

*" How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!
Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand - when I awake, I am still with you"
- Psalm 139:17-18*

We have already said in this series that if everyone were to truly believe, and actively live out the truth of Psalm 139, the world would be a radically different place. You don't have to look far to see how confused our society has become on the subject of gender, in a culture where what you feel is more important than what may be objectively true. Yet what we feel is shaped by what our culture models, what the media portrays as the expected norms of masculinity and femininity. Rather than knowing who God says we are, and being secure in that identity, everyone is trying to work out who they are by looking inside themselves. In the absence of truth this is now the norm.

As discussed last week, we need to have the attitude of Jesus. While we affirm the truth of Scripture, making clear what the Bible says to our culture, we speak to individuals with love, letting them know they are loved. We need to be compassionate, love them, and ultimately seek to lead them to hope that in Christ that one day all the pain and confusion will be taken away.

Read Genesis 1:26-27

1. We are Made Equal

The world has put gender on a spectrum, yet the Bible is clear there are 2 genders by design. If you were born a man God purposed that from the beginning of creation. If you're a woman it's because God has a plan and a purpose for your womanhood. We - both males and females - are made in the image of God. By saying this, God is establishing that man and woman are equal in value and dignity in His sight. We are equal in worth and importance. We both image God. Being equal doesn't mean we are identical. There are some obvious differences - differences designed to complement one another.

In addition to this, Genesis 1 says that the task of ruling the earth was given to both men and women (**verse 28**). That may be refreshing to hear, particularly in light of the treatment of women in Church History. We are the Kings and Queens of creation made to rule together. Equal in dignity and worth.

How has the equality of man & woman been misunderstood/mistreated by the church?...by society?... by ourselves?

2. We are Made Distinct and Complimentary

God created two distinct genders on purpose to display his image. So what does it mean to be male or female? There are tons of things that spring to mind. These stereotypes are dangerous, and they are often cultural expectations that don't honour God's design of equal value, equal dignity. Whilst the Bible doesn't present a list of gender specific personality traits - the Bible is clear on the God-ordained roles for men and women that are designed to complement each other.

Some of these roles and distinctions of men and women may make us feel uneasy. Words such as headship, submission, obey - if these words make us feel uncomfortable, then it is likely that we are viewing these words without being rooted in a Genesis 1 understanding of the high calling of both men and women. Perhaps we are listening to culture, railing against historic injustices, and not trusting in the good purposes of God's design.

What are the dangers of 'gender-stereotypes', and how do these confuse the complementary roles in the Bible?

3. What Does it Mean to be Female?

In Genesis 2, the story of creation is repeated, revealing what happened in more detail. In Gen 2:18 God said, *"it's not good for man to be alone, I will make a helper suitable for him."* The word helper can conjure certain images, particularly linked to the 'helper' wife that is portrayed in recent history. However, the word - עֵזֶר (*ezer*) - occurs 21 times in the Hebrew Bible. Only twice referring to the role of women - in Genesis 2. 16 times, this word refers to God. 'Ezer' is a strong, powerful word.

As women, we are bestowed with this amazing privilege of being *Ezers*. Women get to *ezer* their husbands and their families. We all have the incredible joy and pleasure of praying for, loving, supporting, encouraging and serving our local church. By speaking words of life, encouraging people around you, speaking well of the church and leaders - you are playing a vital role in the advancement of the gospel and the growth of the church. You are being a helper - an *Ezer*!

How are the women of ChristCentral fulfilling this 'ezer' role? How can they use their gifts to support the church?

4. What Does it Mean to be Male?

Moving on to Genesis 3 we get insight into biblical manhood, where Satan entices Adam and Eve to eat of the only fruit in the garden which God had forbidden. When God called for them, He called for Adam. Eve also ate the fruit - in fact ate the fruit first. However, God ordained that man would be held responsible, accountable for his family.

Being accountable is a pretty sobering thing. It should cause us to be totally invested into every area of our families, to be interested in the health of the family - and in the health of the church. This God-ordained male responsibility is one of the reasons why we have, and always will have, male eldership. Elders are there to take responsibility for the Church. Whilst we are at odds with our culture (in terms of women having equal roles), we are being faithful to the word of God.

How are the men of ChristCentral treating this responsibility? How can they use their gifts to support the church?

5. Married and Single

While it is easy to see male and female roles play out in marriage, it still applies for those who are single. Through the Gospel, we have all received a family in the church. Women should *ezer* their church, and their leaders - to bring great strength and support to the work of the Gospel. Men have a duty to accept God-ordained responsibility - starting first with themselves, and how they honour God with their own dealings. This church, needs men and women fully contributing with the gifts God has given them, courageously believing they are who God says they are.

What challenges can we face - single or married? How can we enjoy God and glorify Him in all these situations?