greater clarity as you read the book and will provide an apologetic for becoming a true woman.

Thinking Biblically and Living Covenantally

Genesis 1 is packed, but I simply want to consider five foundational principles for thinking biblically and living covenantally that unfold in this chapter. The story of redemption began in time and space with five fascinating words:

In the beginning, God created . . . (Gen. 1:1)

Foundational Principle 1: God is the reference point for all that is. Unless we begin with God there is no value or purpose—everything is meaningless.

God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. (Gen. 1:3)

Foundational Principle 2: God's Word is the authority over all that is. God commanded and light obeyed. Light did what it was created to do. Whether we acknowledge it or not, God's Word is the authority.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” (Gen. 1:26)

Foundational Principle 3: God's glory is our purpose. Humans were created to live in God's presence—in a unique relationship with him—and to reflect some aspects of the glory of his character.

So God created man in his own image . . . male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:27)

Foundational Principle 4: Gender distinctiveness is God’s good plan. God did not create a genderless being. The man and woman were equally in God’s image, but they were different.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion.” (Gen. 1:28)

Foundational Principle 5: Gender distinctiveness is necessary to fulfill the cultural mandate to be fruitful, multiply, and have dominion over the earth.

Men *and* women are needed to fulfill the gospel mandate to multiply spiritually by making disciples (Matt. 28:18–20).

The man and woman had the *same* authority, purpose, and mandate, but they were designed for *different* functions in God’s kingdom. They were to live covenantally—in relationship with God and with each other in a way that reflected God’s character to one another. It was very good.

God said so.

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Gen. 1:31)

God’s Creation Design of Woman

Genesis 2 gives more detail about God’s male and female designs.

Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature . . . Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” (Gen. 2:7, 18)

Man’s aloneness was not good because he was created in the image of the triune God. He needed one who was equal, but

different, so that together they could reflect the equality and diversity of the Trinity.

The helper design is not limited to a woman's role as a wife. This design is intrinsic to who we are as God's female creation. It is an incredible design that reflects some aspects of God himself. The Hebrew word for helper, *ezer*, is frequently used in Scripture to refer to God as our Helper. As you read the following verses, consider *how* God helps us.

But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation,
that you may take it into your hands;
to you the helpless commits himself;
you have been the helper of the fatherless. (Ps. 10:14)

May he send you help from the sanctuary
and give you support from Zion! (Ps. 20:2)

Our soul waits for the LORD;
he is our help and our shield. (Ps. 33:20)

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble. (Ps. 46:1)

Behold, God is my helper;
the Lord is the upholder of my life. (Ps. 54:4)

But I am poor and needy;
hasten to me, O God!
You are my help and my deliverer;
O LORD, do not delay! (Ps. 70:5)

For he delivers the needy when he calls,
the poor and him who has no helper. (Ps. 72:12)

You, LORD, have helped me and comforted me. (Ps. 86:17)

If the LORD had not been my help,
my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence.

When I thought, “My foot slips,”
your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up. (Ps. 94:17–18)

The LORD is on my side as my helper;
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me. (Ps. 118:7)

I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
but the LORD helped me. (Ps. 118:13)

He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy. (Luke 1:54)

Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains that in Luke 1:54, part of Mary’s magnificat, the word *helped* “means to succor . . . or, perhaps better still, to lift up. The people of Israel had been cast down; they needed to be lifted up, they needed to be saved. They had been thrown down by an enemy, but someone comes and rescues them, he takes hold of them and helps them to stand upon their feet.”¹

The helper ministry is a description of Jesus!

As we reflect on how the triune God ministers to us as our Helper, we begin to understand the beauty and strength of our design. The creativity of this design is limitless in the ways it can be expressed in various relationships and circumstances, but it is constant in its purpose to glorify God. This has application for us as individual women and as we join together with other women to be corporate helpers in God’s church.

Woman’s Redemptive Calling

When the first man and woman sinned against God, they deserved death but received the gospel promise of life through a Redeemer, and, grace upon grace, this Life would come through woman. The man and woman listened as God spoke to Satan:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;

he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel. (Gen. 3:15)

In response to this covenant promise, Adam gave his wife a new name. “The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20).

