

FOREWORD BY JEN WILKIN

enough
about me

FIND LASTING JOY
IN THE AGE OF SELF

jen oshman

“Lord knows that we have more than enough books about ourselves and never enough books about the God that created us. It isn’t until we see him that we can then make sense of ourselves. I believe Jen Oshman’s book accomplishes that by widening our vision and helping us fall in love with seeing God again.”

Jackie Hill Perry, poet; author; hip-hop artist

“Countless voices are telling women, ‘Believe in yourself . . . reach your potential . . . find your purpose . . . fulfill your destiny.’ But *Enough about Me* has a very different message, a message that is not only countercultural but also runs counter to today’s Christian culture: your life is not ultimately or most profoundly about you, but about the one who has made you his own. This is the kind of good news women really need.”

Nancy Guthrie, Bible teacher; author, *Even Better than Eden: Nine Ways the Bible’s Story Changes Everything about Your Story*

“The siren call of self promises much but provides little. While the world tells us to want more, do more, and be more, Jen Oshman turns our eyes from ourselves and helps us to find our lives in Jesus, the giver of every good and perfect gift. Written with warmth and wisdom, *Enough about Me* is an encouragement to something better, something richer, and something true.”

Melissa B. Kruger, Director of Women’s Content, The Gospel Coalition; author, *In All Things* and *Growing Together*

“Jen Oshman deftly walks through a variety of challenges to following Jesus in the modern world. Each time she helpfully exposes the shortcomings of living for the self, while also pointing to the joy of living for and in Christ. I will give a copy to each of my daughters and pray they absorb Oshman’s godly instruction.”

Jonathan K. Dodson, Founding Pastor, City Life Church, Austin, Texas; Founder, Gospel-Centered Discipleship; author, *The Unbelievable Gospel*; *Here in Spirit*; and *Our Good Crisis*

“For many years now I have benefited from Jen Oshman’s writing. I’m delighted that she has broadened her repertoire to include this book. In an age obsessed with self, its message is delightfully countercultural and desperately needed.”

Tim Challies, blogger, Challies.com

“*Enough about Me* is for those who feel tired, burned out, or like they’re not enough. Jen Oshman kindly encourages readers to look away from themselves and to look instead to Jesus, powerfully reminding them that true, lasting joy is found only in him. This book will lift your gaze in a way that will change your life.”

Hunter Beless, Founder and Host, *Journeywomen* podcast

“This book had me hooked right from the start. I guzzled my coffee as I considered the common struggles of despair and disillusionment Jen Oshman describes. But the real triumph is the way *Enough about Me* turned my eyes to the one who defines my life and gives me joy. This is a must-read for any woman running on empty because her ‘fuel of self’ has run out. Our empty hearts need to find full dependence on God.”

Emily Jensen, Cofounder, Risen Motherhood; coauthor, *Risen Motherhood: Gospel Hope for Everyday Moments*

“In a time when our greatest value is self and the lure of this world tricks us into believing we can have it all, I can’t think of a more necessary and relevant book for today’s women. Jen Oshman masterfully ushers us to where greater joy is found by redirecting our gaze from ourselves to Christ. If you’ve ever had it all only to be discontent, or you’ve been discontent with all that you have, this book is for you.”

Shar Walker, Senior Writer, North American Mission Board

“Every day, disciples of Christ are bombarded with competing information for how they can live their best lives. Whether it’s chiseling your arms at the gym, keeping a smokestack of essential oils pumping in your house, or promising to never buy frozen chicken nuggets again—none of these things will sustainably complete you, calm you, or comfort you. The focus on self is crushing us. Jen Oshman reminds readers that the more we focus on *me*, the more out of focus we become. Sisters, there is only one place to look that will secure the good life you truly need: ‘Christ who is your life’ (Col. 3:4). And in this book, that’s who Jen Oshman points you to—Jesus and all his glory. Take up and read. We can never get enough of him.”

J. A. Medders, author, *Humble Calvinism*; Pastor of Preaching and Theology, Redeemer Church, Tomball, Texas

Enough about Me

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Find Lasting Joy
in the Age of Self

Jen Oshman

Foreword by Jen Wilkin

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For Mark

No matter the season, the country, or the circumstances,
you have always ensured that I flourish. You are a
great means of God's grace in my life. I love you.

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Foreword

Have you ever found yourself underdressed at a party? It's not the best feeling, especially if that party is a lavish wedding and you are an honored guest. That was me about ten years ago at the wedding of a dear family friend. Two days before the wedding, I received news that my uncle had passed away suddenly. We were able to adjust our plans to make it to both the funeral and the wedding, but a flight delay meant we were faced with the choice of either walking into the wedding ceremony in our simple funeral clothes or missing it altogether.

