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Male and Female Differences: Part 2 Helper Made in God's Image - Debunking Woman's Inferiority

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This series is written from a Biblical Clinical neuro-counseling perspective. Instead of looking to secular psychological origins to answer questions that concern displaced desires or disorganized thinking, it is wise to look to Scripture for those answers. The goal of this essay series is to take a better look at what Genesis says regarding God's purpose for the first man and woman prior to the Fall, as well as the consequential generational implications that the Fall has on contemporary relationships between men, women, and their children. Part 1 addressed the porn and objectification problem regarding how men view women. Part 2 will now address the under-realized purpose of woman that often places her in an inferior position to man by minimizing her contribution to God's created order.

The Created Female Brain

*But for Adam there was not found an **ezer kenegedo** for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,
 "This at last is bone of my bones
 and flesh of my flesh;
 she shall be called Woman,
 because she was taken out of Man."*

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Gen 1:26-28)

God created woman in His image, in His image He created her (Gen 1:27).

In Genesis 2:18 and then again 2:20, God described His purpose in creating woman – to be *ezer kenegedo* to man. There should be no controversy over what God has said about His purpose for woman. Rather, the controversy arises due interpretation theories that have developed regarding

His purpose for woman. These are followed by endless debates by those who either idolize the man or the woman's position and value in the world, without considering other views.

John Calvin writes “*God created them ‘male and female’. He commends to us that conjugal bond by which the society of mankind is cherished. For this form of speaking, ‘God created man, male and female He created them,’ is of the same force as if he had said, that the man himself was incomplete. Under these circumstances, the woman was added to him as a companion that they both might be one, as he more clearly expresses it in Genesis 2’*”

The Problem:

Bible translation preference often influences and helps to form ideas about what is believed concerning the type of helper God created for man. When women believe that God made men visual, the natural transition to defining her helping role will be to make sure she keeps herself ‘visually stimulating’ for her husband. This also places a burden on other women in the church to “not be stumbling blocks” to other women’s husbands or their single brothers in Christ. Part 1 of this blog series addressed this issue more fully.

Furthermore, Christian women have been stuck on the word “help meet”, based on a book written by Debi Pearl who marketed her version of helper as prescriptive, using Bible verses to justify her version.¹ It’s a book surrounded by much controversy and many women who are unfamiliar with what it looks like to be a woman who honors God in her marriage will tend to gravitate to any female Christian author that, at first, seems right (Prov 18:17).

The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him (Prov 18:17).

The word *help meet* originated from the 1611 King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, which lacked a fuller, robust rendering of the original phrase **כָּנָגֶד** (ezer kenegedo).

“*Helpmeet is ghost word where it was initially a two-word noun adjective phrase that was meant to translate Latin ‘adjutorium simile sibi’, as an help meet for him, literally “a helper like himself.”*²

Sometime during the 1670’s the word became the hyphenated, help-meet, and mistakenly began to be used as a modified noun³

Many readers of the King James translation tend to be firm believers that it’s the only correct translation and all others fail to interpret the “true” meaning of Bible words and ideas. This had

¹ Pearl, D. (2014). *Created to be his help meet: Discover how God can make your marriage glorious*. No Greater Joy Ministries.

² *Helpmeet (n.)*. (n.d) Etymology. from <https://www.etymonline.com/word/helpmeet>

³ Ibid.

led to a traditional rendering of the words *help meet* that impose the purpose of women as that of subservient assistant to the man, often erroneously using New Testament Scripture to validate that belief. However, to consider the pre-Fall understanding of God's purpose for woman, it is necessary to take a closer look at the Hebrew interpretation of the words Moses used to describe the kind of helper that God said was required for man in Genesis 2.⁴

Ezer kenegedo is a Hebrew phrase and various Bible translations interpret these words differently.

ESV - helper fit for him

NASB - helper suitable for him

HCSB - helper as his complement

AMP - helper [one who balances him—a counterpart who is] suitable *and* complementary for him.”

Complete Jewish Bible - companion suitable for helping him

Christian Standard Bible - helper corresponding to him

With so many variations that describe the type of help God said man needed, it's important to dig a bit further into this phrase, not to be nit-picky, but to reveal that how we interpret these words can either distort or enhance how women are viewed in the church and home.

The word ‘ezer’, according to a Hebrew Lexicon, means *a person who contributes to the fulfillment of a need or furtherance of an effort or purpose*.⁵ When we look at the context that Scripture typically uses for this word, it refers to either help that God provides (1 Chron 12:18; Psalms 30:10; 54:4; 121:1), which can indicate that the one needing help is inferior to the one providing the help. Another way *ezer* (*help*) is used is to describe the kind of help that comes from a military ally (Jer 47:4; Nahum 3:9). Feminists tend to lean towards believing they are superior to men because they believe men need a type of help that is stronger than their own, one that only women can provide, which they believe is what God truly meant for man. However, these explanations miss what the whole phrase is inferring.