“Eve” sounds like the Hebrew word for life-giver. The gospel promise of Genesis 3:15 brought a radical reversal: the one who became a life-taker because of sin is declared to be a life-giver because of God’s grace. Womanhood was redeemed.²

When we are saved, our *potential* changes from life-taker to life-giver because our *status* has changed: “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12).

Birthing a child—a *life*—is a beautiful illustration of our redemptive calling to be life-givers, but the ultimate demonstration is when the life of Christ fills us and overflows into our circumstances and relationships. Our redemptive calling transcends age, life-season, marital status, ethnicity, culture, time, and place in history. It is big. *Really big*. It is a calling to live boldly and biblically—to be a true woman.

How can fallen females who have been redeemed by Christ possibly live out the implications of our creation design and redemptive calling? How can we live such selfless lives?

[Jesus said] “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you . . . The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (John 14:16–17, 26)

For he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we can confidently say,

“The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear;
what can man do to me?” (Heb. 13:5–6)

We can be life-giving helpers because he has given us his Word and his Spirit, and he also gives us his church.

Titus 2 Discipleship

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he gave his church a glorious commission:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:19–20)

In Titus 2, this commission is made gender-specific when we are told that “Older women . . . are to teach what is good, and so train the young women . . . that the word of God may not be reviled” (Titus 2:3–5).

The Titus 2 mandate calls the church to equip older women to teach and train younger women. We are to disciple women to think biblically—to think about all of life, including womanhood, through the lens of Scripture—and to live covenantally—to reflect our covenant relationship with the Lord in our relationships with God’s covenant family. This gospel mandate is God’s strategy to give the legacy of true womanhood to each generation.³

Giving the Legacy

When I wrote *The True Woman*, my vision for women embracing this idea was small. When I attended the first True Woman Conference in 2008, my vision exploded as I saw thousands of women listen to Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth’s courageous defense of biblical womanhood. I have celebrated as that conference

became a movement spreading all over the world. While countless women have rejected God's Word, the biblical ideal of womanhood is capturing the minds, imaginations, and hearts of countless others—that's why I have added new stories at the beginning of each chapter. I am grateful for these true women who are glorifying God by reflecting the redeeming work of Christ in this generation and who are giving the legacy to the next generation.

Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together! (Ps. 34:3)

Part 1

The True Woman Versus the New Woman

What is the true woman?
How did the concept evolve?
How did it dissolve?
Does it need to be rediscovered?

My Prayer

*That you will be captivated by this concept and stirred to be
a true woman.*

My Challenge

I appeal to you therefore, [sisters], by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2

Reflecting Redemption as a Woman

Fifteen years ago I was visiting my sister-in-law Rosalia when I saw a copy of *The True Woman* on her table. I started reading it and was so captivated, I asked to borrow it.

This book revolutionized my life and the focus of my ministry because it was the first time I saw the doctrines of grace applied to me specifically as a woman. I saw the practical implications this had for women in the life and ministry of the church. This apologetic for womanhood does not undermine the masculine leadership of the church but rather complements it. The concept of spiritual mothering began to find a place in my heart as I understood the responsibility I had before God to other women in the church.

I emailed the author of the book with little hope of receiving an answer. To my surprise she not only answered but has also been willing to be a spiritual mother to me.

I shared the book with other pastors' wives. As our minds were renewed these truths weighed on our hearts. After presenting a plan to our pastors, we began two Bible studies with the women of the church. We now have a vibrant women's ministry that is helping cultivate a culture of community in our church. The legacy of biblical womanhood is being given to the next generation. Teen girls have a lot of worldly influences because the world has a definite agenda for them, but they have hungry hearts and desire to learn what God says about womanhood.

I have also shared *The True Woman* with unbelieving women. It is amazing to see their response to the principles of biblical womanhood. One woman said, "I am a feminist, but now that I understand God's beautiful design, and that women are not inferior to men but different, I want to know more about him."

In the last ten years, God has given me the privilege of sharing these amazing truths with women in Cuba, Ecuador, Peru, Costa Rica, and Colombia. The truths of biblical womanhood transcend generations and cultures.



