

IF EVE
ONLY
KNEW

FREEING YOURSELF FROM
BIBLICAL WOMANHOOD AND BECOMING
ALL GOD MEANS FOR YOU TO BE

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CHALICE[®]
P R E S S

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

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Introduction

Becoming What We're Meant to Be

The airplane was completing its late-night descent into Indianapolis, the hot summer air making the landing a little more textured than I preferred. My seatmate, a woman in her sixties with a swooping hairstyle and a voice laced with Midwest twang, turned to me.

“What brings you to Indy?” she asked.

For much of the flight, she'd been reading *Guidepost* magazine, a monthly publication that offers “true stories of hope, faith, personal growth, and positive thinking.” My own grandma had once stored *Guideposts* by her toilet, because—I suppose—everyone can use a dose of positive thinking in the bathroom. Though the magazine promises to be nonsectarian, it is prized by many conservative Christians—its true stories involving loads of prayer, references to Scripture, and miraculous Divine intervention.

I wasn't sure what I should tell this *Guidepost*-reading grandmother about why I was visiting Indianapolis. My itinerary was free of debauchery; there would be no all-night benders on riverboat casinos or anonymous hook-ups at Indianapolis's downtown bars. But I hesitated, carefully mulled my answer, then said:

“I'm speaking at a Christian women's conference.”

She nodded and smiled, because we were compatriots. I smiled, too, a little more weakly. If only she knew.

An airport hotel in Indianapolis seems an odd place for a Christian feminism conference. The Midwest isn't always considered a hotbed of progressive thinking. Yet there I was, at a hotel surrounded by a culinary wasteland, with the restaurant trifecta of Bob Evans, Cracker Barrel, and Denny's providing a nice buffer to the highway noise nearby.

For the most part, the participants at this conference looked like the stereotypic Christian woman: older, grayer, wearing slacks and cardigans, hair nicely coiffed into a short bob or perm. A few men followed their wives into the conference room, but this crowd was mostly female. The participants reveled in the companionship found at the conference, and spent time before and after meetings catching up, standing in clumps to visit, gossip, and gather warmth from decades-old friendships.

Most significantly, these women believed ardently in Jesus.

This may be where their similarity to a good many Christian women, including my airplane seatmate, ended. Those at the Christian feminism conference were teachers and pastors, social workers and doctors, mothers and grandmothers, wives and partners, straight and lesbian. They believed in Jesus, certainly, but not the mean, angry, judgmental Jesus some of this country's Christians seem to follow. The feminists' Jesus was a loving social activist, subversive in his time—and in ours.

So, yes, I was speaking at a Christian women's conference. But how do you tell a stranger, reading a conservative Christian magazine on an airplane, that those sharing the dais would include an eighty-two-year-old lesbian, a noted expert on transgendered folks in the church, and several other women exiled from their denominations for asking hard question about the policies that excluded them?

Kendra and I had come to the conference to talk about the effects evangelical popular culture has on the students we teach at our respective colleges. We wanted to help Christian feminists understand what they are up against: a Christian culture that continues to tell women they need to be submissive, silent, docile, and focused not at all on an outside-the-home career, but on raising children and caring for husbands. This was God's exclusive design for women, and those who followed a different path were outside God's will.

As professors, Kendra and I work with women excited about their vocations but faced with the pervasive message they've often been given by their evangelical upbringing, by their families, their churches, and by Christian popular culture. Our students learn early that women—by virtue of their biological relationship to Eve—are more deceptive, more prone to sin and impurity, more emotional, and less capable of making decisions than their male peers. A woman's primary role is as a helpmeet, raising children. Lifelong vocations are for the very few women who do not marry. Any vocation involving

church leadership is reserved for men, no matter what a young woman's calling.

Given the persistent thrum of these messages, it is little wonder conservative Christian women struggle to find a voice in their church communities and to feel affirmed in their life choices. It's also no wonder that women graduating from evangelical Christian universities often express less confidence than their male peers, and their sense of vocational call is less clear upon graduation. Women who visit our offices seeking guidance often seem less self-assured about their futures, especially if they haven't found the "Mrs." degree they are told is imperative with a conservative Christian college education. They often exhibit a lower level of self-competence than do their male peers.