When the Hebrew word קְנֵגָדוֹ (*kenegedo*) is added, it modifies the word ‘help’, giving a better rendering of the kind of help God was providing in the woman. *Kenegdo* means ‘*to correspond to, a counterpart to, or equal to matching*’. Many commentators use the word ‘suitable’ but this fails to do the word justice. Suitable can suggest a kind of help that is a “good enough” or an “acceptable” helper for man, but God would not call the making of woman in relation to and from man ‘good’ if part of the making of mankind were simply suitable. God creating woman out of man and for man was the equivalent of making the sun, moon, and stars, meaning it was ‘very good’ (Gen 1:31) or perfectly complementary. The only way to understand that God created woman for man as ‘very good’ is not to minimize woman’s purpose, but to expound on it, not using feminist ideology, but Biblical simplicity.

⁴ Calvin, J., & King, J. (2010). *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (Vol. 1, p. 97). Logos Bible Software.

⁵ Rick Brannan, ed. (2020) Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press).



It is important to note that the Hebrew base of the word of kenegedo is ‘neged’, which comes from a verbal root ‘*in sight of*’ or ‘*to be face to face*’, as in to be opposite each other, but facing each other. Psalm 119:168 says “I keep your precepts and testimonies, for all my ways (thoughts and behavior) are before (neged) you LORD.” The use of neged in this passage denotes an awareness to be transparent because there is a recognition of complete intimacy in being seen and heard by God. An appropriate translation of ‘to make to be face to face’ takes into consideration the visual and auditory senses that God created for the purpose of communicating with the other to be fully seen and fully heard, not just seen.

According to Robert Alter, a professor and scholar of Hebrew and comparative literature says this about the word ‘helpmeet’,

*“The Hebrew ‘ezer kenegdo is notoriously difficult to translate. The second term means “alongside him,” “opposite him,” “a counterpart to him.” “Help” is too weak because it suggests a mere auxiliary function, whereas ‘ezer elsewhere connotes active intervention on behalf of someone, especially in military contexts, as often in Psalms”*⁶

God said man needed a helper that corresponds to him, that is a counterpart to him, yet is equal in matching and one that complements him as he interacts with her face to face. God made woman to be perfectly compatible to the man He created, where they are equal in purpose and value to God but different in expressed ability to live out their God-created purpose. They are equal in value in nature but different in the attributes that each of their respective natures bring to the creation order. They are not the same in how they interact in creation, but together they are able to complement each other, in that God was able to say about His created living beings “this is very good.” It was very good because God had created the perfect pair that had inherently different attributes needed to influence future generations (Genesis 2:4) to see the value and importance of obeying their Creator by mirroring to each other what worship looked like.

In other words, God made a perfectly complementary helper, who was made in His image (Gen 1:27) whose purpose was twofold. However, this purpose applied to both man and woman

- to fulfill God’s purposes in having dominion of and subduing God’s creation (Gen 1:26, 28),
- to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth (Gen 1:28)

Many Bible scholars and theologians often interpret Gen 1:26 and 28 as a directive that God gave to man alone. Scripture says

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness and let THEM have dominion over the fish, the birds, the livestock and over all the earth and every creeping thing on the earth” and then

⁶ Alter, R. (2004). *The five books of Moses*. W.W. Norton & Company.

again in verse 28, we read that God blessed THEM, the first couple, and then said to THEM fill the earth and subdue it.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word subdue means to bring under control. Man could not do this alone. He needed a complementary counterpart to do this with him. The subduing of the earth and the filling of the earth needed both man's being and the woman's being. Both genders were instrumentally crucial in carrying out this God-given task. Twice in Genesis 1 we see that both man and woman are to have dominion over the lower creatures and subdue the earth.

This directive has often been called the 'cultural mandate'. This reflects the idea that being fruitful, multiplying and filling are not merely commands relating to human reproduction. Rather, they apply to all of life, including the socio-economic and spiritual realms, as well as to giving birth. The concepts of 'subduing' and 'ruling' support the interpretation of this verse as a world-and-life directive: man (as in mankind) is to be overseer of the earthly kingdom.⁷

Man alone could not subdue and fill the earth by himself. God created man to need a perfectly complementary helper to accomplish this God-given duty.

The divine paradox is that God created man and woman to be individual human beings who were dependent on Him and each other socially, emotionally, and physiologically, embedding in each of their sense perceptions, nervous systems and brains the need to be influenced and molded by both their Creator and each other for the purpose of filling the earth with their offspring to the glory of the One who made them.

Many male and female commentators, scholars, theologians, and evangelical feminists tend to get caught up in the headship debate. They will use the truth of Genesis 2:21-23, where Moses describes God making women from man, along with 1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-9, as well as Ephesians 5:23, to either affirm or denounce headship or the complementarity aspect of man and woman in marriage. These arguments are typically centered around the topic of women in ministry or women as pastors.

This essay is not that.