We decided to go straight to the ceremony, arriving just before the processional began, taking our seats in full view of the entire assembly of well-dressed guests. It makes me sweat just remembering that moment. We hurriedly changed into our wedding attire before the reception, and guess what? Not one person at the reception had even noticed our late entrance or lacking attire at the ceremony. Of course they didn't. As it should be, everyone's attention had been fully fixed on the splendor of the bride and groom. All of my anxiety about inadequate dress had been a waste of energy.

It is common, indeed, epidemic for women to lose sight of their purpose and calling. In a culture that tells us we are

the center of everyone's story, every day can feel like another opportunity to be the noticeably underdressed invitee at a party everyone else is attending in full glamour. Comparisons and expectations cause us to self-examine and find ourselves lacking. Anxiety over inadequacy, across days and years.

But the Christian story we are invited into, the best and most beautiful of stories, does not offer us a starring role. It does not place us at the center of the story at all. Which is why it is best and beautiful.

It is the story, in fact, of those invited to a wedding—a story, indeed, of those lately come from a funeral. It is a wedding between a bridegroom (Christ) worthy of all our attention and a bride (the church) worthy of all our effort. It is a story that invites us again and again to remember that we are not the center of attention, but that our lives can be joyfully spent preparing the bride for her husband.

This is the story Jen Oshman intends to tell you. Though your expectations for how life should be, for who you should be, and for how others should see you may daily swirl before your eyes, there is a vision higher than those that can restore to you the joy of your salvation. Oshman calls you to a wedding where the appropriate attire is self-forgetfulness and the liturgy sings the splendor of the Happy Couple. What is more fulfilling than a life spent chasing self-actualization? A life spent giving glory to the God who transcends.

This is the good life. This is the best and most beautiful story.

Welcome to the feast.

Jen Wilkin

Acknowledgments

Getting this message in readers' hands has been a joy and delight. I am so grateful the Lord allowed me this gift of grace. May he be glorified.

This book would not have been possible without the encouragement of seasoned authors and doors opened to me by those already in the writing world. Thank you, Melissa Kruger, for inviting me to write at The Gospel Coalition, for your friendship, and for your example of championing the word of God as you minister to women. Thank you, Shanna Davis, for reading my words, believing in my message, and making that connection. Thank you, Tim Challies, for reading my blog and sharing it with the world. You elevate so many new writers, and I am humbled to be among them. Thank you, Andrew Wolgemuth, for helping me understand this writing world, still a bit foreign to me. Thank you for your tireless guidance and feedback on every question I have had, whether big or small, and for giving me confidence to move forward. And thank you, Chrissy Wolgemuth, for saying hello almost four years ago and becoming a friend and encourager to me. Thank you, Tara Davis, for sharing your gift of editing with me. Your careful

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I am forever grateful for friends who have persisted over the years and over the miles. Thank you, Jen Rathmell and Kristie Coia, for being constant sources of strength, grace, and truth. And to all the women from our years at the Harbor in Okinawa and Betanie in Czechia, you have played a role in growing me and shaping the message of this book. I miss you.

Thank you to my nearby friends, who persevered through conversations and prayer times when I wondered if I should even give this a try. Thank you, Sue Toussaint, Alivia Russo, and Allie Slocum, for memorizing Colossians with me—surely those were the seeds of this book. Thank you, ladies of Redemption Parker, for letting me bounce ideas off of you, and for your enthusiasm for this message. Thank you for studying the Bible with me, praying with me and for me, and for your encouragement in these pages. Thank you,

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To my “creditors,” thank you for your devotion and care. Thank you, Kim Forney, for your tireless support and pressing me where my words were weak—you make me a better writer. Thank you, Carrie Abraham, for more than I can say. Not only did you read every single word of my manuscript with scrutiny and kindness, you and Chris have laid down your lives for us time and time again.

Thank you, Mom, for taking me to church three decades ago. You enabled me to hear the gospel and receive the life-changing grace of Jesus. Thanks, too, for instilling in me a love of reading and writing from an early age. Thank you, Rebekah, Zoe, Abby Grace, and Hannah, for being life-giving daughters. I genuinely love being your mom. Thank you for allowing me the space and time to write this book and for being as excited as I am about it. Thank you, Mark, for loving me like Christ loves the church. You’ve invested more in me than any other human—the words in this book come from you as much as they do me. I could not have envisioned or asked for a better colaborer for life across three continents, with four daughters, and over two decades of marriage so far.

And to my God in heaven, apart from you I can do nothing. Thank you for rescuing and redeeming me.

Introduction

I sat, exhausted, on my dorm room floor, my eyes hot, my head throbbing. My tear ducts were dry, and my mind was limping along wondering how I ended up like this. The sadness enveloping me was foreign. I had always been happy and successful—things usually went well for me. And now I couldn't even identify what was pushing the battering ram into my middle.

I was eighteen and enjoying my quintessential first year of college. My days were filled with green quads, captivating classes, and social gatherings. What was there to cry about?