The evangelical blogs, magazines, and books these young women read, the music they listen to, and the organizations to which they belong send clear messages about who or what they should be. And all of it is delivered with the conviction that it's godly, because "the Bible says so."

Christian feminists also believe the Bible tells us so: that Scripture is an important guide to how people of faith should live, and how we should relate to each other and to God. While it might be easy to assume Christian feminists disregard the Bible and its role in the faith journey, this is not always true. We may understand Scripture differently than other evangelicals, seeing it within its social, historical, and cultural context. Following the model of early Christian feminists such as Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, whose groundbreaking work in the 1970s invited people to re-examine the Bible without the presupposition that God endorses patriarchy, we see the Bible as a living text, opening up to us again and again and allowing us to see the Divine in new and powerful ways. Rebecca Kiser, writing for *Christian Feminism Today*, describes the Bible as one form of authority, and asserts that Christian feminists also "affirm the continuing work of the Spirit of God in unfolding the truth that is written in the Scriptures."¹ Understood in this manner, the Bible does not demand that women act a certain way, and men another; instead, the Bible offers us freedom to explore the very gifts God has given us, allowing us to be all God has meant us to be.

And still, this liberating vision is stifled by the more pervasive message of God's ordained plan for women—plans that include a prescribed way of living. Such messages are difficult to ignore not only

because they are so prevalent but also because of the power inherent in peer pressure. Despite the voices of Christian feminists offering an alternative understanding of Scripture, gender, and God's call on our lives, messages about biblical womanhood continue to dominate Christian culture. Such messages provide easy answers to the messy, complicated question of who God wishes us to be, but they are also quite lucrative. According to the CBA (formerly Christian Booksellers Association) state of the industry report, in 2009² Christian products sales were reportedly \$4.6 billion. Women assume a significant portion of this market share. Speakers such as Joyce Meyer draw large audiences—and large sums—by ironically preaching in mega-churches and to mega-audiences around the country about the primacy of women's domestic domain. Telling women and girls how they are to act, and what godliness *must* look like in those born female, is big business, especially when packaged as “God's design.”

The commodification of the Bible and its presumed message to women becomes even more problematic when we consider that taking the Bible seriously doesn't necessarily mean its function is to add Divine approval to any number of personal preferences. Instead, the Bible invites readers to plumb its depths for meanings and paradoxes, for difficult conundrums and unanswered questions. This depth of analysis, however, is almost always missing from the messages embedded in evangelical popular culture. In its place are cultural assumptions reflecting a contemporary society motivated by a mass consumer-driven market. Using the Bible in this manner becomes a trump card, compelling young people to accept the messages they're fed without critically analyzing those messages or considering the potential that the Bible itself can be misinterpreted, used to support a particular worldview absent from Scripture itself.

We support a counter-message, one that encourages Christians to think about the popular evangelical culture they are ingesting, and about the contradictory, confusing, and sometimes wrong messages offered there. Relying on the biblical hermeneutics offered to us by the Christian feminist movement, this book challenges readers to understand the Bible in a new way. We want to offer a different, richer, and more complex reading of the Bible: one that allows women and men the freedom to be all God intended for them.

Each chapter looks at messages popular evangelical culture sends us about who it believes the Bible demands we be, given its interpretation of Scripture and church tradition. Could there be a

different way to understand the biblical texts? We will critique and rebalance evangelical culture with a reading of Scripture that provides a fresh perspective on the Bible, Jesus, faith, vocation, and the self; and help our readers find new strength in pursuing what God meant them to be.