Fanny Gomez and her husband Eric, who is a pastor, have three children. They live in Santiago, Dominican Republic. Fanny loves to teach women about biblical womanhood and enjoys seeing them embrace God's design for their lives.

1

Her Time

To a certain extent, woman is the conservator of her nation's welfare. Her virtue, if firm and uncorrupted, will stand sentinel over that of the empire.

Female Piety

I am thrilled with the plethora of books, tapes, videos, and magazines that are helping Christians think biblically and strategically as we live out our faith in a post-Christian culture. But as I read, listen, and watch, I wonder if a foundational essential for salting culture has been missed. The French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville discovered this secret ingredient when he traveled through the United States in 1831. He wrote about it in his classic work *Democracy in America*: “No free communities ever existed without morals, and . . . morals are the work of woman. Consequently, whatever affects the condition of women, their habits and their opinions, has great political importance in my eyes.”¹

The nineteenth-century preacher John Angell James was also aware of woman's position as the heart of culture:

The greatest influence on earth, whether for good or for evil, is possessed by woman. Let us study the history of by-gone ages, the state of barbarism and civilization; of the east and the west, of Paganism and Christianity; of antiquity and the middle ages; of the mediaeval and modern times; and we shall find that there is nothing which more decidedly separates them than the condition of woman.²

I can almost hear the groans of women. “Where are the men today who place such high value on womanhood?” Some have chosen to land on that question and write books filled with examples of how men have disappointed, discouraged, distressed, degraded, and disgraced women. But that is blame-shifting. The painful reality is that the question is not: “Where are men like Tocqueville and James?” The question is: “Where are the true women who are having such a magnanimous magnetism on our culture?”

The Real Thing

But what is meant by the term “the true woman”?

The dictionary defines *true* as “consistent with fact or reality; exactly conforming to a rule, standard, or pattern.”³ Some of the meanings of the Greek words translated as “true,” “truly,” and “truth” in the New Testament include *unconcealed*, *actual*, *true to fact*, *real*, *ideal*, *genuine*, *sincere*, *the reality lying at the basis of an appearance*, and *the manifested veritable essence of a matter*.⁴

The true woman is the real thing. She is a genuine, authentic masterpiece. The Master has set eternity in her heart and is conforming her to his own image. There is consistency in her outward behavior because it is dictated by the reality of her inner life. That reality is her redemption.

The true woman is a reflection of her redemption.

Since the fall of Adam, and until Christ returns, there cannot be a thoroughly true reflection of his image. Sin brings confusion, pandemonium, and death to the soul, and its remnants haunt us

even after we are born again. But the radical entrance of grace into the heart brings life, order, and sanity. By the transforming power of the gospel, the Christian woman is empowered by God's Spirit to give an increasingly true reflection of her Savior and thus to be a true woman.

"True womanhood" was the accepted and expected concept of womanhood in mid-nineteenth-century America. Women's books and magazines cultivated and propagated this concept. According to Barbara Welter, "Authors who addressed themselves to the subject of women in the mid-nineteenth century used this phrase as frequently as writers on religion mentioned God. Neither group felt it necessary to define their favorite terms; they simply assumed—with some justification—that readers would intuitively understand exactly what they meant."⁵

I first read of the true-woman concept in *No Place for Truth*. In this book, David Wells, professor of historical and systematic theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, writes:

Moralists and campaigners in the nineteenth century almost invariably addressed their pleas and admonitions to women, to the hands that rocked the cradles. Men, it seemed, were beyond redemption unless their womenfolk could get to them. Carousing and cavorting were accepted as an inevitable part of being male, but it was felt that if women were in some way to fall as well, the very fabric of society would be rent. For this peculiar role in the world, women were not sequestered away from wickedness, as was often the case in Europe, but . . . were encouraged to develop the strength of mind and independence of thought without which their innocence would soon be overcome.⁶

Various attributes characterized the nineteenth-century true woman. Welter summarizes these into "four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity."⁷ Provocative words to say the least! Part of our task will be to determine if

these are biblical virtues. If they are, then we must dismantle our twentieth-century definitions of these words and discover the biblical definitions.

