

TCW

TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN

APRIL 27, 2016

BETH MOORE ON
HOLY AFFECTION

PUTTING THE
BIBLE BACK IN
BIBLE STUDY



When Does the Bible Allow
DIVORCE?

Contents

APRIL 27,
2016



FROM THE EDITOR

The List That's Still Saving Thousands of Marriages

What continues to draw so many readers to the story of a broken marriage, a paper, and a pen?
By Kelli B. Trujillo



RAWPIXEL.COM / SHUTTERSTOCK

COVER STORY

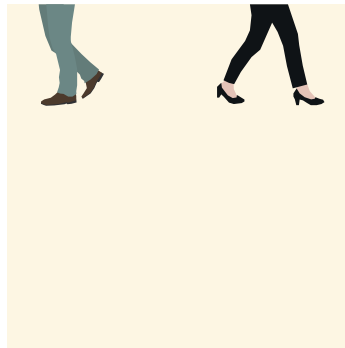
When Does the Bible Allow Divorce?

Scripture's guidance for broken, hurting marriages
By Rebecca Florence Miller



How a Therapeutic Separation Could Save Your Marriage

5 steps toward healing and restoration
By Dr. Juli Slattery



When Your Bible Study Becomes Group Therapy

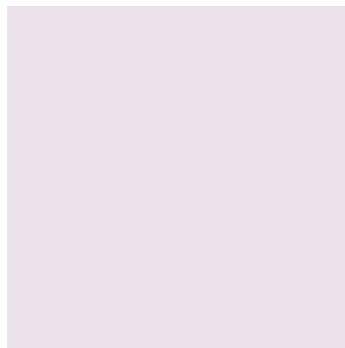
Building strong relationships doesn't need to come at the expense of delving into Scripture.
By Erin Davis



Leading Those Who Are Different from You

From gender to race to politics to class, here's what it takes to lead across differences.
By Chi Chi Okwu

NIELS HARIOT / SHUTTERSTOCK



LIVE LOVE

Stop Carrying Mom Shame

God made you just right for your precious children.
By Margot Starbuck



EXCERPT

Beth Moore on Holy Affection

Jesus wants your emotion, not just your devotion.
By Beth Moore





The List That's Still Saving Thousands of Marriages



Kelli B. Trujillo, Editor

What continues to draw so many readers to the story of a broken marriage, a paper, and a pen?

It's one of the most-read *Today's Christian Woman* articles of all time. No, it's not written by a famous person. No, it's not about a stunning cultural event. And no, it's not about sex.

It's simply a story of hope and healing.

[“The List That Saved My Marriage”](#) by Becky Zerbe was first published in 2005 in *Marriage Partnership* (a Christianity Today publication at the time). Later that same year, Becky and her husband were tragically killed in a car accident. Yet the story of God's powerful work in their marriage continues to impact hundreds of thousands of lives more than a decade later.

What is it that's so compelling about Becky's story?

Becky had reached the end of her rope. She was at rock bottom and had decided to leave her husband. I think many readers can relate to her deep hurts and frustrations—even readers who've never had a rock-bottom moment as painful as Becky's. Every wife or husband knows that marital struggles can be very hard and can feel hopeless. This degree of hurt and struggle can happen in *any marriage*—yes, even Christian ones.

In her article Becky describes arriving at her parents' home, suitcase in hand and child in tow, ready to move in. Becky had her reasons for leaving her husband, and her mom knew it.

Yet Becky's mom gave her a paper and a pen, and asked her to do something.

I don't want to give away what happened next. You'll need to read the article yourself! But suffice it to say that Becky walked through deep spiritual conviction and came out on the


other side with hope.

Many of our most popular articles share a common thread: They tell stories of marriages at or even *past* the breaking point that somehow, despite all odds, experience healing. Along with Becky's article, we see this same thread in [Ruth's story](#), in [Jill's](#), and in [Jeannie's](#). Why do so many of us resonate with these stories? What is it that still brings thousands upon thousands of readers into that kitchen conversation between Becky and her mom?

I think it's because so many of us have faced heartache. So many of us have wanted to give up. And I think it's because, despite the darkest of circumstances, we are yet people of *hope*. We serve a God of resurrection! We follow the one who said to Lazarus, "[Come forth!](#)" and who told Jairus's daughter, "[Arise.](#)" When it comes to hurting or damaged marriages, we long to see that glimmer of hope that reminds us that Jesus, the resurrected one, is still in the business of doing miracles. Even a marriage that seems beyond all hope is *not* beyond the scope of God's healing love.

In this issue of *Today's Christian Woman*, we're grappling with a painful subject: divorce. Our [cover story](#) examines the biblical grounds for divorce and wrestles with difficult matters like emotionally destructive behavior and physical abuse. And in "[How a Therapeutic Separation Could Save Your Marriage](#)," Dr. Juli Slattery examines separation, outlining how that radical step may be necessary in some situations and discussing how it can be approached in a God-honoring way.


The end of a marriage is a deeply painful wound. We know that many of you, our readers, bear the scars from a past divorce. And we know that many others of you may be in a painful marriage and are contemplating divorce. Like Becky did that day, you may have reached the very end of your rope. We hope that the articles in this issue give you wisdom regarding Scripture's teachings on divorce so you can make discerning and faithful choices abo

dar  at, for many of you, stories like Becky's can point you away from hope. It's a hope that may feel outrageous and ridiculous and illogical. It's a choice to say, *I believe God can breathe new life even into the dead bones of this marriage. With his help, I will do what I can to bring healing. Relying on his strength, I will lean on him for hope.*

Grace,

Kelli B. Trujillo

Follow me on Twitter at [@kbtrujillo](#) or [@TCWomancom](#)



● Cover Story

When Does the Bible Allow Divorce?

Scripture's guidance for broken, hurting marriages | **REBECCA FLORENCE MILLER**

Your best friend, Annie, finally works up the courage to make a coffee date with you and get real. “I just can’t do it anymore,” she says, eyes downcast as she traces the outline of her cup. “I constantly catch him watching pornography; he puts me down all the time; he is forceful in the bedroom. A couple times lately, he really lost his temper and scared the kids badly. I don’t know what to do. God wants us to honor marriage no matter what, right?” What do you say?