Feminists are often maligned by evangelical culture as the bogey who would make every woman a self-absorbed, man-and-child-hating harpy; however, what we *really* want to offer is a way to know God more deeply, and to live more richly. While *If Eve Only Knew* analyzes some of the most potent messages in evangelical popular culture about a woman's role in marriage, child-bearing, homemaking, and vocation, the book also argues that God—and God's revelation through Scripture, tradition, and experience—creates all of us to celebrate our abilities rather than confine ourselves by some ill-defined gender roles from the biblical manhood/womanhood movement.

Thankfully, many evangelicals ceaselessly work for gender justice and equity in their vocations, strive to maintain egalitarian relationships in their homes, and believe the Bible unequivocally empowers women to be all God means them to be. In our work at our colleges and for evangelical organizations, many share our commitment. I am married to an evangelical who, in thought and deed, seeks to assure that equity reigns at home and in the workplace, believing that is how God intended the world to be. And, in recent years especially, younger evangelicals such as Rachel Held Evans and Sarah Bessey have carried the mantle of Christian feminism that was first raised high by Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, challenging the patriarchal systems that continue to demand women remain in roles far different than those enjoyed by men.

When we write about evangelical culture, we are not critiquing these individuals or the good work they do to make a better place for us all. Instead, we critique evangelical *culture*—and, specifically, the views and actions some bigoted women and men espouse: the messages they promote, informed by the books and blogs written by their leaders: their beliefs and consumer slogans promoting their theology to those who will plunk down a few bucks. We cannot underestimate the destructive power of these pervasive messages, even as we trust the individuals who work for gender justice, including those who have made a vast difference in our own lives.

Messages about gender are knit into the very language we use to talk about our religious experience. Using exclusively masculine

language in our discussions about God—and even progressive churches can struggle with inclusive language—shapes how we understand God and ourselves. If divinity is always referenced as masculine, we convey God is male and, thus, men as more Godlike than women.³ Using patriarchal language also denies the many feminine biblical metaphors of God, conveying that those metaphors figuring God as female are less significant than the masculine traits.

For the foremothers of the Christian feminist movement, the women who I met at the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus Gathering in Indianapolis in 2012, discovering inclusive language was a significant part of their spiritual journey, helping reshape and transform their relationship to God, to each other, and to the church. These women had an important vision for the evangelical church: that women and men could be understood as equal, because they were created that way. Their vision of gender equity within the church is an important one, but even more significant is their idea that women and men are both created in God's own image. Believing this affirmation—found right there in the book of Genesis—means we cannot fall prey to the counter-idea that God designed specific roles for women and specific roles for men, a sensibility now rampant in evangelical popular culture, and which limits what women can do to reflect God's image within them.

If women and men truly are going to be all God means for them to be, we need to call out those aspects of evangelical popular culture that send women and men negative messages about gender. We need to show that the evangelical understanding of biblical womanhood and manhood is not, in fact, biblical. We need to provide women and men with an alternative message: that they are fearfully and wonderfully made in God's own image, providing them freedom to explore fully who God intends them to be.



Chapter One

Saving Eve

Most evangelical children learn early and often that Eve is the real villain in the Genesis story. Forget the talking serpent, depicted in Sunday school curricula wrapped around a tree, his forked tongue whispering lies into the woman's ears. Forget Adam, standing in the garden, unable to clearly decode God's message. The real culprit of the first sin, the fall, and everything bad that's happened since, is Eve, her beautiful alabaster hand delicately holding the red apple up to Adam, who unwittingly takes a bite.

Biblical literalists who construct such Sunday school curricula stumble into at least one factual dilemma: the Red Delicious could never be indigenous to the region where the garden of Eden presumably existed. Children learning about Adam and Eve are also rarely told there are two Genesis narratives to consider, each figuring the story in a slightly different way. Or that, when Genesis is read with the appropriate acknowledgment of its complexity, its relationship to other creation accounts, and its own puzzling contradictions, the predominating message of Adam and Eve is not necessarily a straightforward tale about a talking snake, a woman's deceitfulness, and humanity's fall into sin.

Never mind all those things. If evangelical popular culture is right, then Eve represents all that's gone wrong from the very beginning, her disobedience a clear indication of the ways women were designed, and her hubris a sign that men, rather than women, need to be in charge.