And yet day after day, for weeks, I was stricken with a grief that seemed, at first, to have no source. I was just mournful.

Now I look back on those days with gratitude. I can see from here that they were a gift of grace, a tool in God's hands to draw me to himself. But at the time I felt as if I were under water, unable to catch my breath, disoriented from swimming so hard and making no progress.

Maybe you can relate. Perhaps you too have charted a course and worked hard, only to arrive at a goal that didn't deliver what you thought it would.

While college was the first time I encountered such disillusionment, it wouldn't be the last. As a young wife, I quickly learned that marriage wasn't exactly what I had anticipated. My entrance into professional life as a young adult was rife with disappointment. Even my life in Christian ministry has had its share of valleys. My midlife too—a season that's supposed to be the pinnacle, the climax, the destination—doesn't match the movies or the imaginings I had as a young girl.

How many times have you arrived at your desired destinations only to find that they did not deliver on their promises? We're left tired. Cynical. Disappointed in what life has produced for us.

In the two decades I've been in women's ministry, I've encountered this story time and time again. My friend Leila always wanted a big family. Now that she's the mom of five little ones, she's frustrated, resentful that her husband doesn't help around the home, and drowning in behavioral issues with several of her young boys. A single friend, Andrea, has climbed the corporate ladder with finesse. While she is making well into six figures and has the business lifestyle she always wanted, she's finding that it falls short of the personal fulfillment she anticipated. And then there's Dana, who seemingly excels at doing it all: work, motherhood, church, kids' sports—the works. But in private she confesses that she feels like a failure at all of them and if she could, she'd run away, if only for a break and a feeble attempt at finding temporary peace.

These stories and confessions aren't unique to the ladies sharing their burdens at Bible study. The wider world notices this phenomenon too. Our present moment bears witness to a growing population of hurting women.

While I don't recommend turning to Oprah for advice, her empire does have its finger on the pulse of today's American women. An Oprah.com article titled "The New Midlife Crises for Women" captures what I'm talking about. The article cites research that "women's happiness has 'declined both absolutely and relative to men' from the early '70s to the mid 2000s. More than one in five women are on antidepressants."¹

I see this in my own town, where the deteriorating mental health of women is a major public health concern. According to a county human services worker, the suicide rate among women is exceptionally high here in the Denver suburbs. A friend who is an emergency responder shared that his team often answers 911 calls from women who have overdosed on drugs and alcohol—frequently in the middle of the day. A nearby neighbor recently lost her rights to her children after driving them to school while intoxicated.

What is going on? Why are women—from the teen years through midlife and beyond—languishing so? We now have greater access to education, professional opportunities, wealth, and self-determination than ever before. We can seemingly have it all—or at least much more than we had in the past and considerably more than women in other parts of the world. And yet, we're more depressed than ever.

This is not what the giver of life intended.

Back on the floor of my college dorm room, I sat with my dusty Bible that I had brought to college but never opened. Although I believed in God, I didn't know his word. That night, however, I grabbed it like a lifeline, reaching

1. Ada Calhoun, "The New Midlife Crisis: Why (and How) It's Hitting Gen X Women," Oprah.com, <http://www.oprah.com/sp/new-midlife-crisis.html/>, accessed January 2018.

out for something more, something to help me catch my breath, find peace, and heal me.

I arrived at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane to pray before he was to endure the cross. What captivated me was that even in his unspeakable grief Jesus prayed to the Father, “Not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39). In the emotional brutality of Gethsemane I saw a Son sweetly surrendered to his Father, trusting him with immeasurable pain.

My soul longed to trust too. I didn’t think then, and I don’t think now that my suffering was on par with Jesus’s. Even then, as an inexperienced Bible reader, I grasped that my valley of despair was *nothing* compared to the prospect of hanging on a cross and bearing the weight of the world’s sins.

But in those pages, I sensed that God was standing ready to heal me. He wanted to provide relief for my sadness. Through his word, it felt like God was saying to me, “Jen, I will heal you. But you’ve got to give me your *whole* self.” In that valley, I knew the Lord was asking me to surrender. I didn’t know what that meant or how I might do it. But I longed to be healed.

If you too find yourself sitting on a floor, then this book is for you. Maybe you’re on the boardroom floor in your company’s office building, or the nursery floor knee-deep in diapers, or the floor of your master bedroom wondering how to repair your marriage. You might be on a floor overseas, or in the heart of a city, or in the middle of nowhere. You may be on a floor you never envisioned, or perhaps you are sitting squarely where you had hoped you would be, but it’s not turning out as you thought.

Or maybe you're not on the floor at all right now. If things are going really well for you, rejoice! But we know that in our fallen world, promises are broken and dreams don't always come true. A floor moment is likely coming. On this side of heaven, no one is left unscathed.

Wherever you find yourself, as a woman in this age you are likely battling some disillusionment, disenchantment, or disappointment with what life has brought you. This book will explore both how we got here and how we might get closer to the abundant life that Jesus promised to those who believe (John 10:10).