Then and Now

Imagine living in mid-nineteenth-century culture where you would be out of sync if you opposed this standard. Let me jumpstart your imaginings by quoting from some books and magazines of that era.

Imagine sitting in your doctor's office scanning your favorite magazine, *The Lady at Home*, and reading:

. . . even if we cannot reform the world in a moment, we can begin the work by reforming ourselves and our households—
It is woman's mission. Let her not look away from her own little family circle for the means of producing moral and social reforms, but begin at home.⁸

Imagine sitting by the fire with a cup of tea and a new book by a favorite male author and reading:

Every woman, whether rich or poor, married or single, has a circle of influence, within which, according to her character, she is exerting a certain amount of power for good or harm. Every woman, by her virtue or her vice; by her folly or her wisdom; by her levity or her dignity, is adding something to our national elevation or degradation.⁹

Imagine your daughter perusing a catalog from Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary and being “promised an education that would render women handmaidens to the gospel and provide them with tools they could use ‘in the great task of renovating the world.’”¹⁰

Imagine getting a copy of the much-talked-about *Democracy in America* and reading:

If I were asked, now that I am drawing to the close of this work, in which I have spoken of so many important things

done by the Americans, to what the singular prosperity and growing strength of that people ought mainly to be attributed, I should reply: To the superiority of their women.¹¹

It sounds idyllic.

But that is not the time in history when God placed *us* on this planet. That was then; this is now.

Fast forward from the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century and imagine . . .

My friend Ruth returning to teach high school after thirteen years as a stay-at-home mom:

I knew intellectually about the notion of truth being relative, but I was not prepared for the reality of the results of this philosophy. In a discussion about cheating, I told the students they should not cheat because it was wrong. They could not connect with what I was saying. They looked at me incredulously and asked, “Why?”

Imagine faithful Christian parents being told by their teenage daughter that she is pregnant and wants to have an abortion. It is an easy way to “get rid of the problem,” and she thinks their objections are just another ploy to control her.

Imagine my young friend Jennifer, along with seventeen other students in a high school health class in a conservative suburban community, being asked if they think it is wrong for an unmarried couple to live together. Jennifer and five others said yes. Two-thirds saw no problem with this arrangement.

Imagine a Re-imagining Conference billed as “A Global Conference by Women; for Women and Men,” where conference participants reportedly explored ways to “re-imagine” God in nontraditional ways. One speaker told the group, “I don’t think we need a theory of atonement at all. I think Jesus came for life and to show us something about life. . . . I don’t think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff. . . .”

Participants worshiped the divine in each other by marking red dots on their foreheads to signify their divinity and then bowing to each other in an act of reverence. They sang songs to the goddess Sophia, the source of their divinity, the creator who dwells within them and unleashes within them their divine power.¹²

Imagine a United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, where, according to Dr. James Dobson:

The delegates from the United States, Canada and the European Union lived up to expectations. They focused on re-designing the family, reordering the way males and females interrelate, promoting “reproductive rights for women,” distributing condoms and safe-sex nonsense to kids, propagating “homosexual and lesbian rights,” weakening parental authority, undermining “patriarchal” religious teachings and spreading feminist ideology to every nation on earth.¹³

Workshops at the conference included “Lesbian Flirtation Techniques Workshop” and “How Religious Fundamentalism Helps the Spread of AIDS.”

Obviously the reasons for such a contrast between then and now are complex. But the question must be asked: *Is the loss of true womanhood a basic cause for our current cultural poverty and confusion?* It seems undeniable that it is at least a contributor. Which forces another question: *Could the recapturing of true womanhood be a contributor to, or dare we dream, a catalyst for reforming and reshaping culture?*

The true-woman concept is much broader than the husband-and-wife relationship. We will see that the virtues of true womanhood are biblical virtues that cross all cultural, situational, and generational boundaries and go to the heart of the covenant community of faith. But first let me build a case for the urgency for women of biblical faith to give a true reflection of our redemption by maintaining a firm and uncorrupted virtue that “will stand sentinel over that of the empire” at this time in history.