Forever, if possible.

Messages about Eve's culpability are legion in Sunday school curricula, and they are also ubiquitous in evangelical books and blogs for girls, in sermons preached about the Genesis story, in Bible study programs for young women. In other words, messages about Eve—and, by extension, Eve's daughters—are everywhere, letting women know they are the cause of sin in the world; that they are more deceptive and more easily deceived than men; and that Eve's initial disobedience, her wily ability to misguide, shows an unnatural order of the way things should be: a wife leading a husband.

Paradise lost, the result of sin, is the theme upon which evangelicals stake their claim, and gender is inextricably linked to this worldview. Those early Sunday school lessons about a beautiful woman in the garden, tempting Adam, are the foundation for every other message evangelical women receive about who and what they are, about how they walk through the world, and about their place in God's intricate ordering of gender roles. Ultimately, these messages let women know where they stand in relationship to God and to the beings they managed to deceive, from the world's very beginning.

Reading Genesis primarily as a story about sin is advantageous for some evangelicals. It provides an explanation for evil's existence in the world, a formulaic way to contend with life's complexities. If the garden is literal, and Eve the locus of sin, then evil can be readily explained, its presence not random and unpredictable but pinned to a woman who chose listening to a serpent over following God. In this view, evil comes from sin. Sin comes from making bad choices. Eve is the example of making bad choices and thus the model of what not to do.

More significantly, interpreting Genesis in this way exclusively implicates women, making them the conduit through which evil enters the world. Because Eve, the first female, made the wrong decision, all women after her are prone to act likewise. In this particular worldview, women are more likely to be deceptive and to deceive. They are guided by their hubris, and their desire for control. They will tempt and torment men into doing what men, by their very nature, do not want to do. To establish a successful society, men, not women, need to be in charge. When this happens, even some kind of paradise can be restored.

The Chasm Eve Created

Just how much havoc did Eve cause in the garden of Eden? Some Christians can draw a ubiquitous diagram used to visually articulate

just how wide and deep the gulf is between an all-powerful and loving God and wayward humanity. A large chasm stretches across a page while an isolated individual (drawn in small scale) stands on one side of the deep ravine and the large Divine figure is found on the opposite side. There is no way for the two to come together without something—a miracle, really—to bridge the gap.

Fortunately for the narrative and for the visual image, a cross with its wide beam seems to fit just right, a bridge the faithful are invited to fearlessly step upon, drawing us close to the Almighty. Fundamentally, evangelicalism argues the death of Jesus on the cross provides the only reasonable bridge bringing humanity and divinity together, restoring and healing the chasm created by Eve's (and subsequently Adam's) disobedience.

Everything about the faith is founded on this idea, and those reared in evangelicalism—even those who claim a progressive theological understanding—seem to accept this premise as God's own truth. For Christians outside the evangelical bubble, it is baffling to hear so much focus on sin and its taint in humans as the gospel's central concern. They may rightly wonder why the gospels are called “the good news” if read through the lens of human depravity, wickedness, and a resulting separation from, presumably, a loving God. What's so good about all of that?

Many evangelicals argue their understanding of Genesis, and in particular of its third chapter, is rooted in biblical truth, and that the text speaks for itself. However, most theologians acknowledge a more complicated understanding of Genesis, recognizing that the Defective-Eve-and-Original-Sin interpretation can be traced to a few male theologians writing at a time when women were believed to be less than fully human.¹

During the second century, for example, a Christian theologian, Tertullian, put forward the idea that all women were just as guilty as Eve. “Do you not know that you are Eve?” he wrote. “God's sentence hangs still over all your sex and His punishment weighs down upon you. You are the devil's gateway; you are she who first violated the forbidden tree and broke the law of God.”² John Chrysostom, writing a couple of centuries later, continued this misogynistic claim when he charged, “The woman taught once, and ruined all. On this account... let her not teach. But what is it to other women that she suffered this? It certainly concerns them; for the sex is weak and fickle.... The whole female race transgressed.”³

Most famously, though, is Augustine of Hippo, the church father whose theological shadow remains firmly in place especially among evangelicals, and whose rendering of Genesis 3 identified sexuality with sin. Interpreting the text through the lens of his experience, including a life with a long-time mistress, Augustine struggled with competing desires of sex without familial constraints and commitment to fatherhood versus recognition within the Christian faith—recognition that in his mind required celibacy. Women’s bodies, he claimed, were so evidently sexual that women themselves represented sinfulness in ways far transcending males, whose minds rather than bodies were indicators of their godlikeness.

