

Lost Women of the Bible

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Eve

A FORGOTTEN LEGACY—

She lost the woman God created her to be.

The last time I saw my grandmother, she was a thin shadow of her former self. My daughter was only a few months old, and more than anything I wanted my grandmother to see and hold her great-granddaughter before time ran out on us. I got my wish one afternoon during a visit to the Northwest when my mother drove us to the nursing home. I didn't allow myself to dwell on the fact that neither my grandmother nor Allison would remember this historic meeting that meant so much to me, but the moment I saw my grandmother's blank gaze and sagging form, there was no denying it. The fun-loving, intelligent, energetic woman I had known and admired all my life was nowhere to be seen. In her place a feeble, worn-out body slouched in a wheelchair alongside several other wheelchair-bound individuals in varying stages of decline. It broke my heart to see her so altered. Yet even in her frail and failing condition, the presence of a baby energized her and brought a glimmer (just the slightest) of the woman I

remembered. “It’s a baby! It’s a baby!” she cried in a weak raspy voice as she extended her trembling hands. “Bring him here. We’ll take care of him.”

Anyone who tried to reconstruct my grandmother from the shell that was left at the last, or who searched for clues to the legacy she passed down to her daughters and granddaughters in this final version of her, would be setting themselves up for failure. The penetrating blue eyes that caused my grandfather’s knees to buckle, that devoured countless books including all the classics and just about everything C. S. Lewis ever wrote, that read to her children and made loving books a family tradition were now clouded over by macular degeneration. There was no trace of the beloved teacher of God’s Word, who nurtured and influenced so many young women in the faith, not the least of whom were her own two daughters. Her well-worn Bible lay undisturbed on the table beside her bed. The vibrant woman I remembered—the woman God created her to be—was lost somewhere in a fallen, aging body that was no longer hospitable to her marvelous spirit.

The last time anyone saw Eve, she was only a shell of her former self too, a broken-down version of the woman God created her to be. The original Eve was lost in Paradise. Sadly, instead of remembering her in those earlier glory days, the world’s memory of her was frozen in time at the worst possible moment—back in the Garden of Eden just as she swallowed a piece of forbidden fruit and served some to her husband. John Milton, the great English poet, couldn’t get that image of Eve out of his mind.

*Her rash hand in evil hour
Forth reaching to the fruit, she pluck’d, she eat:
Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat
Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe
That all was lost.*

—JOHN MILTON, *PARADISE LOST*

A bite of fruit, and everyone forgot God’s stunning sixth-day assessment: “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). We forgot the woman he created as the perfect remedy for man’s lack. From the vantage point of hindsight, perhaps the man would have been better off without her, considering the damage she had done. Even Adam seemed to think so when he blamed her for his actions. “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it” (Genesis 3:12).

Eve’s role as instigator in the debacle blotted out the wonder and significance of her creation out of Adam’s side, along with Adam’s rapturous delight in her. Rarely does anyone recall her as the sole inspiration of the world’s first poetry. Even if she lived the rest of her life like Mother Teresa, the world can never forgive what she did to us in Eden. There’s no talk of amnesty for the first human being to break rank and rebel against God. No chance we will forget the “rash hand” that reached for the fruit. A few swift movements and it was over. Eve got lost in Paradise—as lost as any woman has ever been. What she was in earlier times is only a dim and distant memory.

THE TROUBLE WITH EVE

We wouldn’t dream of doing to my grandmother what we persist in doing to Eve. We forget what Eve was like in her prime and try to reconstruct her legacy from the broken remnants that remained of her at the end. What would be a simple injustice to my grandmother proves far more injurious where Eve is concerned, simply because of her powerful influence over the rest of us, an influence that remains undiminished despite her terrible failure and our attempts to distance ourselves from her. As one writer put it, “There is no way to talk about women without talking about Eve.”¹

God cast the mold for all women when he created Eve. She embodies the secrets of his original blueprint for us. So we rightly turn to her to understand who we are and to discover God’s

purposes for us. We see and evaluate ourselves, as well as the women in the Bible, through the definition we draw from her. Which makes Eve both powerful and dangerous. Mistakes with regard to our understanding of her are costly for everyone. Like the missile that launches only the slightest fraction off course, we will miss our ultimate target by light-years if we misinterpret Eve. Conversely, a better understanding of Eve as God created her promises much-needed direction and ensures we have a true target in our sights. So before we attempt to understand any other women in the Bible, much less ourselves, we have important groundwork to do with Eve, for she is the foundation of all that follows.