Our Time

Cultural chaos is nothing new. Since Adam and Eve plunged humanity into sin, there have been two kingdoms warring over territorial rights. The territory is the human heart, and the issue is who will rule. There is no demilitarized zone. The enemy of our souls is ruthless, deceptive, and dazzling. He cunningly adapts to each generation and location. But in God's providence, this is the time in history and the place on the globe that he has placed us. This is the time and place that we are to reflect our redemption. So what characterizes our time?

Peggy Noonan, former speechwriter for Ronald Reagan and George Bush, gave a trenchant critique in *Forbes* magazine. Her critique is noteworthy because her vantage point affords her the opportunity to observe and participate in the broader secular culture. In a sense, this is a view from within. Noonan writes: "The life of people on earth is obviously much better than it was 500 years ago. . . . But we are not happier. I believe we are just cleaner, more attractive sad people than we used to be."¹⁴

After cataloging some reasons people today are discontented, Noonan declares:

It is embarrassing to live in the most comfortable time in the history of man and not be happy. We all have so much!

. . . I find myself thinking of Auden's words about the average man in 1939, as darkness gathered over Europe. . . . Auden called his era the "age of anxiety." I think what was at the heart of the dread in those days, just a few years into modern times, was that we could tell we were beginning to lose God—banishing him from the scene, from our consciousness, losing the assumption that he was part of the daily drama, or its maker. And it is a terrible thing when people lose God. Life is difficult and people are afraid, and to be without God is to lose man's great source of consolation and coherence. . . .

I don't think it is unconnected to the boomers' predicament that as a country we were losing God just as they were being born.

At the same time, a huge revolution in human expectation was beginning to shape our lives, the salient feature of which is the expectation of happiness. . . .

Somewhere in the seventies, or the sixties, we started expecting to be happy, and changed our lives (left town, left families, switched jobs) if we were not. And society strained and cracked in the storm.

I think we have lost the old knowledge that happiness is overrated—that, in a way, life is overrated. We have lost, somehow, a sense of mystery—about us, our purpose, our meaning, our role. Our ancestors believed in two worlds, and understood this to be the solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short one. We are the first generations of man that actually expected to find happiness here on earth, and our search for it has caused such—unhappiness. The reason: If you do not believe in another, higher world, if you believe only in the flat material world around you, if you believe that this is your only chance at happiness—if that is what you believe, then you are not disappointed when the world does not give you a good measure of its riches—you are despairing.¹⁵

After this piercing analysis of our time, Noonan concludes on a note of what sounds to me to be sad resignation:

It's odd to accuse boomers of reticence, but I think we have been reticent, at least in this:

When we talk about the difficulties of our lives and how our country has changed, we become embarrassed and feel . . . dotty. Like someone's old aunt rocking on the porch and talking about the good old days. And so most of us keep quiet, raise our children as best we can, go to the cocktail party, eat our cake, go to work and take the vacation.

We have removed ourselves from leadership, we professional white-collar boomers. We have recused ourselves from a world we never made. We turn our attention to the arts and entertainment, to watching and supporting them or contribut-

ing to them, because they are the only places we can imagine progress. And to money, hoping that it will keep us safe.¹⁶

The oddity of our time is the juxtaposition of Peggy Noonan's commentary and the rise of evangelicalism. On the one hand there is this discontent and reticent resignation, and on the other hand we hear staggering statistics about the growth of evangelicalism. David Wells comments on this:

The vast growth in evangelically minded people in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s should by now have revolutionized American culture. With a third of American adults now claiming to have experienced spiritual rebirth, a powerful countercurrent of morality growing out of a powerful and alternative worldview should have been unleashed in factories, offices, and boardrooms, in the media, universities, and professions, from one end of the country to the other. The results should by now be unmistakable. Secular values should be reeling, and those who are their proponents should be very troubled. But as it turns out, all of this swelling of the evangelical ranks has passed unnoticed in the culture. It has simply been absorbed and tamed. . . . This surely is an odd circumstance. Here is a corner of the religious world that has learned from the social scientists how to grow itself, that is sprouting huge megachurches that look like shopping malls for the religious, that can count in its own society the moneyed and powerful, and yet it causes not so much as a ripple. . . . Thus it is that both American culture and American evangelicalism have come to share the same fate, both basking in the same stunning, outward success while stricken by a painful vacuity, an emptiness in their respective centers. . . . In the one there are no moral absolutes, and in the other there is no theology.¹⁷

Our Opportunity

This is our time. This is our opportunity. There is a vacuum of moral leadership. There is decadence and despair. There is a shallowness

of theology that has produced a superficial lifestyle among Christians. But woman is the keeper of the moral atmosphere. She sets the moral compass. But not just any woman.