According to Augustine, women, as primarily sexual beings, could serve only one real purpose. He once asked, “Now, if the woman was not made for the man to be his helper in begetting children, in what way was she to help him?”⁴ The answer? No other way. Augustine instituted a perspective about women evangelicals echo today: women are made *from* men; women are made *for* men; women are less like God than men because women are more sexual. And, thus, more sinful. The first book of the Bible, the argument goes, makes this so.

Sin Is All That Matters

As soon as young girls begin dressing themselves, they are told in myriad ways that their bodies reflect a propensity for sin. From purity rings and balls to princess websites, where girls are instructed to measure the lengths of their skirts and shorts and to wear blouses that aren’t revealing too much skin or budding breasts, the message is clear: their bodies are a problem. Girls and young women hear they need to be wary of their sexual nature because, unbeknownst to them, Satan will use their bodies to make boys and men fall into the deep chasm of sin. And when this happens, girls are clearly culpable, their very physical selves a temptation to the spiritual well-being of the boys and men around them.

Augustine and other Christian writers may have established this sin-filled theme from Genesis, but contemporary evangelical leaders continue to perpetuate it, presenting this ideology as gospel truth rather than the machinations of early church fathers. For example, John Piper, a leading figure in the complementarian movement (a sub-group of evangelicalism), argues a fundamental shift occurred in

the nature of humanity.* Prior to the Genesis narrative, Piper claims, Adam and Eve were morally upright, but, after they ate the forbidden fruit, they became corrupt by nature, enslaved to sin, and morally unable to delight in God and overcome their own proud preference for the fleeting pleasures of self-rule. The reason for this massive shift—one so all-encompassing that it changes the essence of what it means to be human—is disobedience.⁵

Similarly, Nancy Leigh DeMoss and Mary Kassian, promoters of the *True Woman Manifesto* and well-known conference speakers and writers, relate a comparable understanding of humanity. They say sin not only separated God and humans but it makes people unable to reflect the image of God, a characteristic granted to humans in Genesis 1. In their understanding, the reason Jesus is the antidote to this altered reality is that he represents a sinless state and his vicarious death makes possible a new opportunity for the otherwise now fundamentally flawed humanity.⁶

Many popular evangelicals promote the idea that when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, they so angered God that She or He rightly could have punished them with death. Since disobedience to God's command indicated a desire to go beyond the authority given to them, the first humans deserved to be punished for their lack of humility, for their extensive pride. This way of thinking is a pattern we find troubling, one in which a crucial link exists between a theology built upon sin and subjugating women to men.

Blaming Eve

It isn't just that sin has marred humanity and the world. We must remember who started this chain of sin: Eve. Evangelical popular culture has created Eve as the scapegoat, her one act in the garden a reason evil exists in the world, causing heartbreak, pain, and a need for redemption to everyone ever born. We need to blame someone, and making Eve culpable for *everything bad* means Adam (dupe that he is) does not have to bear the same mark of shame. He's a man, and needs to take charge. The stain of guilt would only drag him down.

*Throughout *If Eve Only Knew*, the term "complementarianism" will be used to describe a Christian ideology asserting that God created men and women to exist in separate, but equal, roles, and that these distinct roles are to complement each other. Egalitarian Christians, on the other hand, believe in gender equity, and that women and men are to live fully into their callings, not based on gender but on the gifts God has given them.