The trouble with Eve is that in the rush to evacuate Eden, we picked up the wrong pieces of her to tell us who we are. On the downside, we're left with the impression of Eve as a temptress, which leads to the belief that women are morally weak and, if given the chance, will bring men down or seize control. This is a *fallen* view of women. On a more positive note, Eve is remembered as wife and mother. Yet even this poses something of a problem. It means little girls must grow up before becoming what God created them to be. Moreover, it excludes women without husbands or children. Eve's old legacy simply doesn't fit us all.

If we want to recover Eve's true legacy, we must begin where the Bible does—with her creation. We must retrace our steps to the Garden of Eden to retrieve the truth God revealed about Eve *before* the serpent showed up. God's definition of the woman and her significant place in his purposes came out in the planning phase of creation when his blueprint for women was spread out on the table in heaven's holy conference room.

EVE'S LOST LEGACY

When Michelangelo painted the magnificent ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, he painted not one but two frescos of Eve. Next to the ceiling's centerpiece is the fresco that depicts her fall

and expulsion with Adam from the Garden of Eden. Theologically, Michelangelo understood Eve's role in what went wrong in Eden. But, in the center of the ceiling—as the focal point of his magnum opus—he pictured God creating Eve out of Adam's side. According to art historians, Michelangelo's artistic decisions were driven by his theology. He somehow wanted to communicate that Eve's creation is central to our understanding of what God intended for us in the first place, what we lost in the Fall, and what Jesus came to restore. Michelangelo's masterpiece gives the full story, including the Fall, but begs the eye to focus on the newly created Eve. Here, at the consummation of creation, God reveals his true vision for humanity and Eve's lost legacy for women. I think the old Italian master was onto something.

In many ways, Eve's creation fulfills the fantasies of a lot of adults who, having suffered through the growing pains and regrets of youth, can only dream of a life that skips the awkward, stubborn, bumpy, learn-the-hard-way stages and starts out as an adult. Wouldn't it be nice to begin life appreciating the value of relationships, education, and opportunities and making the most of them? Eve had that chance. She didn't have to learn to walk, talk, or feed herself (at least we don't think she did). She could easily have started out pondering the big questions of life: "Who am I?" "Where did I come from?" "Why am I here?" If she did, Adam was right there, recovering from surgery, to help her find the answers.

Eve's forgotten legacy resides in explicit statements God made when he created her. First, God created Eve to be *his image bearer*—"in his image and likeness"—and second, to be the *ezer*, or the strong helper. Furthermore, she shared with Adam what theologians call the "Cultural Mandate"—God's command to be fruitful and multiply, to rule and subdue the earth. This global mandate included the call to reproduce physically and to engage in scientific, technological, and artistic pursuits. More importantly, the mandate was also profoundly spiritual and theological—the call to reproduce spiritually by multiplying *worshippers* of the liv-

ing God and to extend God's gracious rule over every inch of this planet. This staggering enterprise encompasses all dimensions of life and has occupied the human race ever since. God's creation design for Eve applies to *every* woman all the time, from the cradle to the grave.

EVE, GOD'S IMAGE BEARER

The Bible's very first statement about Eve is without question the single most important fact we can know about her. "God created [mankind] *in his own image*, in the image of God he created him; *male and female* he created them" (Genesis 1:27, emphasis added). God created Eve to bear his image—to be like him. This is the Bible's starting point for any definition of what it means to be a woman. It is also one of the most staggering statements in the whole Bible, even though it has become so familiar the shock of it has completely worn off.

In Genesis, however, this announcement is understandably surrounded by intense drama. On the sixth day of creation, we are unexpectedly drawn behind the scenes into the secret council of God, where we overhear a conversation among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as they draw up plans to create the man and the woman. "Let us make [mankind] in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Genesis 1:26). You can actually sense the excitement.