A brief word of caution before we get started: This book is not meant to address the real challenges of clinical depression. The pages that follow are written with the discouragement in mind that is commonplace among women today. If you suspect that you are experiencing significant mental illness, please seek the wisdom and treatment of a licensed counselor.

In the chapters to come we'll examine the societal norms and practices that have delivered us into our current crisis of unhappiness. We'll step back and ask why the world's wisdom hasn't given us what it promised it would. We'll specifically wrestle with why Christian women are disheartened. Why is it that nearly half of women who attend church say they experience no emotional support there?²

After diagnosing how we got here, we'll turn our hearts and minds toward God's word. How did God make us? To what has he called us? How exactly can "the God of hope fill [us] with all joy and peace" (Rom. 15:13)?

2. "Five Factors Changing Women's Relationship with Churches," Barna website, June 25, 2015, <https://www.barna.com/research/five-factors-changing-womens-relationship-with-churches/>.

As we turn these pages together, I hope that we will come to a fuller understanding of the gospel. It is the story of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. It is the message of salvation. *And it is also our daily hope and source of strength for whatever comes.* God calls us to root ourselves in Christ Jesus the Lord, to be built up in him, and to be established in him (Col. 2:6–7). When we do that, we will find the lasting joy we're looking for.

The Siren Call of Self

I am nearing my fortieth birthday. In just a couple weeks my friends and family will gather to celebrate, and I'm looking forward to it. Forty. It's a much-anticipated age.

Did you know that starting in 1970 Jennifer was the most popular name in North America for fourteen years in a row? One news article called it the *Jennifer Juggernaut* because there has never been another name phenomenon like it.¹

There's an entire generation of us. Just about every third girl in all of my classes from kindergarten through college was named Jennifer, Jen, or Jennie (Or is it spelled Jenny? My grade school worksheets reveal that I never could figure that out.). We are everywhere.

We Jennifers were born when America's favorite films were *Grease*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *Star Wars*, and *The Pink Panther*. Pretty groovy. Bell-bottoms and leisure suits marked

1. Jen Gerson, "The Jennifer Epidemic: How the Spiking Popularity of Different Baby Names Cycle Like Genetic Drift," *The National Post*, January 23, 2015, <https://nationalpost.com/news/the-jennifer-epidemic-how-the-spiking-popularity-of-different-baby-names-cycle-like-genetic-drift>.

the fashion scene. In my birth pictures, my dad is rocking a butterfly collar. My mom's hair is cut in the then-popular pageboy style. With my parents' on-point fashion sense, you know I had to be a Jennifer. Just another sign of the times.

Some of my earliest memories from the 1980s include fashions that I see again now when I go shopping with my daughters: high-waisted jeans and crop tops, shoulder pads, jean jackets, and fanny packs. I'm in favor of the jeans—last year we called them “mom jeans,” but my daughters swear that high-waisted jeans are different and immeasurably superior to mom jeans. Whatever the case, this almost-forty mom is happy to say sayonara to low-rise denim. But do we have to be so quick to welcome back fanny packs and shoulder pads?

If you can identify any of these popular fashion items, then you might be part of Generation X, of which I am just barely a member—the cutoff is 1981. The millennials mark the children born right after me, in the 1980s and 1990s. Some social scientists call us forty-year-olds “Xennials” because we're so close to the line. So if you are a millennial, let's just say we're peers. Anyway, in my heart I feel like I just left college.

A Generation of Pioneering Problems

We whose ages currently span the twenties, thirties, forties, and fifties have more than the return of shoulder pads to lament. We're still working through the hard stuff that accompanied us as we came of age. We're dubbed the divorce generation because broken marriages peaked in 1980.² This

2. Susan Gregory Thomas, “The Divorce Generation,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 9, 2011, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303544604576430341393583056>.

divorce spree coincided with the sexual revolution.³ As our parents liberated themselves from their marriages, they also found liberty in the new norms of casual relationships and alternative expressions of sexuality.

As the first latchkey generation, we found ourselves home alone, trying to figure out what was what and who was who. We grew up in uncertain times for sure.

A Generation of Pioneering Promise

But the times were exciting too. In the United States we welcomed Title IX, a civil rights law that says no one can be excluded from any education program on the basis of gender. My girlfriends and I felt the effects of Title IX primarily in the sports world. Girls' sports began receiving more attention and funding, and we all found ourselves on the soccer field every afternoon, keeping up with the boys. Our coaches' and teachers' common refrain was, "Anything the boys can do, you can do better." My high school even had some hopeful female kickers for the boys' football team.

Sure, we were limping a little from our turbulent home lives. But our school days and social circles were full of possibility. "Be anything you want to be," people told us. Our only limit was our imaginations.

