

What a Woman Wants

By: Judy Lewis

As the years without a husband and children continued to beat by, I ached. At 35, I was angry. Come 40, I just got sad. Tick, tock, tick, tock—the rhythm of time escorted me further from a woman's greatest calling. Wasn't I created to be a husband's helper? A child's shelter? Who would I help and shelter alone in my apartment?

In church I noticed that the key efforts centered around moms with school-age children and married couples. Most sermons and Sunday school classes paid detailed attention to these partial demographics. I felt left out. And I felt confused.

Looking at my span of girlfriends young and old, I began to wonder about a woman's "helpfulness". My friends with young children did not seem to be relishing their "greatest calling." They seemed to just hold on until the afternoon drive-thru at Starbucks or evening reality show.

And my widow and older friends were no longer in the 24/7 helper role. *What's wrong with this picture?* I asked. Never married and childless left me standing ineligible to enter the mission as critical.

(And I haven't even mentioned moms who work outside the home! Or divorced moms. Their posture toward the "greatest calling" must feel even more complex, their identity even more fractured if home helpfulness is the ultimate in God's kingdom.)

How can the flimsy "helpmeet" encompass *all* a woman's worth for *all* her life? We need a broader definition. But where can we go? As more women come to the table with men and look at language and narrative in the Scriptures, we are getting a fuller, more meaningful, more robust grasp of God's Word.

And it couldn't come at a better time. The sickly definitions have so narrowed a woman's worth that unless you are between the boundary lines of "married with children in your home," your identity is unhelpful. God help us. We've just disqualified significant numbers in His army. And no wonder women feel schizophrenic.

One truth that has made a home in my soul (big enough for the ache/anger/sadness) comes from scholarship on the biblical definition of "female."

The work of Carolyn James has given me hope. Raised as a pastor's daughter, she knew one calling: play piano and serve potluck for your pastor husband's flock. Since marriage was not on the horizon after college, Carolyn became one of the first women to graduate seminary. She wrestled with singleness and purpose. She married a wonderful man, then excelled in the workforce while Frank pursued his multiple PhDs (No potlucks? No piano?). Then they wrestled with infertility. *Surely*, she groaned, *I must have a calling big enough for me that may not include children*. Then, they adopted.

Still, she knew that God's plan for women must serve them from cradle to grave, little girl to

aged beauty—not just in the church’s seemingly confined boundary lines. Carolyn unpacked the Hebrew word *ezer* from Genesis 2:18’s “helper” and learned that the best definition had been drastically undersold.

Ezer showed up 21 times in the Old Testament as a description for God helping Israel as a warrior—a heroic figure in the story—not a sidelined secondary character. A warrior for all the things that are important to Him: truth, beauty, goodness, the marginalized, the poor in spirit, the poor, the guilty.

Finally, I had a calling that was bigger than me, and one that would require more of me than I could ever imagine. One that would be worthy of my entire life and put me on the frontlines: fighting for the good, the true and the beautiful, on earth as it is in heaven.

Eighteen months ago, at 43, I got married. I became a wife, a step-mom and a grandma in one day. And I work full-time. I know the temptation to lose myself in the daily sacrifices or sprint in exile to Starbucks (in the very same hour!). Imagine my identity confusion at this unexpected stage in life.

Only under the banner of joining God as warrior for His glory can I both frame my battle and find rest. Only under God’s commitment to *fight for me* can I find an identity that neither crushes nor abandons me. Let the newborn baby girl and the woman wizened with wisdom find this calling big enough to require an *ezer* God to fulfill.