The author of *Female Piety* understood this:

Man is neither safe in himself, nor profitable to others, when he lives dissociated from that benign influence which is to be found in woman's presence and character. . . . But it is not woman, gay, frivolous, and unbelieving, or woman separated from those divine teachings which make all hearts wise, that can lay claim to the exercise of such an influence. But when she adds to the traits of sympathy, forbearance, and warm affection, which characterize her, the strength and wisdom of a well-cultivated intellect, and the still higher attributes of religious faith and holy love, it is not easy to limit the good she may do in all situations, and in all periods of life.¹⁸

A Band-Aid approach will not suffice. Our moment in history demands women who know their time, but who are not controlled or manipulated by their time. Our time begs for women of biblical faith who can exert a reforming influence on culture.

In my work as consultant for the women's ministry of my denomination, I spend much energy exploring the role of women in the home, church, and world, and training women to fulfill their calling. At a leadership training conference, a woman asked an insightful and heartfelt question: "As we pursue our desire to train women for kingdom work through the women's ministry of our churches, what is to keep us from spinning out of control and going the way of so many other women's movements? Is it wise for us to organize and mobilize women?"

I had considered these questions and was prepared to answer, or so I thought. My response: "Women *will* organize, and they *will* mobilize. If we *don't* give biblical leadership, there will be a vacuum, and someone will fill it. A laissez-faire approach may suffice for a season, but eventually someone will become frus-

trated and erupt, and others will follow. Anger-birther leadership is dangerous.”

Following the meeting, the question hovered over me. I could not disentangle it from my brain. I finally concluded that there was another part of the answer that God wanted me to learn.

It took a lot of soul-excavation before I went deep enough to unearth the treasure I found. It was hard work. At times my spiritual muscles ached. I was weary from this soul-work, and I was uncertain that I had made the right discovery, so I went to visit Rosalie. That visit was the final push to write this book.

Rosalie Cassels was a fascinating woman. She was one of my heroines and one of my spiritual mothers. In her late eighties, she was full of wisdom and grace that came from living a life of serving her Savior through his church.

Rosalie was born January 1, 1907. She has been a member of Rose Hill Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina, since she was about eight years old. Her father began this church as a Sunday school class for poor children.

As Rosalie became a young woman, she had a passion for training women to serve the Lord through his church. She held many positions in the women’s work of her denomination. Her husband was a prominent and successful businessman, so she had the resources to travel to mission fields encouraging missionaries.

But of all the things Rosalie did, her eyes lit up the most when she tells about serving as director of the Interdenominational Christian Conference for Negro Women at Benedict College. This was a week-long summer program to train black women for kingdom work. Rosalie’s tenure in this volunteer position spanned the years from 1947–1967. Think about it—this was before racial reconciliation was in vogue. A couple of years after she began this work, her maid became ill while the family was vacationing at their lake house. Rosalie drove her into town to see the doctor. On the way, the maid needed to use the restroom. Rosalie made several stops, but there was no place that would allow a black

woman to use their facilities. By the time they reached Columbia, Rosalie had a new mission. Though her cause was unpopular in her community at that time, she worked tirelessly to improve the circumstances of African Americans.

I have sat spellbound as Rosalie told me incredible stories, usually not even aware that the stories were extraordinary. This particular afternoon she told me that during the time she worked in interracial ministries, she would often go into churches or restaurants, and she could see and hear people whispering. “I could feel their disapproval,” she said. “But it didn’t matter. I was doing what God told me to do.”

Sitting in her presence, I knew I had made the right discovery regarding the potential danger of equipping and mobilizing women for kingdom service.

Any group is in danger of spinning out of control unless each individual woman’s redeemed character is shaped and driven by God’s Spirit and his Word.