Frankly, it is a letdown to read what most professional theologians have to say about being God's image bearer. They recite laundry lists of attributes God possesses that he implanted in us and that distinguish us from the rest of creation—qualities like reason, morality, love, wisdom, spirituality, capacity for relationship, and on it goes, like a boring Sunday school lecture that never quite reaches us where we live. What theological technicians say about Eve, while true, utterly fails to capture God's

glorious vision. Is the essential meaning of the image of God to distinguish us from and set us above plants and household pets? Is this the sum and substance of the *imago Dei*?

King David didn't think so. He offers us much more in our quest to understand what it means to be made in God's image and he used rather startling language to make his point—so startling some translators have understandably been hesitant to give us the straight translation: “Yet you have made them a little lower than God [Elohim], and crowned them with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:5 NRSV). What does he mean by “a little lower than God”? I would argue that David has in view the rank God bestowed on humans at creation. God is the king, but he called Eve (along with Adam) to be his vice regents—next in rank to God himself in the creation. As his vice regent, as his image bearer, Eve's goal was to align herself with God at every possible level—to share his heart, imitate his ways, love what he loved, and join him in his work. It is the rarest of privileges, the highest of honors, the most daunting challenge imaginable. A simple list of attributes barely scratches the surface of all it means to bear God's image.

Being an image bearer was not a *fait accompli*. Neither Adam nor Eve was a full-fledged image bearer even before they sinned. Rather, it is as though God entrusted to Adam and Eve starter equipment, like the gear the army issues each new recruit. Everyone gets the same equipment. It's what we do with it that makes the difference. Yes, every human is created in God's image with basic qualities and responsibilities we inherit from God. That fact alone invests each person with dignity, worth, and purpose. But those who “walk with God”—who get to know him, follow and imitate his ways—will make much of this high calling. When Eve arrived on the scene, the bar had been raised exceedingly high, for God called her to be like him. “The image of God is . . . what we are enroute to becoming”²—a calling that invokes us to aspire to be more.

CREATED TO KNOW GOD

Before moving to England, our family often talked playfully about how much fun it would be to meet the queen. Our photo album contains photos of our three-year-old Allison practicing her curtsy “just in case” the queen came to call. She never did. We lived there four years, and not once did she drop by. Not once did the phone ring with an invitation from Buckingham Palace to join Queen Elizabeth for tea. The explanation was simple. She wasn’t interested. Didn’t even know we existed.

Things have never worked that way with God. From the dawn of creation, he refused to cordon himself off in a palace behind iron gates that admitted only dignitaries and blue bloods with the proper pedigree. By creating us to be his image bearers, he opened himself up to a relationship with us that otherwise would have been hopelessly out of reach.

The call to bear God’s image is an invitation to get to know God deeply. On the outskirts of human history—even before a single human set foot on this planet—God opened the door for us to enjoy an intimate relationship with him. The call to bear God’s image was intended to whet Eve’s hunger to learn all she could about him. It wasn’t good enough for Adam to know God and tell her what he was like. Eve needed to know God for herself. In other words, God was calling Eve to be a theologian.

The word *theologian* doesn’t appear in the Bible. Old Testament writers used a warmer, user-friendly expression, describing people who “walked with God.” A theologian takes a long walk through life with God—living in *his* presence, going *his* way, learning to see the world through *his* eyes, and getting to know *his* character so that trusting him in the dark stretches won’t be quite so hard. The theologian sees God at the center of everything. She lives with a profound confidence that he holds the whole world (including her) in his hands. Eugene Peterson described it like this: “If we live by mere happenstance—looking at what is biggest, listening to what is loudest, doing what is easiest—we will

live as if God were confined to the margins of our lives. But God is not marginal; God is foundational and central. The person who lives as if God sits on a bench at the edges of life, waiting to be called on in emergencies, is out of touch with reality and so lives badly.”³

Eve was created to know and walk with God and to make him known to others by reflecting his character in her life. This is a woman’s true path to fulfillment and meaning—the only way we will ever discover who we are and find our purpose. And it is accessible to all of us.