Another friend, Monica, calls you often with complaints about her husband. It seems he can never do anything right, and you’re concerned that Monica has started to obsess about what a “man of God” your church’s new, single pastor is. You suspect Monica might be getting a bit infatuated. You’re concerned about her. Could she be considering divorce?

Meanwhile, a third friend, Mary Ann, is consumed with guilt about the past. After studying the Bible, she has come to the conclusion that she divorced for selfish reasons, not biblical ones. Because her ex-husband is remarried, Mary Ann can’t remedy this wrong. She is having a terrible time hearing anything you tell her about God’s forgiveness.

When we face challenging marital circumstances (whether they are our own or those of our loved ones), we may struggle with deep, hard questions: What are the biblical grounds for divorce? Are my marriage struggles just the product of two sinners marrying? Or are these struggles legitimate grounds for divorce? How can God’s Word help me discern what is right?

MANY AMERICANS [AND CHRISTIANS] ARE DIVORCING TODAY

The National Center for Family and Marriage Research at Bowling Green State University **reports** that out of every 1,000 married women in 2014, 17.6 experienced a divorce that year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention base their numbers off of total population rather than only married people. They found that, **in 2014**, there were 6.9 marriages per 1,000 members of the total population, while there were 3.2 divorces or annulments per 1,000 members of the general population that same year. (It's important to note that, by and large, the number of those marrying in any given year is not the same group which is divorcing.)

But what about Christians? Are we doing any better? It depends. In *Christians Are Hate-Filled Hypocrites . . . and Other Lies You've Been Told*, sociologist Bradley R.E. Wright reports findings from **The General Social Survey** (from 2000 to 2006): "Contrary to popular belief, Christians and members of other religions have lower divorce rates, about 42%, than do the religiously unaffiliated, about 50%." He goes on to explain that, for evangelicals, regular attendance at religious services makes a big impact on the divorce rate: "60% of the never-attendees had been divorced or were separated compared to only 38% of the weekly attendees." While regular church attendance does seem to make a difference in the health and preservation of marriage, nonetheless divorce rates are still pretty high in the church. In his book, Wright says, "The percentage of divorced or separated Evangelicals almost doubled from the 1970s to the 2000s (25 to 46%)."

MARRIAGE: A LIFELONG COMMITMENT

Scripture consistently communicates that marriage is a lifelong commitment. Jesus described the relationship between husband and wife this way in Matthew 19:6: "They are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (NIV). **Dr. Craig Keener**, Professor of Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, explains how crucial this understanding is, saying, "Jesus reminds us that in the beginning God joined man and woman together. 'One flesh' often refers to one's relatives or kin, so the husband and wife becoming 'one flesh' should be a family unit no less permanent than our families of origin should be."

"The biblical ideal is marriage as a lifelong union between a man and a woman, both of whom are Spirit-filled disciples of Christ (**Ephesians 5:18**)," affirms **Dr. Andreas Köstenberger**, Senior Research Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He emphasizes that "marriage illustrates the principle of two becoming one, [a principle] which is also present in the spiritual union between Christ and the church (head and body; **Ephesians 5:32**)."

Dr. Beth Felker Jones, Associate Professor of Theology at Wheaton College, adds,

Marriage, created by God as a "one flesh" union, is meant to be a sign of God's unbreakable covenant with us. This is an important symbol throughout the

Scriptures: God is compared to a husband and God's people to a wife. When, by the grace of God, we're able to keep a marriage together, we get to be symbols—imperfect symbols, but still symbols—of God's faithfulness to his people. Marriages are supposed to last because they are symbols of God's lasting love for us.

EXPLICIT DIVORCE ALLOWANCES

The Bible only explicitly allows divorce for two reasons. Köstenberger, who is also the President of [Biblical Foundations](#), summarizes: "Jesus proceeded to state one exception in which case divorce is permissible: sexual immorality on [the] part of one's spouse, that is, in context, adultery ([Matthew 19:9](#))." Köstenberger clarifies, "In such a case, however, divorce is not mandated or even encouraged—forgiveness and reconciliation should be extended and pursued if at all possible. But divorce is allowed, especially in cases where the sinning spouse persists in an adulterous relationship."

Köstenberger goes on to note, "Paul adds a second exception, in instances where an unbelieving spouse abandons the marriage. This would typically be the case when one of the two partners is converted to Christ at some point after marrying and the other person refuses to continue in the marriage" (see [1 Corinthians 7](#)).

WHAT ABOUT DOMESTIC ABUSE?

Keener sees these explicit statements as applicable more broadly to other situations that may not be directly mentioned by Scripture. He says, "If a husband is beating his wife, that would certainly seem to be to violate the 'one flesh' union. If he were beating himself, we'd recommend psychiatric help; if he is beating his wife, who is supposed to be one flesh with him, he is certainly not treating her as one flesh."

Keener goes on to add, "Now, I don't want to let that be an excuse for people to opt out of their marriages—someone saying, she abuses me (because she doesn't laugh at my jokes) or he abuses me (because we had an argument). Even the patriarchs in Genesis had disagreements (for example, Jacob and Rachel in [Genesis 30:1-2](#))," Keener points out. "But there does come a point where discretion is the better part of valor. Some people are too ready to grasp for that point; others wait much longer than they should. Jesus told those persecuted for his name to flee from one city to another to escape persecution ([Matthew 10:23](#)), and sometimes the apostles did so ([Acts 14:5-6](#)). It is heartless to make someone remain in an abusive situation."

Köstenberger is more cautious, arguing that while "the Bible displays a pervasive concern for justice and is concerned with protecting the vulnerable, it also teaches that believers can glorify God by bearing up under unjust suffering. This calls for wisdom and balance: Certainly we should do everything we can to protect victims of abuse while at the same time respecting the marriage bond and not dissolving it lightly."