Placing a high premium on each woman’s character is mandatory for a group of women to stay on course. Godly leadership keeps this foundational principle at the center. It is godly character that will persevere and finish well regardless of the opposition or obstacles.

My discovery seems obvious. It is not a complicated truth, but it is a core truth. Perhaps its simplicity causes us to take it for granted. We assume everyone knows it. And then it slips to the background, and soon everyone has forgotten it.

We must train women to serve the King of the church through his church because of who he is—the King of glory; and we must continually remind them who they are—his redeemed daughters.

A Close Encounter

We will explore the standard, the identity, and the virtues of the true woman in later chapters. But let me set the stage by presenting a breathtaking scene from Scripture that I want to

hold before you as we begin our quest into what it means to be a true woman.

The Lord God spoke to our spiritual father Abraham and made an extraordinary promise: “I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you” (Gen. 17:7).

“Your offspring” includes me! All believers are spiritual offspring of Abraham, so the God of glory is *my* God.

And it keeps getting better. “I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Lev. 26:11–12).

He will not be an absentee father. He will live among us. We will be his people and live in his presence.

Keep this promise in mind as we look at the scene at Mt. Sinai. Try to form a mental picture of this amazing episode. The thunder and lightning, the thick cloud over the mountain, the loud trumpet blast, smoke billowing up as though from a furnace, the mountain trembling violently, the trumpet getting louder and louder—this goes beyond awesome (Ex. 19:16–19). But while Moses is on the mountain receiving God’s law, the people make and worship a golden calf. In response to this flagrant disobedience, God strikes the people with a plague and says to Moses, “Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people” (Ex. 33:3).

The plague was one thing, but when God said, “I will not go up among you,” Moses panicked. God was threatening to withdraw his presence, and that was the one thing Moses knew they could not do without. Moses could not deny that the people were rebellious; he could only plead God’s covenant faithfulness to be their God and to live among them. So he cried, “Consider too that this nation is your people” (Ex. 33:13).

And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” And he said to him, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?” (Ex. 33:14–16)

Then Moses prayed, “Please show me your glory” and God replied, “I will make all my goodness pass before you” (Ex. 33:18–19). God showed Moses the glory of his character (Ex. 34:6–7).

Moses spent forty days on the mountain with the Lord. Following this incredible encounter, when he returned to the people with the tablets of the Law in his hands, “he did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God” (Ex. 34:29).

Moses’s world was as cluttered with unbelief, rebellion, and moral collapse as our world today. But he knew that all that mattered was: “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.”

Moses knew that the only thing that would distinguish them from everyone else on the face of the earth was God dwelling among them.

And when Moses spent time in the glorious presence of God, he radiated that glory. Such a close encounter with glory could not be repressed; it could only be reflected.

In Summary

When my friend Sharon Kraemer was diagnosed with cancer, her response was, “I am confident that God will use this to take me deeper into his love for me.” I didn’t see Sharon until several weeks after surgery and several rounds of chemotherapy, and at my first sight of her I gasped. It was not because her body and her hair were so thin. My shock was because Sharon absolutely glowed

with peace and love. She was awash with an undeniable radiance. I could only exclaim, “Sharon, you must have been spending some incredible times with the Lord.” She did not need to reply. The evidence was there.

This is the essence of the true woman. Regardless of the time in history when she inhabits this earth, she is one who lives in the presence of glory. Her redeemed character is shaped and driven by God’s Word and Spirit. Because she is the very dwelling place of the Lord God, her reflection of him is manifested in every relationship and circumstance of life. The distinguishing characteristic of her life is his presence in her radiating out to all who see her. The true woman’s life is not segmented into sacred and secular. All of life is sacred because it is lived in his presence. The true woman is a true reflection of God’s glory.

Personal Reflection

1. I must begin by asking you to “examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith” (2 Cor. 13:5). Are you trusting in Christ alone for your salvation? Have you repented of your sin and put your faith in his life of perfect obedience and his atoning sacrifice on the cross? He is the source of truth, for he is truth, and it is only as you are in relationship with him that you can reflect him. Write a statement of your faith in your journal.
2. Are you a participating member of a worshiping community? Have you placed yourself under the authority of a local church?
3. Read Acts 17:26–28 and reflect on the truth that God sovereignly determined the time in history when and the place on the planet where you would live. Meditate on the fact that in him you “live and move and have your being.” Record your thoughts in your journal.
4. How do the values and character of “our time” distract and discourage you from living for God’s glory?