I was the editor in chief of my high school's newspaper during those potential-packed days. I recently found an old paper with an editorial written by yours truly. It was composed with no small amount of sass. The gist was this: the girls are filling the honors and AP (advanced placement)

3. Wikipedia, s.v. "Sexual revolution," last modified April 27, 2019, 6:49, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sexual_revolution&oldid=874901769/.

classrooms, but where are the boys? It was a celebration of Title IX. We girls really were advancing, beyond the boys even. At least in my context, we were gobbling up all the awards and scholarships and heading off to promising futures at the best colleges.

The world was cheering for us. We could feel it. “Girl power” was propelling us beyond where our mothers and grandmothers had ever been. We were determined to take the glass ceiling by storm—our sights were set on becoming CEOs, entrepreneurs, engineers, professors, lawyers, doctors, or, in my case, television broadcasters. Our predecessors were thrilled for us, and we didn’t know any better.

With great confidence we set out into the women’s world.

You Can Do It!

The optimism of our mothers and the can-do spirit that washed over us girls shot us into adulthood. Some of us got degrees. Started careers. Found husbands. Had children. Filled important roles in our communities, in politics, and in churches.

You can have it all, they told us then and they keep telling us now. And we are certainly trying. Most of the women I know work (part time or full time or from home) or own their own businesses, volunteer, raise kids, participate in local sports and clubs, serve in their churches, work out, endeavor to put healthy food on the table, maintain active social lives, think global, shop local—and the list goes on. We are juggling laundry, promotions, car pools, and Sunday school. Girl power.

The cultural air we breathe fills us with optimism. And so we take deep breaths, and we keep running for the goal.

Create your own destiny. You be you. Reach for the stars. You can be a self-made woman. You are in charge of your own happiness. You get what you give. Never let them see you sweat. Follow your dreams. Make it happen. You are enough.

We're all reaching for that elusive gold star: becoming the women society says we can be. We keep pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps, guzzling our coffee, and looking in the mirror to remind ourselves, "You got this, sister. Go get 'em."

But then.

Then.

Almost without exception and as if on cue, we reach the end of ourselves. The coffee cup is empty. The self-talk grows quiet. We collapse on the couch. We are tired. This isn't working. Someone send help.

We Did It! So Why Are We So Sad?

The feminist movement did indeed deliver better pay, equal rights, and more respect for us in many spheres of society. Today's women are indebted to the sisters who went before us. I am grateful for much of the fruit borne by women's liberation. Without those who came before me, I likely wouldn't be a student of culture and theology and writing this book.

But even as I celebrate the strong women of the past and present, I also wonder what's really going on. We Xenial women who shot out of the gates into adulthood with much promise and anticipation are not rejoicing the way I think our foremothers imagined we would.

It's not going according to plan. Being self-made women is wearing us out.

Researchers have found that “although women’s life circumstances have improved greatly over the past few decades by most objective measures, their happiness has declined—both in absolute terms and relative to men’s.”⁴

In the United States, female mental and emotional health is in crisis. A Centers for Disease Control study reveals that in the last almost two decades, suicide rates among women have increased by 50 percent, and among girls ages ten to fourteen they have tripled.⁵ We have to ask ourselves, *if things are supposed to be increasingly hopeful, why are we increasingly hopeless?*

Social scientists are divided on why women and girls are struggling. Some point to the fact that men still populate the highest paying jobs and the highest levels of elected office, and garner the most respect. Some blame sexual misconduct, as displayed so graphically in the #metoo movement. Many point out that while opportunities have been vastly opened outside the home for women, we still take care of everything inside the home; it’s called the second shift, and it’s primarily staffed by women. Some say it’s just that we’re too busy and nothing is getting the attention it deserves. Many believe social media plays a role.

How Did We Get Here?

We have a map on our dining room table that our family loves to linger over after meals. Three-fourths of my daugh-

4. Sherrie Bourg Carter, “Meet the Least Happy People in America,” *Psychology Today*, September 17, 2011, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/high-octane-women/201109/meet-the-least-happy-people-in-america>.

5. Hilary Brueck, “The US Suicide Rate Has Increased 30% Since 2000—and It Tripled for Young Girls. Here’s What We Can Do About It,” *Business Insider*, June 14, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-suicide-rate-increased-since-2000-2018-6>.

ters were born in Asia. After their childhoods there, we moved to Europe. We ended up back in the United States in time for their teen and young adult years. When we look at the map, we remember our favorite places in Japan and Thailand. We focus on the Czech Republic and remember our road trips through Europe.

We trace our fingers over three continents and remember how we got here, to Colorado. Each country plays an important role in who my daughters are right now. Those places are why fried rice and ramen are their comfort foods. They're why they love sushi and why Japanese curry and Czech goulash are treats in our home. The points on the journey reveal why they speak a second language and why they're still bewildered by American football and grocery stores and school supplies. Looking at that map and our shared history reminds us why we are who we are today and how we got here.