Jones, who is the author of *Faithful: A Theology of Sex*, brings a broad conceptual view to biblical teachings on divorce. She says, "In [Matthew 19:9](#), Jesus forbids divorce 'except for

unchastity.” She explains, “When a spouse breaks the marriage covenant through sexual sin—*porneia*—there are biblical grounds for divorce. Divorce is not, of course, required in such cases, but it is permissible. I see this as a way that Jesus protects us in a world torn apart by sin. Because we are precious to God, we are not required to stay in a marriage when we have been betrayed through *porneia*.”

It is worth mentioning that many Bible interpreters see *porneia* here as referring *only* to sexual sin against one’s spouse, but Jones believes it can be understood more generally: “If we put *porneia* into the larger biblical context, we see that it is any violation of God’s intentions for lasting, faithful ‘one flesh’ union. *Porneia* certainly includes adultery, because adultery violates the one flesh union. But *porneia* can also include violence or abuse against one’s spouse because to abuse one’s spouse is also to violate that one flesh union.” Jones emphasizes, “If committing violence against the one who is supposed to be ‘one flesh’ with you isn’t a violation of God’s intentions for marriage as a faithful, one flesh union, I don’t know what is.”

CHRONIC “HARDNESS OF HEART”

Christian counselor and author of *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage*, [Leslie Vernick](#) believes there is a strong biblical warrant for allowing people to experience consequences for their sin (see [1 Corinthians 5:9–12](#); [James 5:19–20](#); [Galatians 6:7](#)). While she affirms the sanctity of marriage, Vernick explains her view that safety may be more important to God than absolute loyalty to one’s spouse under all circumstances (see [1 Samuel 18–31](#); [Matthew 2:13–15](#); [Luke 14:5](#)). Vernick believes that “chronic hardness of heart” is grounds for divorce when there is “a serious sin issue, a serious breach of the marital bond, a serious trust breakdown . . . and there is no repentance or willingness to look at that and how that’s affected the marital bond and the bond of trust.” While some biblical interpreters may not agree with her conclusions, Vernick draws upon Moses’ allowance for divorce cited by Jesus in [Matthew 19:8](#) to support this viewpoint.

In her work with women who are experiencing such situations, Vernick first counsels a wake-up call conversation with their husbands, followed by separation if the husband fails to turn from his sin. A [separation](#) of this sort, undertaken with the support of wise counsel, clarifies the destructive consequences of sinful habits and could have the potential to lead to eventual healing and restoration.

Vernick emphasizes that there is a difference between a difficult or disappointing marriage and a destructive marriage. She points out that we must not seek divorce simply because we are not getting everything we want out of our marriages: “We have such high expectations—no one can live up to that. When you’re disappointed in your spouse because they’re not as romantic or ambitious or as spiritual or as handy or whatever it is that you wanted out of that marriage, and you’re disappointed and you see somebody else who’s got those qualities, you begin to become contemptuous or critical or disappointed . . . instead of being grateful and appreciative of what you do have.” Vernick believes a disappointing or difficult marriage is not grounds for divorce but rather is grounds for faithfulness.

WHAT ABOUT A PAST DIVORCE?

If you are reading this article and you've been divorced, you may be wrestling with your own questions or feelings of guilt—particularly if you've concluded that your divorce was not biblically grounded. It is easy to become weighed down by the shame of past mistakes. Sometimes there are abiding consequences in relationships with others, but before God, "If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness" ([1 John 1:9](#)).

"Repentance usually doesn't mean we get to do things over again; often it is too late to get a second chance with the same person, especially if one party has remarried," Keener observes. "But it does mean that we make restitution as best as possible, confessing and doing whatever is possible to make things right with the people involved, including spouse, children, or anyone else affected by it."

Vernick says, "Really messing up badly and understanding grace is the most beautiful thing that can happen." She adds that we can show God our gratitude for his grace by learning from our mistakes. As we experience God's grace for our failures or sins, it transforms us into more gracious people who readily extend God's mercy and compassion to others.

NAVIGATING THE TENSION

Within the church we see various responses to tough marital struggles. Some may counsel for divorce too hastily, advising couples to forgo the difficult peaks and valleys that are part of any marriage and, in essence, ignoring the high value the Bible places on the marriage commitment. Meanwhile others may respond with legalism, pressuring fellow Christians to stay in marriages that are clearly destructive and unsafe.

There are no cookie-cutter answers to some of these difficult questions. The tension remains: Marriage is a lifelong commitment that is only broken for the most severe reasons. When a Christian is wrestling with a marriage that may be irreparable, sometimes the best we can do is seek God's guidance in Scripture, talk with trusted friends who know the situation well, and pray together for the Spirit's guidance.

Let's strive to be a Christian community that treats marriage with respect and honors it as a lifelong commitment, but let's also reach out to protect the vulnerable and mistreated. Only as we stay engaged with the whole Word of God can we navigate this tension. ●

Rebecca Florence Miller is a freelance writer and editor, and a blogger at [Patheos](#). You can also find her at [RebeccaFlorenceMiller.wordpress.com](#) and on Twitter at [@flatheadmama](#).



How a Therapeutic Separation Could Save Your Marriage

5 steps toward healing and restoration | **DR. JULI SLATTERY**

I have both the privilege and heartache of hearing from women in extremely difficult marriages. One has a husband with a sexual addiction. Another's husband regularly comes home after midnight, refusing to share where he has been. Many marriage problems can be solved through counseling and communication. However, some issues, such as abuse, addiction, or a spouse who won't work through serious conflicts, call for drastic intervention.

As a Christian who believes in the sanctity of the marriage covenant, I am hesitant to ever recommend divorce. As Jesus said in Mark 10:9, "Let no one split apart what God has joined together."

However, I don't recommend that women stay stuck in a relationship that is abusive, destructive, or riddled with betrayal; hence, the option of separation. Fortunately, most states now allow for legal separation, which addresses sensitive areas like money, safety, and child custody.

I find that many couples are unwilling to consider separation because they don't understand the purpose for it. Is it just a way for Christians to avoid the stigma and trauma of divorce? Or is it simply a stepping-stone toward an inevitable divorce?