Many evangelicals find support in the New Testament for seeing Eve as the conduit through which evil entered the world by looking to 1 Timothy and the negative portrayal of Eve presented there. According to the author of 1 Timothy, women should be silent and submissive, having no authority to teach because Eve was formed after Adam and was deceived; subsequently, the author of 1 Timothy writes, she transgressed God's commandment. Although the Hebrew translation of Eve is "mother of all living," evangelicals have discovered in this progenitor not life but sin, an idea that has been carried through Christian tradition and embraced by much of contemporary evangelical culture.

And since in evangelical lore Eve's most notable attribute is her propensity for sin, Eve is blamed for every social ill, not just a few thousand years ago (although there are no firm dates for origin narratives), but for today. Speaking at a True Woman conference, Kay Arthur recently said women have entangled themselves with the affairs of life because of Eve. True Woman events have taken place for several years in multiple venues—and have birthed an entire franchise of True Woman blogs, books, videos, and study curricula—so thousands of women have heard they are mired in their lives because of Eve.

Arthur claims that Eve made a fateful decision to usurp God's power; and, similarly, when women today decide to have careers outside of the home, they are deliberately choosing the wrong path, likewise transgressing the rules of God's design. Arthur also says that when so many women are making these choices—as is evident in the recent employment data—this is evidence of how much sin exists in the world. Women who make choices deemed problematic by evangelicals are thus, again and again, re-enacting that first unwise decision made by someone born female.⁷

Nancy Leigh DeMoss teamed up in a book with Dannah Gresh targeting teens to take Eve to task for everything gone wrong with our world. *Lies Young Women Believe: And the Truth That Sets Them Free* has on its cover that always-present apple, letting us know immediately who the genesis of those lies is going to be: Eve, of course. In the opening chapter, called "The Deceiver," Gresh and DeMoss provide a somewhat unbelievable scenario about a teenager who develops a romantic relationship with her "church-going father," who offers her crystal meth, saying "God wants us to be happy." When the teen starts

reading the Bible, the father gets angry, saying “I am God,” hoping to sway his daughter to the evil dark side.

Here is apparently the biblical parallel: In Genesis, Eve also took some “crystal meth,” in the form of the “forbidden fruit,” from someone who wanted to be God. Eve listened to the serpent and his lies, and was easily deceived. She, in turn, was able to deceive her husband. In other words, Eve, being easily deceived, has made all women into deceivers, and brought down all of humanity by making her husband sin. Young women reading Gresh and DeMoss’s book will discover that, first of all, “Satan targets women with his lies.” We may not understand exactly why Satan wants to go after women, but, the authors write, “The facts are the facts.” They are willing to acknowledge that “it may feel like a bad rap” for women to be targeted, but argue women will just have to live with the facts, because “there was something in the way Eve was created that made her more vulnerable to deception.” So there we have it. Women are more inclined to be deceived, and to deceive. According to *Lies Young Women Believe*, young women believe lies because they are more inclined to do so.⁸

Similarly, John and Stasi Eldredge, popular authors and speakers, also build upon the Genesis narrative, blaming Eve for negative traits running through all women. In their book, *Captivating: Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman’s Soul*, they say Eve’s transgression confirms women want to be captivating, want to gain the attention of others. Eve did this when she talked with the serpent. According to them, the serpent and Eve had a flirting exchange, and out of their desires to mesmerize the other, Eve succumbed to temptation, doing exactly what the serpent wanted. Since Eve is the symbolic representation of all women, any woman born since then is prone to flirt and to be captivating, all of which will lead to no place good, unless women strive for the approving gaze of God.⁹

Blaming Eve and her daughters for introducing evil into the world thus provides evangelicals opportunity to assert the need for male dominance and female submission, while also abrogating the need to consider other potential causes of societal ills: the privileging of those already in power, or greed that drives people to treat others poorly, or even institutional racism and sexism that reinforces hierarchies oppressing the “weakest of these.” As long as we blame Eve, everything else—including misogyny within the church—can remain the same.