But Eve was also called to walk with Adam. Relationship reaches perfection within the holy fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God’s image bearers enter into strong relationships with one another. Which brings us to the second part of Eve’s lost legacy—her calling as the *ezer*.

EVE, THE *EZER*

Throughout history the church has always zeroed in on “*ezer*” (pronounced *āzer* with a long sounding *ā*, as in *razor*) as the pre-Fall piece of Eve that defines a woman’s role and remained intact despite her sin. God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper [*ezer*] suitable for him” (Genesis 2:18). The meaning of *ezer*, however, was diminished when translators rendered it “helpmeet” and restricted it to marriage.⁴ A woman’s mission centered on home and family—vital spheres of ministry to be sure, but only a slice of the vast mission God originally cast by calling women to rule and subdue the earth.

Thinking regarding the *ezer* began to change when scholars pointed out that the word *ezer* is used most often (sixteen of twenty-one occurrences) in the Old Testament to refer to God⁵ as Israel’s helper in times of trouble. That’s when *ezer* was upgraded to “*strong* helper,” leaving Christians debating among themselves over the meaning of “strong” and whether this affects a woman’s rank with respect to the man. Further research indicates *ezer* is

a powerful Hebrew military word whose significance we have barely begun to unpack.⁶ The *ezer* is a warrior, and this has far-reaching implications for women, not only in marriage, but in *every* relationship, season, and walk of life.

Earth has always been a war zone. Even before people inhabited the world, the Enemy was on the move. So it makes perfect sense that God used military language to mobilize Eve into action. God created Eve with a mission. The man was alone in the world—the only one on earth who walked by faith. God was preparing to launch the most ambitious enterprise imaginable. The potential for overload, burnout, discouragement, and unbelief was enormous, worse considering the fierce opposition the Enemy was about to mount. Adam couldn't fight these battles alone. So God created the *ezer* as the man's staunchest ally in the life of faith and in fulfilling the Cultural Mandate. Together they exercised dominion and labored to advance God's kingdom in their own hearts and on earth.

Further evidence of the strength and significance of the word *ezer* appeared when men in the Old Testament used *ezer* in naming their sons. Moses named his son Eli-*ezer* (the same name as Abraham's servant), explaining, "My father's God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh" (Exodus 18:4; see Genesis 15:2). First Chronicles 4:4 lists a man named *Ezer*, a descendant of Judah. Abi-*ezer* (my father is help) was among David's mighty warriors (1 Chronicles 11:28). There is wonderful irony in the fact that during New Testament times, one of Jesus' contemporaries, a man outspoken in his belief in women's inferiority to men, was Rabbi Eli-*ezer*.⁷ His very name declares the strength of women. (Who says God doesn't have a sense of humor?)

Eve and all her daughters are *ezers*—strong warriors who stand alongside their brothers in the battle for God's kingdom. We do not have to wait until we're grown to become *ezers*. The doctor who announces the birth of a girl might just as well exclaim, "It's an *ezer*!" for we are *ezers* from birth. Marriage

is one major arena where the *ezer* stands with the man in battle. It by no means exhausts the possibilities. If the call to rule and subdue the whole earth means anything, God calls the *ezer* to join the man in every sphere of life. Wherever the battle rages for God's kingdom, whenever someone needs a friend, God summons the *ezer* into action. Eve's calling as *ezer* takes us straight into the headwinds of our relationships with men—the most fascinating and at the same time most distressing and dysfunctional aspect of our lives. The paradigm we inherited from Eve is incomplete, however, if we don't grasp her legacy for us at this level.

THE BLESSED ALLIANCE

Sadly, in our world, relationships between men and women have deteriorated so that we jokingly refer to the “Battle of the Sexes,” sometimes with a private sense of despair that we'll ever resolve the tensions between us or overcome the difficulties of working together. Yet it was not so in the beginning.

At the dawning of creation, when God had a big job to do (and this was the biggest job ever), the team he put together was male and female. The man and the woman were God's A-Team—his first string of all-stars called to fulfill his ambitious mandate. According to the biblical record, the history of men and women working together is *longer* than men working with men or women working with women. This has profound implications for husbands and wives, but goes well beyond marriage to encompass *every* relationship between men and women in the family, the church, the workplace, and the wider world community. The clear message of the Bible is that God intended for men and women to work together. God put an exclamation point beside his choice of male and female. He *blessed* them before presenting them with their global mandate (Genesis 1:28). They are a *Blessed Alliance*.