While some couples separate with every intention of divorcing, a therapeutic separation based upon biblical principles is an entirely different proposition. In a therapeutic separation, entered into with the help of wise counsel, the couple hopes for a restoration of

the marriage rather than dissolution.

If you are separated or are contemplating separation, consider these five hallmarks of therapeutic separation to help you approach your decision in a healthy and God-honoring way.

1. HEALTHY SEPARATION CREATES A CRISIS RATHER THAN AVOIDING CONFLICT

A primary purpose of a therapeutic separation is to create a crisis. In essence, it is saying, *We can't continue to function the way we are. Our marriage is not okay, and it's time for us to acknowledge that.*

Some couples live together for decades while ignoring serious issues like addiction or abuse, giving the outward appearance that everything is normal. The crisis of separation makes a strong statement both to the couple and their community that “we need help.”

The Bible tells us what to do when there is sin in a relationship (see [Matthew 18:15-17](#)). First, we are to confront the person. If they don't listen, we should bring in a third party. If they still don't listen, we ought to ask for help from a church authority. If this doesn't bring about change, we are to separate from them. While we rarely apply this principle to marriage, I believe it is a good blueprint for how to address serious marital issues and helps us understand separation as a biblical last resort for a troubled marriage.

2. HEALTHY SEPARATION MAPS A CLEAR ROAD FORWARD RATHER THAN PROMOTING HELPLESSNESS

Separation can often feel like a land of limbo. You don't feel married or divorced but somewhere in the middle. The state of separation will continue to be that way unless there is a clear road forward.

With a counselor, you need to identify the specific problems that led to the separation. This shouldn't be a laundry list of minor grievances; the focus should be on the big issues that must be addressed. Along with that, you should create specific and clear steps that must be taken if there is to be reconciliation. Consider these examples:

Issue: My spouse is controlling with our money.

Action Step: We meet with a financial counselor and agree on a plan for both to have fair access to our finances.

Issue: My spouse has had inappropriate relationships with others and won't be accountable for it. Trust is broken.

Action Step: We meet with a counselor, and my partner must be honest with me about the other relationships, absolutely committed to our marriage, understand the breach of trust, and be willing to be accountable so that I can trust again.

Separations often fail because there is no clear definition of what needs to happen to

bring about a healthy reconciliation. Mapping out the issues and action steps provides clarity and hope, and it gives God the room to bring restoration and healing.

3. HEALTHY SEPARATION LETS A HARD HEART WALK AWAY RATHER THAN ENABLING SIN

You can pray, fast, and do everything right but still have a spouse who refuses to address his or her damaging contributions to your marriage. Once you have communicated your willingness to work on the marriage and presented clear changes that must occur, you then wait for your spouse to respond. That response isn't up to you. You can't control whether your partner is stubborn or broken, willing to fight for the marriage or already moving on to the next one.

Scripture tells us to live at **peace** with everyone, as far as it depends upon us. There are times when one person clearly has no intention of staying married or taking responsibility for the damage caused. In cases like these, you have to let them go.

4. HEALTHY SEPARATION WORKS TOWARD A RENEWED MARRIAGE RATHER THAN REINFORCING OLD PATTERNS

I recently met with a woman who was in the throes of separation. While she grieved the loss of her family, she was also terrified that God would ask her to go back into an abusive marriage.

I responded to her concern this way: "If God asks you to go back to the marriage, it would be a *new marriage*, not the same one you just left. Your husband must be willing to admit to and address his out-of-control anger and the ways he has been hurting you and your children."

Real, *proven* change is essential in situations like this one. I described what the new marriage would need to look like, saying, "In order for him to be back at home, he needs to be repentant and have taken the necessary steps, like counseling, to ensure that those destructive patterns have clearly been broken. Even then, your relationship would need accountability over time in order to rebuild the trust that has been shattered."

Giving the Lord room to work means asking him to bring healing and restoration, not just waiting for time to pass. God can also use this time to teach you things and show how you may have contributed to an unhealthy pattern in your marriage.

5. HEALTHY SEPARATION IS DONE IN COMMUNITY RATHER THAN ISOLATION

One of the biggest differences between separations that lead to divorce and those that lead to restoration is the presence and health of the community surrounding the marriage. The community may be family, church, or good friends, and their support, prayer, and willingness to speak truth are essential for restoring the marriage.

Communities tend to support only one person in the marriage rather than supporting

How a Therputic Separation Could Save Your Marriage

the marriage itself. It's human nature to want to take sides with the one we know the best or think has been wronged. But the Christian community's job is not only to support the people in the marriage but also to support the marriage itself.

Good friends, mentors, and family members can be a bridge between the two people, working and praying for their reconciliation. Because they know the history of the relationship and have some part in each person's life, community members can speak hard truths when needed.

Following the route of a biblical separation will not save every broken marriage, but it certainly will save some. ●

Juli Slattery is a TCW regular contributor. A widely known clinical psychologist, author, speaker, and broadcast media professional, she co-founded [Authentic Intimacy](#) and is the co-author of her most recent book, *Surprised by the Healer*.



When Your Bible Study Becomes Group Therapy

Building strong relationships doesn't need to come at the expense of delving into Scripture. | **ERIN DAVIS**

Somewhere in that narrow window between dinner on the table and total, tired meltdown, my friends and I shuffle our kids downstairs with the babysitter, grab a cup of coffee, and circle up. Like a halftime huddle, this midweek ritual shores us up for the gridiron of life.

Then several months ago, something felt off about our treasured time together. Our Bible study began to feel more like group therapy. Looking back, I can see that, as the leader, I'd made a critical mistake: I'd taken the Bible out of the Bible study.

Mind if I invite you in to our circle so you can see how it happened?

MEET THE LADIES

Of the nine women in our study, five have full-time jobs outside the home. Three have full-time, work-from-home jobs. One homeschools her three children.

We are the proud mamas of 24 kids under age 11. Yes, 24. The football analogy I used earlier is legit. We can field two complete teams and supply a couple benchwarmers.

Our Bible knowledge varies wildly. Some of us can debate the finer points of propitiation. Some of us struggle to find Leviticus without using the table of contents. Some have read the Bible since childhood. Others purchased their first Bible in their thirties.