5. Read and meditate on Exodus 33 and 34.
 - When Moses asked to see God's glory, what did God say he would show him in 33:19?
 - List the character qualities God uses to describe his goodness.
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to transform your heart so that you reflect these characteristics in your relationships and situations.
6. Read 1 Corinthians 3:16 and praise God that he is not an absentee father. His dwelling place is among you—indeed he dwells in you. Again record your thoughts about this glorious truth.

Reflecting Redemption by Thinking Biblically

From childhood I was taught the authority of God's Word. There were always older women who spiritually mothered me by word and example. I knew involvement in women's ministry was in my future.

Eventually, God called me to serve on the national women's ministry team for the Presbyterian Church in America where godly women taught me about God's design and calling for women. They encouraged and equipped me to *think biblically and live covenantally* in all of life, and when I became coordinator for women's ministry at my home church this concept became one of our objectives. The day came when this philosophy of ministry, which I loved deeply and taught passionately, sustained me in powerful and tangible ways.

Our son, Clary, a freshman at Clemson University, was in a serious car accident. In God's providence, the place and timing took his car down a ravine to the edge of a river basin next to the Clemson football field just as the team finished practice. Several trainers and coaches immediately swam to Clary's aid and rescued him from the car as the coach led the team in prayer.

News of the accident spread quickly in our little town. As I drove to the hospital, there was a moment of clarity when I thought, "God has NOT promised me everything will be okay." But in my shock, I could not remember what he had promised. I could not think biblically until a dear sister called and spoke truth into my crisis—"God loves you, and Clary is his. No matter what happens, he will not leave you or forsake you. He will be glorified in this and will use it for the good of you and your family."

My husband received a similar call to inform him of the accident from a dear brother in Christ and member of our

church who works with the Clemson football program. His first words were, “God is good, and this has not caught him by surprise.”

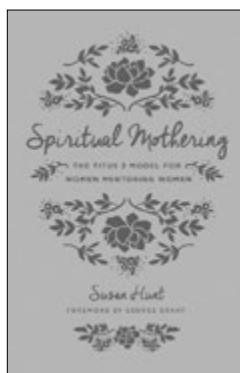
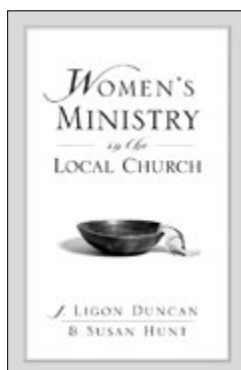
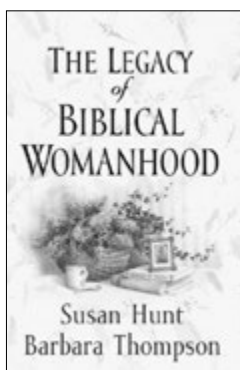
These friends lived covenantally by reaching out to us with words that carried us through the next hours, days, weeks, and months.

God’s promises and his people sustained us. Life-giving words and actions encouraged us to trust the sovereignty and goodness of our God. The cry of our hearts became, “God, use this for your glory and make us more like Jesus.”



Paula Miles is wife to Kevin and mother of Wimberly (Charlie), Janie, Clary, and Judy. She serves as a trainer for the PCA national women’s ministry team and as women’s ministry coordinator at Clemson Presbyterian Church in Clemson, South Carolina. Her son, Clary, was able to finish his freshman year. After many long and difficult months, he has experienced much healing. We expect a full recovery. Praise God!

Also Available from Susan Hunt



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Christina Fox, Women's Ministry Advisor, Presbyterian Church in America

Susan Hunt is a mother, grandmother, pastor's wife, author, and the former director of women's ministries for the Presbyterian Church in America. Hunt has written a number of books, including *Big Truths for Little Kids*; *Spiritual Mothering*; and *By Design*.

WOMEN / CHRISTIAN LIVING