And so it is with this moment in global women's history. If we want to understand who we are today, we must trace our fingers along the map to find out how we got to this paradoxical moment of both great opportunity *and* great discouragement.

Western Worldviews and Women

Our current condition is not just the overflow of the women's liberation movement or Title IX. It's not rooted solely in social media or the two-shift work many of us are doing. It's not simply the result of modern-day pitfalls and pressures.

Rather, we arrived here by following the natural progression of worldviews in the West over the last few hundred

years. We're actually right where our path led us. Western worldviews brought us here, whether we realize it or not.

A worldview is exactly what it sounds like: it's how we, as a group—a family, a people group, a nation—view the world. Worldviews answer our big life questions: What is real? Who are we? How did we get here? Is there a god and if so, what is he or she like? What is the meaning of life? What should we be doing here? How do we know the difference between right and wrong? What happens when we die?

Worldviews are subtle. We breathe them in and out, usually without even knowing it. We take them for granted. They're our of-course-that's-the-way-things-are knee-jerk reactions. Unless you've spent time pondering why you think the way you do, it's likely that your worldview has developed without you really knowing it.

A Quick Sprint through Worldviews

Stick with me here. Let's take a minute to trace the important worldviews from the past few hundred years, so we can have a better understanding of how we got here. Our worldview wasn't shaped in a vacuum. It's the culmination of influential thinkers and culture shapers. The thinkers below are our worldview ancestors; we may be tempted to think they have nothing to do with us, but they have played a major role in how you and I see the world in the twenty-first century.

1600s

Western philosophy really began back in the 1600s with the age of reason, fathered by René Descartes. He is famous for saying, "I think, therefore I am." This quote sums up the ideology of that time well: it's because of reason, or ratio-

nality, that we can know anything. Though subtle, this was the beginning of our looking to ourselves as the source of wisdom, of life, and of purpose.

1700s

The Enlightenment was quickly on Descartes's heels, with thinkers such as Swiss-born Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau is famous for rejecting anything that limited the freedom of self. He's the father of the if-it-feels-good-do-it movement. We are definitely living out the legacy of Rousseau's thinking today.

The 1700s was an age of revolution. Both the French and American revolutions threw off the shackles of church and state. With Rousseau, European and New World thinkers prioritized the individual above the institution.

1800s

The beginnings of the orientation toward self as authority in the 1600s and the rejection of church and state in the 1700s morphed into the modern philosophy of the 1800s. American Ralph Waldo Emerson triumphed self-reliance, saying, "Every one for himself; driven to find all his resources, hopes, rewards, society, and *deity* within himself."⁶

German philosopher Karl Marx also championed total autonomy. He said, "A being only considers himself independent when he stands on his own feet; and he only stands on his own feet when he *owes his existence to himself*."⁷

6. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Lectures and Biographical Sketches*, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 329. Emphasis added.

7. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Private Property and Communism," in *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 304, quoted

We know now that although many were wooed (and are still wooed) by Marx's promises of equity, his influence led to the self-deification of totalitarian leaders throughout the twentieth century. Applying his worldview to politics caused the death of millions throughout Russia, China, Cambodia, and elsewhere.

Charles Darwin convinced us that we evolved by chance and mutation, ultimately freeing us from any obligation to a creator or god outside of ourselves. Darwin, Marx, Emerson, and other thinkers from the 1800s led us to define our own reality; we will decide for ourselves how we got here, what our lives are for, and what's real.

1900s

The barely noticeable rise in the water that started in the 1600s with rationalism gained momentum throughout the 1700s with the rejection of the church and state and became a tidal wave in the 1800s with the elevation of self-reliance, self-existence, and self-deification. The tsunami wiped out our value for pursuing objective truth and carried us into the mid-1900s, landing us squarely in the existentialism movement. As the waters receded, the majority of us in the West set out to rebuild by defining our own meaning of life.

The varied definitions among us brought about post-modernism in the 1970s. Postmodernism says there is no metanarrative to life—in other words, there's no way to ultimately explain who we are or how we got here.⁸ Post-

in Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1999), 234, chap. 24, Kindle edition. Emphasis added.

8. This idea comes from Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: Finding God in the Modern World* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 200. Keller credits two sources in

modernism says any worldview that claims to interpret life and history through an overarching meaning is wrong (never mind that postmodernism itself attempts to interpret all of life with one overarching meaning, namely that there is no meaning).

And that's when we Jennifers, and Generation Xers, and millennials, and most likely you, dear reader, came on the scene.

You and I were born into an age that triumphed relativism and individualism. The culture of our childhoods was decidedly antiauthoritarian. Rather than *discovering* the objective truth, we were taught to *define* our own subjective truth. Unlike millennia of generations before us, we set out not to uncover the meaning of life, but to give our lives their own meaning.

From Relying on Self to Deifying Self

Here in the 2000s, we've successfully thrown off the shackles of any institutionalized definition of truth or reality or right and wrong. We've triumphed freedom as our highest good.