If you are a woman trying to know and follow Jesus while keeping a thousand plates

spinning, pull up a chair. You'll fit in just fine! But you should know, there's homework.

Did I lose you? I was afraid of that.

Because I wanted us to open our Bibles more than once a week, I chose a Bible study curriculum with required homework. That presented a problem, namely that no one would do it. As a former teacher, I know how to lay on the homework guilt, but these are my friends, and I know how hard we're all trying. The women in my Bible study are amazing wives and mamas, productive workers, and faithful volunteers. I don't want to add to their burden; I want to *ease* it.

So I lowered the bar. I tried teaching with the assumption no one would do their homework. But leading a discussion about a passage no one had read was gawky at best—lots of awkward silence and very little eye contact.

Dropping homework felt like an easy call at the time, but I overlooked this essential facet of teaching: Whoever is doing the work is doing the learning.

In addition to scrapping all homework, I also always picked topics I knew the women in my group loved to discuss, primarily marriage and motherhood. Except mostly we talked about how we aren't being good wives and mothers. We fessed up to our failures, cried a few tears, encouraged each other, prayed, and dismissed.

On some weeks we never even opened God's Word. We'd leave our "study" resolved to pray for our husbands more, yell at our kids less, oh and . . . read our Bibles at some point in the week. In this way, our group was not much different from a 12-step meeting or counseling session.

Let me be clear: We didn't go wrong by talking about our lives, encouraging each other, and crying into our decaf together. *That's good stuff*, but that's just the icing on the cake. The most important thing we can do together is feast on the Word of God. As the leader, I'd made the mistake of essentially omitting the Bible. I have a hunch it's a pattern not limited to my little group.

We cannot become better Christ-followers by being better wives and mothers. Instead, due to the transformative work of Christ in us, we *can* become better wives and mothers by becoming better Christ-followers.

As leaders of women, we need to stare this truth in the face: There's a difference between wanting to be better disciples and just wanting to be better women. Discovering that difference will transform how we study the Bible together.

FIND THE ME, WE, HE RHYTHM

I found that Jesus' [Sermon on the Mount](#) is a great resource not only for teachings about discipleship but also as a pattern for the way we each teach and learn from Scripture. I call it a Me, We, He rhythm.

Me. Jesus started his sermon with the [Beatitudes](#), a series of lessons about how we should think, feel, and live. There must be room in our Bible studies for self-reflection. As we lead women, let's give them freedom to talk about themselves.

We. After the Beatitudes, Jesus addressed what we all should be as Christ-followers, calling us “salt and light” ([Matthew 5:13-16](#)). There is some sense of personal responsibility to represent Christ well here, but the emphasis is on solidarity. We, the church, are the salt of the world and a city on a hill. Knowing we’re all in this together, how can *we* represent Christ well? What might change if we started asking that question each week at Bible study?

He. From salt and light, Jesus pivoted to deep spiritual truths about himself ([Matthew 5:17-20](#)). We need to know that the Bible is not primarily a book about us; it is primarily a book about Jesus. When we come to Bible study week after week hoping to learn a spiritual truth for how to be better women, we miss the fact that Jesus’ name is the one on the marquee. We should always drive toward discussion of Jesus himself.

In this single sermon, Jesus repeats the Me, We, He cycle twice more, landing the plane on “He” by explaining that he is the [solid rock](#) upon which we can build our lives.

TRANSFORM YOUR STUDY

I’ve learned three simple steps to keeping our studies Bible-focused. These ideas got my Bible study group back on track, and I hope they’ll work for you too.

1. Raise expectations. When Jesus taught, he tackled the law, the church, and the coming judgment. He invited his listeners to wrestle with big ideas.

Following his lead will look different from group to group and week to week. It may be doing homework that’s part of the curriculum. It may simply be asking women to read, pray through, or journal about the passage ahead of time.

Remember that assignments are always given with heaping portions of grace. Communicate both that women should be studying the Bible on their own because it is a treasure trove and that women are welcome even when their week goes sideways and their Bible remained unopened.

2. Go to the source. Instead of filtering the Bible through what someone else says, dig into the Word itself. Remind women often to bring their Bibles and help them learn to navigate them. Communicate, “We’re wrestling through this big, beautiful book together.”

Our group began picking a passage and reading it aloud three to four times and then discussing the Me, We, He questions: What does this tell us about us? What should we do? What does this tell us about God?

3. Embrace rhythm. Using the Me, We, He pattern, your group studies will have a rhythm of teaching and learning. Make the Bible the center of your time together but also leave margin to attend to the needs of group members. Ask the Lord to help you prioritize his Word and to help you minister to the women in your circle.

It’s a sad irony that women who over-focus on study miss the opportunity to pause and minister to a sister who needs compassion. Flip that coin over and we see a corresponding irony: women who offer compassion to a sister absent of God’s Word.

Call a few friends, brew a pot of coffee, and crack open the living and active Word of God. The Bible is a deep well. Women who drop a bucket there will pull up answers every time.



Erin Davis is a [blogger](#), speaker, and writer of several books, including her most recent, *Connected: Curing the Pandemic of Everyone Feeling Alone Together*. She chases chickens and children on her small farm in the Midwest.



Leading Those Who Are Different from You

From gender to race to politics to class, here's what it takes to lead across differences. | **CHI CHI OKWU**

’

ve spent most of my career being led by people who are different from me: people of the opposite gender, other races, different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. I learned early on how to succeed in work environments in which I was a minority. I did my best to act like the people in charge, trying to think like them and even talk like them. I was pretty successful at it, and that made the achiever in me very happy.

Yet when I found myself moving into leadership positions, I realized that my desire and need to conform left me unsure of my own voice and perspective. I realized that my previous work experiences had not prepared me to trust and value my ability to lead and create change. Conformity had been valued over diversity of opinion, and there was very little room for me to exercise my own voice.

Looking back, I wonder what might have been if I had realized the value of my unique perspective—a perspective shaped by my heritage, gender, and life experiences.