God was forging a powerful union between the man and the woman that was essential for the challenges they faced together.

Eve brought to this alliance everything God called her to be as image bearer and *ezer*. God's plan to reveal his image through humanity involved *both* male and female. Nowhere does God's image shine more brightly than when men and women join in serving him together. This vital interaction between men and women enriches every aspect of life. Adam *needed* Eve's gifts and strengths to fulfill his calling, and she needed his gifts too. She was called to enter his struggles, to bolster his faith and obedience to God. The immense calling they shared demanded everything they had to offer and more. Each was called to promote the faithfulness of the other and to get in the way if ever their companion contemplated disobedience.

Every woman's life changes with seasons and circumstances. But for all of us, two callings never change—we are God's image bearers and we are *ezers*. These callings line up perfectly with the two greatest commandments. As image bearer, a woman's chief purpose in life is to love the Lord her God with her whole heart, soul, mind, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). As the *ezer*, her purpose is to love her neighbor as herself, beginning with her husband (her closest neighbor), but encompassing every person she encounters (Leviticus 19:18). The two commands are inseparable. By loving God first and most of all, we learn how to love others as he loves us. If Adam ever usurped God's place in Eve's heart, her love for Adam would degenerate into a destructive force, which is, as we all know, ultimately what happened. So where do things stand with Eve and her daughters, now that the damage has been done? What was left of Eve and her legacy for us, after Paradise was lost?

GETTING LOST

The conversation between Eve and the serpent has drawn enormous attention over the years.⁸ It's hard to imagine a more important exchange, given the devastating outcome. What interests me

for our purposes, however, is how Eve's callings as image bearer and *ezer* came into play. The serpent's tactics were unnerving. He broached the subject in the most mocking, incredulous manner, making God's command sound rather silly. "Can it really be true—what I've heard—that God said, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

You can almost feel Eve stiffen defensively, like a kid being taunted for having an earlier curfew than her peers. She came back with the right answer—sort of. All the trees were accessible, except one. On pain of death, they weren't even to touch that one, which, although not part of God's original command, was actually a good idea. Getting nowhere with this line of argument, the serpent countered by undermining her confidence in God, planting suspicion that God didn't have their best interests at heart and was withholding something good.

It's important to note that Eve's failure wasn't in questioning God's goodness. The Bible is full of similar questions from people earnestly trying to understand God within the appalling realities of a fallen world. Questions actually play a vital role in helping us grow in our relationship with God. They force us to be honest with him and help us probe more deeply into his heart. Asking questions of God was not the problem. The trouble started when neither Eve nor Adam (who was present during the whole discussion)⁹ spoke the truth. Despite overwhelming evidence of God's goodness from all that surrounded them, no one spoke up for God.

Nor was Eve out of line to speak or act when she faced the Enemy. The image bearer/strong helper was supposed to join the battle. Before God, she was responsible to think, decide, and act in ways that honored God. Nor was she wrong to initiate. She was called to help Adam, not to create more work for him. It seems to me that, far from trying to overthrow her husband, Eve was actually seeking to benefit him—something any good *ezer* would do.

The real problem was in rejecting and disobeying God's Word. If she had rejected the serpent's proposal and held her ground, no one would ever question her conduct. But instead of relying on the truth, she gave way. God's voice became one of many instead of the one voice against whom all others should be measured. She was completely taken in, tempted, and seduced by the serpent's words. Adam, on the other hand, was *not* seduced or overpowered by seductive charms, as many allege. He ate the fruit knowing full well the serpent's words were false.¹⁰

I've often puzzled over why Satan's temptation was so overpowering. Why couldn't Eve be content with the abundant variety of other fruit? It almost seems childish to be unable to resist one piece of fruit among so many delicious options. That was before it dawned on me what the serpent was actually offering. The Enemy shrewdly chose the perfect bait, targeting Eve's calling as image bearer. Here was the Alice in Wonderland approach to fulfilling Eve's God-given calling in life. Just sink your teeth into this piece of fruit and presto, "you'll be like God."