Individual freedom trumps all former societal norms and values. It is ultimate.

Whether we knew it at the time or not, the priority and power of the individual were elevated in our elementary classrooms. The self-esteem movement of our childhoods utilized school curricula that taught us "to chant slogans like 'I can handle it,' 'I can make it happen,' and 'I am me,

his notes: Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv; and Richard Bauckham, "Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Richard B. Hays and Ellen F. Davis (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 45.

I am enough.”⁹ The salvation of our childhood was found in ourselves. And we carried it into adulthood.

Look no further than Instagram and home decor stores to see the very same messages on our coffee cups and throw pillows. We see this prioritizing of self in popular culture, television and movies, parenting books, music—it’s everywhere.

We’ve consecrated self not just in pop culture, but in our laws too. In 1992, the Supreme Court “enshrined this view in law when it opined ‘the heart of liberty’ is to ‘define one’s own concept of existence, of the meaning of the universe.’”¹⁰ Defining one’s own reality is upheld in all manner of policies on university campuses, in business boardrooms, and on public bathroom signs.

Nothing is allowed to get in the way of you being you. You define you. You do you. All other societal scaffolding must submit to self, our greatest value.

Fragility: The Primary Problem with Deifying Self

When we deify ourselves, we require reality to conform to our own desires, rather than the other way around (conforming ourselves to reality). And whether we know it or not, this self-deification requires us to worship ourselves, to uphold ourselves, to convince ourselves that we are enough and worthy of following.

When we become our own source of meaning, we also become our only source of satisfaction and fulfillment. We set ourselves in a cycle of defining ourselves and worshipping ourselves.

9. Colson and Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?*, 267.

10. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 47.

To uphold this worldview, we must become our own masters. Ironically, we don't actually become free. We must not only muster our own meaning and goals and dreams, but we must supply our own energy and ability to accomplish them. With ourselves on the throne we must truly be self-made women: we must conjure up everything from the meaning of life to the energy and ability to live it out.

This makes us fragile. It's all on us. Today we have to create our worlds and make them go round too.

Disability: When the Deified Self Is Not Enough

The problem with self-deification is that it limits oneself to oneself. We disable ourselves by not permitting ourselves to look to something bigger—something outside (or *someone* outside, as we'll investigate in the next chapter)—for our meaning and purpose. Our only hope is to believe ourselves when we say we are enough.

And we must eat a steady diet of the praise of others. How do you know you've arrived at being *anything you want to be* if you don't receive accolades for your achievements? A ho-hum life is not enough to know that you're at the pinnacle of your dreams. We've got to be out there, receiving the applause of the multitudes.

But the appetite for approval is insatiable. And we're never quite sure we're on track. How many "likes" on social media is enough to know that you've finally reached the stars?

The self-esteem mantras of our childhood eventually ring hollow. The "I can make it happen" slogan repeated by our teachers, parents, pop culture, and even the law of the land doesn't give us the life we thought it would. Ironically,

the worldview that is supposed to give us life sucks it right out of us.

If you and I cannot be who we set out to be, then we've lost ourselves. As pastor and author Timothy Keller says, "The modern self is crushing."¹¹ Following our hearts doesn't work when our hearts must also be the source of where we're going and how to get there. We're like a dog chasing its tail. There's no beginning. There's no outside source for the needed energy and joy and direction we're trying to go.

And so we end up chasing our tails frantically until we're exhausted. As we trace the map of historical world-views, we see that the path that has led us to triumph self above all has also led us to our own destruction.

We are destroying ourselves by trying to follow ourselves.

Since the latter half of the twentieth century, we have assumed that we have the authority to create ourselves and live out our own reality. But this view is fatally flawed. It's what's ailing my generation and yours.

We Are in the ER, and We Need an Accurate Diagnosis

At one point in my early parenting years, I had three daughters ages three and under. Whatever madness you're picturing is accurate. During that season of crazy I got a sore throat that wouldn't let go. I was downing Advil multiple times a day to keep the soreness, swelling, and fever at bay. But after a few days, the swelling got to the point that I was having trouble breathing. So I did what any mom of young children would do: *I drove myself* to the emergency room. It was simply easier to leave the kids at home with

11. Keller, *Making Sense of God*, 134.

my husband than to have him drive the whole family to the hospital.

I parked my car and went inside the ER expecting to wait for hours to be seen. Instead, after answering a few questions, I was whisked behind a curtain and started receiving treatment. The doctor on duty was clearly alarmed.

I heard her call my husband, "Sir, your wife is very sick. She won't be home anytime soon. We'll be giving her intravenous antibiotics and possibly inserting a trach tube. She'll be in ICU, so come down here when you can." I got morphine for the pain and slipped in and out of awareness of my surroundings for the next few days.