Today, I have the privilege of working with a multicultural congregation in downtown Chicago. I get to lead an amazing group of people that includes different races, ethnicities, ages, economic classes, and political views. Navigating through the many perspectives can be challenging, but I love it and wouldn't have it any other way. By serving among so many different people, I have learned more about myself, God, and how to lead and love better than I ever thought possible.

LEADING TOWARD INCLUSION

I often meet with other leaders who are interested in planting or leading diverse congregations, and they want to know what it takes to lead in a diverse context. My response? “That depends. Do you want to lead a church where everyone conforms? Or do you want to be a leader who creates a space for everyone to be heard and valued?”

The first is easy and comfortable; the second is challenging but transformative.

Leading toward inclusion is difficult, but I believe that brings out the best in everyone. I don’t know if anyone ever “arrives” when it comes to inclusive leadership. It is a lifelong journey, but we learn a lot of lessons along the way.

Here are some of the lessons I’ve learned (mostly the hard way) about leading toward inclusion.

Lesson 1: It’s Not About Me

Leading people who are different from one another means that I don’t always get to be right. Honestly, that’s a hard pill to swallow some days. Leading toward inclusion starts with me and my willingness to be open to different thinking and perspectives. I have to choose to invite people who are different from me into the decision-making process.

To do that, I must create a space where I provide more questions than answers. In these environments, I end up learning more about other people, and that often opens my mind to solutions I could have never come up with on my own. It’s a beautiful thing, but I first have to choose to invite them to the table.

Lesson 2: Always Ask “Who Is Missing?”

Once I make the invitation, I look around the table and ask myself, *Who is missing and why?* What am I intentionally or unintentionally doing to keep certain people out? If I don’t push myself, I will gravitate toward people just like me because it’s comfortable.

A few years ago, I noticed that all of the people on one of my volunteer leadership teams were very similar to me. Although they were diverse in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity, everyone had a similar level of education and socioeconomic status. I had to ask myself what I was doing that excluded people who were less educated or in a different economic class.

I apply this question to all the teams I lead, staff members I hire, and even my circle of friends. I have to continually work at creating a space where all are welcome. If everyone around the table is like me, it’s highly unlikely that we will make the best decision for the ministry or organization.

Lesson 3: People Need to Feel Safe

Just because a group is diverse doesn’t mean it’s *safe*. This is the harder thing to achieve. Do the people I lead feel safe enough to bring their unique voice and perspective to the table? As leaders, we have to set the stage for celebrating diverse perspectives. We have to be aware of the ways race, ethnicity, gender, and class affect the way we engage in the world. We need to create safe spaces for people to speak up—in their own time, in their own way, and at their own pace.

Some people have been told that their voice doesn’t matter, or that they are too loud, not eloquent enough, or too soft spoken. We get to create a space where they can heal and be reminded of the truth that their voice *does* matter. Normalizing diversity is an essential part

of leading toward inclusion. As believers, it's also important for us to normalize and celebrate diversity because that's the way God created the world.

Diversity is the natural state of the world. Reading [Genesis 1-2](#) you quickly realize how much God loves diversity. In the Garden of Eden, we see God created a wide variety of unique and different plants and animals, yet everything worked together in perfect harmony and unity. It wasn't until after the Fall that we saw division and discord in creation, and that was not God's original design for the world.

Jesus came to invite us back into relationship with God and all of humanity, to remind us that we were all created equal in the image of God. Jesus invited everyone into this relationship: the poor, the rich, men, women, educated, non-educated, Jews, and Gentiles. Jesus modeled radical love and inclusion. In his final prayer for all of the believers, Jesus said, "I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you" (John 17:21). Jesus prayed that we would be unified, just as the Trinity is the ultimate expression of unity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each uniquely different but exist in oneness.

Leading toward unity and inclusion doesn't mean that we all become the same. It means that we celebrate the diversity we see in each other and recognize that we are better together than we are apart. When we enter conversations with this perspective, we create spaces where others can feel safe.

Lesson 4: Everyone Has a Voice

At the table, everyone should understand that their voice is important and their ideas are valid. Leading across differences means that I get to use my power and influence to create safe spaces for people to show up, speak up, and be heard. It means that it's okay to challenge and disagree with the leader. It's my job to lead through the tension and toward a solution where we can walk away unified.

This sets the stage for healthy and meaningful dialogue, and we begin to see the value that everyone brings to the table. When we all bring our unique and God-given voices to the table, something beautiful happens. The solutions and ideas that come from that space are rarely attributed to the leader. The best decisions come from the collective voice. People walk away feeling heard and valued.

LEADING TOWARD UNITY

Leading toward inclusion is transformative because it requires us to work together toward unity. We begin to see our differences not as a barrier but as a strength, just as God intended in the Garden. We are then moved to lead with a radical love that recognizes the image of God in each individual and creates space for all at the table. ●

Chi Chi Okwu serves as the Associate Pastor at Willow Creek Community Church in downtown Chicago, overseeing all social justice outreach initiatives and providing directional leadership for the Community Care and Discipleship ministries. She is passionate about creating spaces for authentic community and mobilizing the church to engage in the fight against injustice.



Stop Carrying Mom Shame

God made you just right for your precious children.



Margot Starbuck, MDiv, is an award-winning writer and speaker. Connect with Margot on **Facebook**, **Twitter**, or at **MargotStarbuck.com**.

Slapping a Krispy Kreme jelly donut and stick of beef jerky on my child's plate is pretty much the same breakfast as the freshly baked zucchini-kale muffin, juicy cantaloupe, and nonfat Tofurkey bacon that these overachieving moms are serving their kids. Or that's what I told myself when I was gripped by "mom shame." Now that my kids are in their mid-teens and making their own breakfasts, I don't spend quite as much time wallowing in that pit o' shame. But I remember what it was like in there. If you're a mom, there's always something you can feel bad about.

A CACOPHONY OF GUILT

When my kids went to a groovy public charter school during their elementary years, I felt bad around "regular" public school moms because my kids had stumbled into this great, almost elite, free opportunity. And I felt bad around private school moms because, while the posters in their kids' classrooms said "Obey authority," the posters at my kids' school said "Question authority."