One writer, critical of Eve for overstepping her bounds as a woman, suggested things would have turned out better if Eve had insisted, "Let me not be like God. Let me be what I was made to be—let me be a woman."¹¹ But being like God *was* Eve's true calling as a woman. This was God's design for her. The passion of her heart was to be like God. The serpent couldn't possibly have offered her anything more desirable.

It is sobering to realize that God, not the woman, was the first person to be marginalized on earth. *God* was slighted. Not the man. Eve and Adam turned their backs on God by choosing to become like God *without him*—without walking the long road of faith and obedience and doing the hard work of forging a relationship with him. It was a shortcut that could never deliver what the serpent promised.

Their actions did deliver what God promised. Death. The freedom and joy they once relished just vanished. Their hearts turned cold toward God. Naked and filled with shame, they frantically

stitched leaves together to cover themselves. Flimsy fig-leaf coverings were not enough, so they hid themselves instead of stepping out to walk with God in the cool of the evening. Their longings for fellowship with God were displaced by an overwhelming desire to get away. Instead of repentance and sorrow, there was blame. Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the serpent. The whole scene was sickening. They were clueless about what they had done and what they were losing. Tragically, in the familiar surroundings of the beautiful Garden that was home, they were lost. Death was in the air, and their losses were incalculable.

ON THE OUTSIDE OF EDEN

So what was it like, the morning after the great crash? After living in the Garden, in harmony with Adam, after enjoying open access to God, what was it like to awaken that first morning in the wilderness knowing they could never go back there again? How very different this was from the first time Eve opened her eyes and heard the jubilant man waxing eloquent over her. No one was reciting poetry now. Tension and distance had come between them. How long would it be before Adam's anger subsided—the anger that pointed the finger of blame at Eve?

Oh, the things we would all take back, if given the chance. Hasty decisions, rash words, and reckless actions that backfired, leaving wounds, closed doors, and estrangements we can't seem to repair. Did Eve relive again and again that fateful moment when she bought the lie and bit into the fruit? Was she depressed over losing Eden and about the rift that had invaded her marriage? Were any tears shed over the loss of God? We only know that her world, her life, her body, her marriage, her work, her relationship with God—all changed forever.

Life in a fallen world was nothing like life in the Garden she once called home. Efforts to subdue and rule the earth now met with resistance as the earth, originally designed for their comfort

and safe habitation, turned hostile. Work that once promised satisfaction and joy now required “painful toil.”

She and Adam brought suffering on their children too. Death posed a constant threat to their attempts to be fruitful and multiply. The grave has an appetite that never says, “Enough!”¹² The pain of childbirth was not limited to labor pains, as often thought, although labor pain was surely intended. The Hebrew word used for the woman’s pain is the same word used for the man’s pain in his work. It is *not* the usual Hebrew word for the pangs of childbirth.¹³ The pain of bearing children extends far beyond the pain of physical birth. Now, instead of being the joyous, purely hopeful event it should have been, the birth of a child became a source of unavoidable pain for everyone. The child suffers from the brokenness of a fallen world, but also adds to the suffering because of personal fallenness. A child’s parents suffer as well because of their helplessness to shield their child from heartache and their inability to change a heart.

Eve cried out in physical pain countless times as she gave birth. That pain was nothing compared to the pain she felt when her firstborn, Cain, murdered her second son, Abel. Pain spread over the planet as the descendants of Adam and Eve lived out their fallenness in relationships with others. The multiplication of true image bearers was now obstructed by spiritual death—the deadness of their children’s hearts toward God—for Adam and Eve would multiply after their own kind.

After Eve and Adam ate the forbidden fruit, relationships between men and women collapsed from unity into tension and conflict. Instead of being valued as the man’s strongest ally and spiritual resource, the *ezer* became an object to possess and control. The noble calling to rule and subdue the earth in God’s name was perverted, as male and female tried to rule and subdue each other. The vast shared global vision God gave them at creation constricted into narrowly defined roles, and male and female divided life into separate spheres. The Blessed Alliance was breaking up.