Eve, The First Feminist

In the eyes of some evangelicals, the contemporary expression of Eve's sinfulness is feminism. According to them, Eve was the first feminist, her willful disobedience of God and man/Adam is clearly reflected in a movement that challenges women to assert themselves, to voice their own desires, and to fight for equity. Some evangelicals draw a direct line from Eve to feminism, believing feminism is the current cause for all that is wrong in the world.

The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, the flagship complementarian organization, was founded in 1987 as a response to evangelical feminists who argued for gender equity in the church. According to its own site, CBMW was "established primarily to help the church defend against the accommodation of secular feminism." Because secular feminists got their wily hands on some evangelicals, though, the CBMW and its definitive Danvers Statement became a way to argue for "God's design" in gender roles; otherwise, CBMW founders believed, the "heart of the gospel is in jeopardy." Feminists, secular or evangelical, were playing fast and loose with the authority of Scripture and biblical translation, the health of the home and church, and the advance of the gospel. CBMW formed to fight against the scourge of feminism's broad reach.¹⁰

It's no wonder that the contemporary CBMW site continues to publish articles denouncing the evils of feminism and tying those evils to the Genesis story. In May 2013, Courtney Reissig, claiming to be a recovering feminist, posted an anti-feminist article on the site. "Feminism started in a garden in the Middle East thousands of years ago," she asserted. And, thus, "Feminism is at the very heart of our fallen nature and manifests itself in many different forms." And while Reissig believes the "first feminist, Eve," is the root of this satanic movement, she also argues the continuing source of the problem is within women themselves, who see themselves—not God—as the "authority of all."¹¹

Because feminism is so powerful and evil, it needs an entire website dedicated to its opponents. Ladies Against Feminism, founded in 2002, intends to "publish thoughtful, biblical responses to feminism and to encourage other women in their God-given roles." To that end, correspondents for the organization write about how to encourage husbands, keep an impeccable home, raise and teach children, and maintain a "well-ordered family," all presumed goals

anathema to feminists. Ladies Against Feminism provides links to other like-minded organizations, as well as promoting online sites through which readers can purchase t-shirts to voice their antipathy toward this “devil’s tool.” Three options provide a decent sampling of the possibilities: “Birth Control is for Sissies,” “Militant Fecundity,” and, “I Refuse to be a Victim of Feminism.”¹²

This idea is a consistent message in evangelical popular culture. Applying pervasive stereotypes of feminism that have long colored the culture at large, a good many evangelical advice books targeting young and old women rely on a composite “feminist” character: she is often an academic teaching lies to college students and pushing them to seek careers rather than spouses. She is sometimes single and likely childless, because feminists decry marriage and family. On occasion, she is a lesbian, because feminists have these tendencies. She hates the Bible and God, makes decisions independent of anyone but herself, and sees herself as her own “authority of all,” just like the first feminist, Eve.

Rather than questioning the ways their stereotypes about women and feminism might send problematic messages to young Christians, both female and male, evangelical apologists often critique mass media for endeavoring to destroy each generation. In Mary Kassian’s “You’ve Come a Long Way, Baby!” True Woman 101 lecture she illumines the downward spiral of American culture caused by the onset of feminism and illustrated through television programming, beginning with *Leave it to Beaver*, which she believes is a portrayal of how things *should* be in the hearth and home; to Mary Richards of the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, who was, in Kassian’s assessment, a little too independent; to Murphy Brown, a self-absorbed, loud-mouthed atheist who was pregnant but chose not to marry; to Ellen Morgan on *Ellen*, with her in-your-face lesbianism, *Friends* with all of their sexual promiscuity, and *Sex and the City*, in which women live neurotically and completely for themselves. Feminism resides at the heart of this destruction, with characters such as Ellen Morgan and Murphy Brown telling young women they can be autonomous beings, successful and strong. Little in Kassian’s lecture suggests a consideration of the ways evangelical popular culture has also conveyed problematic messages to young women, nor how an ideal like “True Woman” can be in its own way complicated, because it’s easier to blame feminists—and their foremother Eve.¹³