I felt bad around privileged moms who shopped for overpriced groceries at Whole Foods because my kids didn't light up with joy when they saw celery on the counter as a snack. (They didn't see that, but if they had, I promise you they would not have enjoyed it.) I felt bad around lower-income moms because my kids actually did have access to all the fruits and vegetables I could force them to eat.

As a married work-at-home mom, I felt bad around single moms whose work schedules prohibited them from dragging their kids to endless sports practices and games. And I felt bad around moms who drove all over the state transporting their little athletes to tournaments because I wasn't willing to pay the big bucks and drive the long miles for my kids to have those fancy opportunities.

And though school, food, and sports accounted for a good deal of my mom humiliation, there was an endless array of other opportunities to wallow in shame: fashion, faith, domesticity, fitness, you name it.

So basically, I *always* felt bad.

MY LIGHT-BULB MOMENT

The light bulb turned on when I was busy feeling shame because another mom in my small group had a spotless home. The illusion of both her perfection and my inadequacy was shattered when Clean Mom admitted that she envied the colorful parade of creations bursting forth from my home: cards, videos, books, beads, magnets. She felt shame, she admitted, when she looked at my messy, creative life.

Uh, come again?

In that honest moment, something clicked for me.

I realized I'd believed that the clean-house moms were genuinely a better breed of human being. I suspected that the substance of which they were made was existentially better stuff than that from which I was formed. My eyes opened at last, and I saw that we weren't so different at all. When Clean Mom explained that keeping her home in order was how she kept her anxiety at bay, I realized that being in my happy place—designing, editing, writing, stringing, and creating—did exactly the same thing for me.

If that was my light-bulb moment, there have been plenty of days since then when I've had to check the breaker box to ensure the current was still flowing. When I'm tempted to feel shame because I'm not the mom who lets her children watch full-length feature films only in daily 15-minute intervals, or the one whose kid raised enough money to build a Haitian orphanage at the age of eight, I'm gently reminded that I'm the mom God chose for my kiddos.

And I'm *enough*.

Thankfully, that assurance never depends on comparison. My kids' awesome paintings, clay creations, and videos are never measured against another family's domesticity, industry, or service. I'm enough because I've been nourished by God's good provision and can share that with my kids.

SHUTTING OUT THE VOICE OF SHAME

So today, when I hear the evil hiss of the Enemy insisting that I'm not a good-enough mom, I'll pause for a moment to notice it. And I'll realize that it sounds nothing like God's voice. The shaming voice is one that steals, kills, and destroys, but the voice that is true speaks words of life and provision ([John 10:10](#)).

It's not that God's crowning me "Mom of the Year." That's not happening. Yet where there are actual deficits—an area in which my children truly don't have enough (physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, or spiritually)—God points me to the ways I can provide enough as I receive my own "enough" from God.

Whenever I pause to let God speak the true word, I hear God's quiet whisper assuring me that I'm a "good enough" mom . . . despite the Krispy Kremes. ●



● Excerpt

Beth Moore on Holy Affection

Jesus wants your emotion, not just your devotion. | **BETH MOORE**

Love carries a feeling. Not every second of every minute, of course, but it has frequent enough feeling involved in it to characterize the whole attachment. Is that fair enough? We know this instinctively with every other relationship in the human experience. Set aside all the times we toss around the word *love* to convey how we feel about a movie or a meal and let's limit it to the real thing.

If I ask you which of your friends you really like and which of your friends you truly love, you'd answer the latter with the names of those who draw the deepest affections from you. If you're a mom and I ask you to describe your love for your children, your response would be incomplete without references to the feelings and emotions they stir up in you. Let's switch sides at the table and have you ask me a question.

How about this one: "Beth, do you love your husband?"

You'd want to punch me if I launched headlong into, "Of course I do! I cook for him every single day, I iron his shirts, gas up his car, drive right behind him in mine, and I do every single thing he tells me to do."

Wouldn't you want to say, "I didn't ask you if you work hard for your husband. I asked you if you loved him"?

We don't give a second thought to characterizing love primarily by feelings in our human relationships but, somehow, when it comes to Jesus, the definition shifts. The difference is understandable, of course. He is not visible. It's easy to subconsciously conclude that, since Jesus is unseeable, love for Jesus is probably unfeeling. With this view, love for Jesus is most

about doing and least about feeling. Not only is this view misleading, it's woefully dissatisfying. In fact, Christ's point with Simon Peter in their dialogue in [John 21](#) was that *the doing* he was assigning him ("feed my sheep") could only be sustained and satisfied for the long haul through *the loving*.

We're not talking about hyper-emotion and learning to levitate ourselves into spiritual hysteria with Jesus. That would no more be the goal in our relationship with him than it would be the goal in a marriage. Keith Moore put a ring on my finger 36 solid years ago. My affection for him often enough spikes feverishly, especially on sentimental occasions, or when I get home after several days away, or in a happy resolution after a big fat fight. Sometimes it spikes for no reason at all and takes me by surprise. But even in seasons between the fever-pitch, my relationship with Keith is overwhelmingly defined by a feeling. I *feel* a way about him that I do not *feel* about another person on the planet. My love for him, as flawed as I am, is too big to hide in my heart. It surfaces in skin and shows up in actions. Because I love him, I like to do things for him, but, if he asked me if I loved him, his heart would sink if I responded, "I cooked you dinner last night, didn't I?" Try to picture Christ asking Peter if he loved him and Peter saying, "I swam to you, didn't I?"

The love Jesus longs for is not just devotion. It's also emotion.

It's not just volition. It is also affection.

It is not just discipline. It is also passion.

It's not just routine. It is also romance.

And not just for Christ's sake but also for ours. Love is the catalyst. The holy cause and effect.

The person you are when you love Jesus with everything in you—with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength—is the real you. The brilliant you. The *bring-it* you. The breathtaking you. The *born-for-this* you. The person you were born to be crawls out of the shell of a heart cracked wide-open to the audacious love of Christ. When your heart, your soul, your mind, and might are engaged in a wholly invasive holy affection, march yourself into the nearest bathroom and look in the mirror over the sink.

That's you.