FOUND AGAIN

God never abandoned his original blueprint. He never threw out his plan for male and female to bear his image, he refused to retire the *ezer*, and he maintained his vision of the Blessed Alliance. God set his jaw with determination when things were at their worst—Paradise was in shambles and a fig-leaved Adam and Eve were standing there making excuses. God’s love never stops. His purposes never change. Adam and Eve and their offspring might turn their backs on God. He never turned his back on them or us.

Included in God’s shattering words of curse was an unsolicited promise of hope. God promised a redeemer—a descendant of the woman—to engage the serpent in mortal combat and emerge the victor (Genesis 3:15). Amid the shards of the Fall, God picked up the warrior piece of Eve and promised the birth of another much greater warrior. The seed of the woman—Jesus—became humanity’s hope, the seed of promise.

Ezers are alive and well throughout biblical history. They come alongside the men in their lives—husband, father, brothers, friends, and colleagues—joining hands to reflect God’s image and build his kingdom. The Bible records some glowing moments (along with serious failures) for the Blessed Alliance. At times God orchestrates situations, leaving men no choice but to rely upon the courage and godly resourcefulness of women. Jesus took the Blessed Alliance to new heights by joining men and women in one body—his church. Although male-female relationships remain a place of struggle, occasionally, even today, we catch glimpses of what God intended.

The Blessed Alliance came to life when a board of hardworking deacons invited a woman in the church to attend one of their meetings to discuss ministry opportunities in their church. In reality, they were “including” her as a friendly gesture toward the women in the church, counting on her to recruit other female volunteers to work. What they discovered in their interactions with

her was something they didn't expect. They actually needed her to help them minister more effectively as deacons. Her insights into the people who needed their care revealed dimensions of ministry they had overlooked and opened ways to minister more compassionately. Instead of doing *her* a favor by giving her a place at the table, her influence and wisdom enhanced *their* ministries. It was another gentle reminder of God's assessment in the beginning, "It is not good for the man to be alone."

Although it has been years since my grandmother shed her frail body and entered the arms of Jesus, the woman I knew and loved in her younger days lives on in my memory and continues to inspire me. Eve's glorious legacy lives on today too. She gives all women more to live for. We are God's image bearers. There is no higher calling. We are *ezers*—chosen by God to soldier alongside our brothers as a Blessed Alliance, advancing Christ's kingdom in the hearts of people all around us.

Eve's threefold legacy—that we are God's image bearers, *ezer*-warriors, and members of the Blessed Alliance—provides a clear lens through which we will examine the women in Scripture and gain a fresh vision for ourselves. In the chapters that follow, we will look at each woman's story to see how she lived up to this rich legacy that all women inherit from Eve.

The woman we turn to next is a perfect first candidate for us to try out this forgotten legacy for women. Mrs. Noah was so lost, she doesn't even make the long list of women in the Bible. But she is on our short list and has a powerful message for us.

FOCUS: Eve has enormous influence over women's lives today because she was the first woman God created. We want to recover Eve's forgotten legacy and rediscover God's creation blueprint for women.

EVE'S STORY: Genesis 1:26–31; 2:18–25; 3:1–24; 4:1–2

FOR DISCUSSION, READ: Genesis 1:26–31; 2:18–25

1. Prior to reading this chapter, how have you understood God's calling for you as a woman, based on the story of Eve? Where do you expect to find your greatest fulfillment in life?
2. What kinds of women or stages of a woman's life are left out of your definition of a woman's calling? Does your definition ever leave *you* out?
3. What is the Bible's first statement about women and why is this the highest possible calling for any human being?
4. Why is *image bearer* both a description of who we are as human beings and a vision of what God created us to become?
5. What does it mean to be an *ezer*? How does it affect your view of yourself to realize the *ezer* is a warrior?
6. How does being an *ezer* affect our relationships with those around us? How are we *ezers* for our friends and loved ones?
7. Describe some examples you have seen of the Blessed Alliance or where you have seen it lacking.
8. How do our callings as image bearers, *ezers*, and members of the Blessed Alliance reinforce our need to know God better?