Clearly, I had misdiagnosed my sore throat. What initially felt like a small hassle grew and grew until it was actually a life-threatening crisis. The Advil wasn't going to cut it. What I thought was a cold was actually an aggressive infection closing my throat. My uneducated misdiagnosis put my family and me in peril.

A misdiagnosis for understanding the current mental and emotional health crisis for women in the West will do the same thing. We cannot simply pop a few Advil if we're going to have any hope of coming out of this crash we're in.

It's not that the feminist movement had it all wrong. It's not that we women are just doing too much and we're tired. It's not that mental health medicine and practitioners aren't helpful. It's that our problem is deep down. *It's soul deep.*

Author Rosaria Butterfield nails it when she writes, "The real issue at the core is personhood. Failing to discern rightly who we are renders us unable to accurately discern anything we touch, feel, think, or dream. Failing to discern rightly

who we are renders us unable to properly know who God is. We are truly lost in a darkness of our own making.”¹²

The bold theologian and Reformer John Calvin called it five hundred years ago when he said, “For the plague of submitting to our own rule leads us straight to ruin.”¹³ Truly, we are lost in a darkness of our own making, and we got here by dethroning God and enthroning ourselves.

We’ve deified ourselves. And it’s led to our demise.

The Remedy: Remembering Who We Are and Whose We Are

Culture tells us the remedy for our burnout is more me-time. What we need is more rest. More quiet times alone. A nicer luxury vehicle that can block out the stress of the world. Possibly a nanny and a cleaning lady to help us balance it all. More wine. More coffee. Therapy, medicine. More self-talk. Get your tribe, get your people, get your momfia to remind you that you are enough and you can do this.

But I propose that we need to go way back to the beginning. We need to remember *who we are and whose we are*. How were we created and by whom? For what purpose were we designed? On what kind of energy are we meant to run?

Our remedy is in reclaiming our worldview. It’s in rejecting the self-help movement that birthed us and in re-orienting ourselves back toward the God who made us. Healing must happen in our souls. Our health will come when we root ourselves in what’s true.

Let’s face it: we were duped by the culture that raised us. The ideas that we swim around in are wreaking havoc. As

12. Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 48.

13. John Calvin, *A Little Book on the Christian Life*, trans. Aaron Denlinger and Burk Parsons (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2017), 22–23.

we match them up against the biblical truths of the gospel, we see how they ring hollow.

Like the alluring but destructive creatures in Greek mythology, self is a Siren. We are indeed attracted to ourselves. But rooting ourselves in ourselves has led to our ruin. The I-can-do-this self-talk and building ourselves up from the inside has exhausted us. We see now that there is no rest for the one who depends on herself for everything.

Our current crisis condition is not what the giver of life intended. He created us in a specific way, for a specific purpose. And he intended that we be energized and filled with joy in a relationship with him.

Let's admit that we are not enough, and turn to the God who is.

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

1. What are some of the unspoken worldviews you were born into?

2. What worldview ideas from the 1600s, 1700s, 1800s, or 1900s do you see playing out in culture today?

3. What problems do you see with self-help?

4. Think about our cultural trend to define reality, rather than discover reality. In other words, we tend to require reality to conform to our own desires, rather than the other way around (conforming ourselves to reality). What are some real-life examples where this is problematic?

5. Do you agree that “the modern self is crushing”? Reflect on the cycle required by self-deification: we must worship ourselves, to uphold ourselves, to convince ourselves that we are enough and worthy of following. Have you experienced this?

6. Read Colossians 2:8 and Romans 1:28–30. How do these verses speak to our current culture?

7. Ask God to reveal where you have been conformed to the culture’s ideals rather than to God’s ideals. Where have you given over your mind, and where do you need to be renewed? Meditate on Romans 15:13, and ask God to reveal himself to you and to show you where to find lasting joy as make your way through this book.

ARE YOU FEELING TIRED, CYNICAL, OR JUST PLAIN DISAPPOINTED IN WHAT LIFE HAS GIVEN YOU?

Many women would answer *yes*. The constant pressure to improve oneself or compare oneself to others makes a woman feel like she's never enough. That's because joy doesn't come from a self-improvement strategy—it comes from rooting your identity in who God says you are and what he has done for you. Through the pages of this book, you will be encouraged to look away from yourself in order to find the abundant life God offers you through the gospel.

“Enough about Me has a message that is not only countercultural but also runs counter to today's Christian culture: your life is not ultimately or most profoundly about you, but about the one who has made you his own. This is the kind of good news women really need.”

Nancy Guthrie, Bible teacher; author, *Even Better than Eden: Nine Ways the Bible's Story Changes Everything about Your Story*

“While the world tells us to want more, do more, and be more, Jen Oshman turns our eyes from ourselves and helps us to find our lives in Jesus, the giver of every good and perfect gift.”

Melissa B. Kruger, Director of Women's Content, The Gospel Coalition; author, *In All Things* and *Growing Together*

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