And what *that* woman in *that* mirror in *that* condition of teeming affection most wants to do is most likely *that* woman's calling or the carrier of *that* direction. Does *that* woman in *that* mirror want to help the homeless, teach kindergartners, visit shut-ins, teach Bible classes, reach the unreached, write a book, work on an album, foster children, go to seminary, work with preteen girls, tutor underprivileged kids, work in law enforcement, fight human trafficking, finish creating that cookbook, pursue an acting career, become a college professor, manage money for nonprofits, run a corporation, do medical missions, volunteer at a women's shelter, or be a network news anchor?

When the blood in your veins runs hot with holy affection for the living Christ, what do you want to do most? Paul put it [this way](#): *Christ's love compels us*. When Christ's love invades every cell in your body, what are you compelled to do? The follow-up question is critical. The answer to it is where the rubber meets the road, where dreams become realities and destinies

that defy gravity finally get fulfilled. This is it: What would it take to do it? You answer those two questions—*What are you most compelled by the love of Christ to do?* and *What would it take to do it?*—then identify one first step toward that direction, and, child, you will find the next place to plant your food on your divinely planned path.

Don't tell me you're too young. Don't tell me you're too old. Don't tell me you're too scared. Don't tell me you're too busy. Get to it. Nobody but you can do it. ●

Beth Moore is a writer and teacher of best-selling books and Bible studies whose public speaking engagements carry her all over the United States. A dedicated wife and mother of two adult daughters, Moore is president and founder of [Living Proof Ministries](#). This article was excerpted from *Audacious* by Beth Moore. Copyright © 2015 by B&H Publishing Group. Used with permission.

TCW

TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN

The Team Behind TCW



Editor: Kelli B. Trujillo

Art Director: Jillian Hathaway

Administrative Editor: Natalie Lederhouse

Editorial Coordinator: Joy Beth Smith

Marketing Coordinator: Kristen Cloyd

Production: Diana Prange

TCW Advisory Board: Helen Lee, Bianca Juarez Olthoff, Julie Pierce, Joannah Saxton, Sherry Surratt, Joni Eareckson Tada

TCW Regular Contributors: Brittany Bergman, Austin Channing Brown, Helen Coronato, Maria Cowell, Corrie Cutrer, Ashley Grace Emmert, Sissy Goff, Renee James, Joy-Elizabeth Lawrence, Trillia Newbell, Diane Paddison, Patricia Raybon, Vaneetha Rendall, Juli Slattery, Margot Starbuck, Ann Swindell, Nicole Unice

Advertising in *Today's Christian Woman* does not necessarily imply editorial endorsement.

Unless otherwise specified, all images are from Shutterstock.com

Unless otherwise specified, Scripture references are from the Holy Bible New Living Translation®. NLT®. Copyright 1996, 2004, 2007, by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

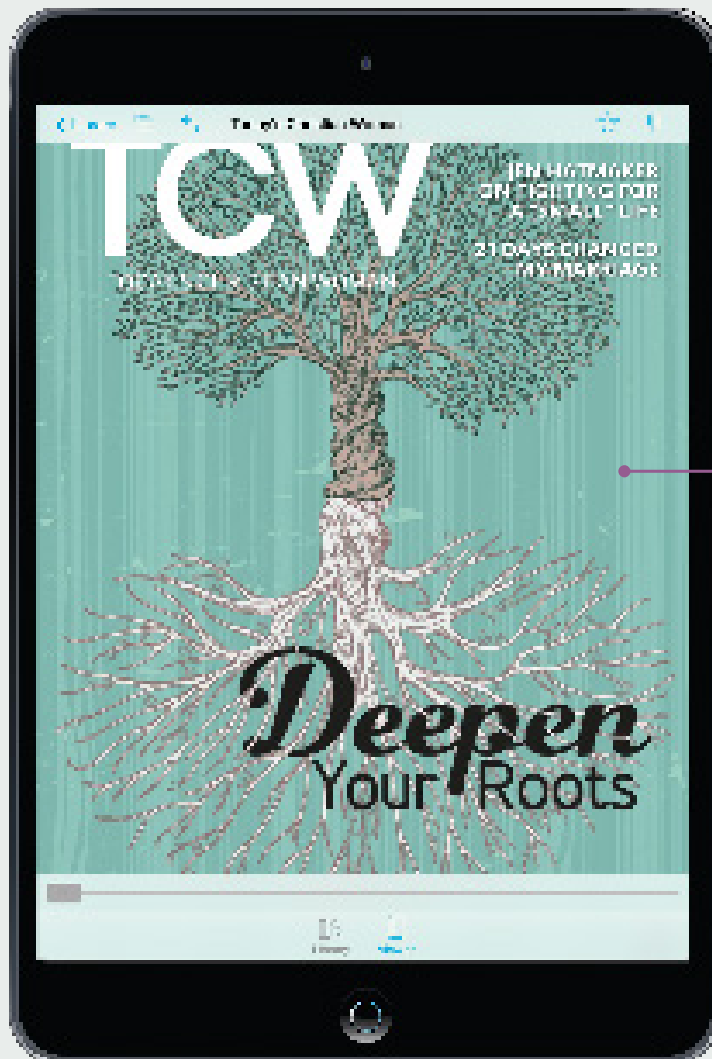
Editorial and advertising offices: 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188, (630) 260-6200. Website: www.TodaysChristianWoman.com. Email: tcw@christianitytoday.com. We are not able to accept unsolicited manuscripts. Please follow our writers' guidelines at our website address.

We occasionally share subscriber information with select organizations. If you wish to have your name removed from direct mail, email, or telephone promotional lists, call 1-800-999-1704 or send an email to etwcustserv@cdsfulfillment.com.

©2015 Christianity Today. All rights reserved.

We hope you enjoyed this issue,
but don't stop now ...

Get more from TCW at TodaysChristianWoman.com



TAP HERE
TO ENTER

Read exclusive web-only content on these topics and more!

FAITH + HEALTH

PARENTING

SINGLES + COMMUNITY

CHURCH + MINISTRY

MARRIAGE + SEX

CAREER + CALLING