For marriage health purposes, it is unhelpful speculation to attempt to determine the degree of headship in marriage or where headship should show up as distinct marriage prescriptives. To default to the 'male superiority' or 'male supremacy' of pre-Fall man to justify a husband's disregard for his wife in the present is unsound theology. New covenant realities allow us to see equal value of men and women, both made in God's image. Without a new covenant Christ lens by which to understand headship, the concept of headship in the past and can in the present be tyrannical, dictatorial, misogynistic, lacking patience, grace, and mercy towards women or wives. Headship can also cause a husband to become abusive, especially if he lacks the ability to regulate his own anger, frustration, stress, or anxiety. It is enough to say women ought to submit to their husbands and husband's ought to love their wives with sacrificial love according to all of

⁷ Currid, J. D. (n.d.). *A Study Commentary on Genesis: Genesis 1:1–25:18* (Vol. 1, pp. 87–88). Evangelical Press.



Ephesians 5, not just verses 22-25, while letting each marriage determine how and when these directives are expressed in the context of each respective marriage. When these directives become difficult, we have to be able to parse out whether the difficulty arises due to

- an attempt to live out unhelpful caricatures of masculinity or femininity that Christians often use as prescriptives
OR
- typical Genesis 3:16 marital conflict as a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience that is revealed in marriage

A lack of humility or lack of selflessness is revealed in husbands who fail to love their wives in a way that honors God and/or wives who fail at submission, which also fails to honor God.

God's directive to husbands to love their wives consistently and unconditionally as Christ loves the church cannot be done without supernatural power. Likewise, wives are not able to submit to their husbands who love them consistently and unconditionally without supernatural power. Unfortunately, men who elevate headship in the church often encourage wives to submit to abusive husbands who do not reflect Christ. Christians who elevate feminist ideology can also encourage wives to reject submission whenever their feelings are not placated or whenever they feel generally dissatisfied in their responsibilities in being a wife or mother.

Unfortunately, these areas of conflict not only affect the wife and husband. Conflict in marriage also negatively and severely impacts the children. God's mandate to fill the earth with generations that worship their Creator and subdue God's creation by ordering and nurturing it became significantly more difficult after the Fall.

Woman's Purpose and the Consequences of Disobedience

We know from part 1 of this blog series that God made man to interact with the earth through exploration and have dominion over the fish, sea, birds, and livestock in a particularly male way (Gen 1:26), which reflected how his brain received sensory information. It was for the purpose of naming and then overseeing God's creation that reflected God's image and glory, which is evident in God putting Adam to work in the garden soon after being made (Genesis 2:15).

Likewise, God made the woman from man but with her own female brain that reflected how she received sensory information in a particularly female way for the purpose of caring for and nurturing God's creation that was also to reflect God's image and glory.

- God made man's brain for the purpose of using his mind to work to create order and oversee God's creation
- God made woman's brain for the purpose of using her mind to nurture the created order of God.



We see this fleshed out when God dishes out the consequences for disobedience to man and woman after the Fall. Each of their respective judgments reflect their respective purpose.⁸

To the woman He said,

“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.”

The man’s judgment is primarily focused around his purpose to work. Part of that work included a negation where God set a boundary that man was not to cross. Adam may not have initiated the crossing of that boundary but he didn’t stop Eve from crossing it either. The man was culpable for joining the woman in disobedience so his judgment reflected the work he was created for.

The woman is culpable for being deceived but God does not curse her or the man. Only the serpent and the ground are cursed (Genesis 3:14,17).⁹ The serpent is cursed for deception and ultimately murder. The man and woman were given severe discipline and judgment that impacted their nature, their purpose, and their relationship to God and each other.

- Where once their nature was reconciled to God and to each other, their disobedience caused an irreconcilable sin nature separating them from God and each other, which only the Father is able to repair.
- Where once they knew their purpose, to fill the earth and subdue it to the glory of God, their disobedience caused their purpose to be distorted, unclear, surrounded by strife and difficulty, which only Christ’s work on the cross can reorient.
- Where previously they interacted with God without shame and fear, their disobedience caused their relationship with God to include shame and fear, which only the Holy Spirit’s counsel can erase.

Disobedience negatively impacted their overall image of God qualities, which included subduing God’s creation and filling it with generations who were meant to worship the Creator.

Many commentators have erroneously assumed “*I will multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children*” is exclusively referring to the short period of conception, gestation and birth, using the rationale that bringing children into the world was a dangerous business because of the lack of maternity wards. Interestingly, Christian women have accepted this belief so there is now a tendency to prove one’s maternal worth by skirting the hospital all together and having the baby at home because “women are saved through childbirth” (1 Timothy 2:15).

If the pain God was referring to was specifically directed at the birthing process, does having sanitary hospitals that have specialized care for birthing mothers or dulas who offer private care at home negate the first woman’s consequence?

John Currid, a professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary writes:

⁸ Wenham, G. J. (1987). *Genesis 1–15* (Vol. 1, p. 81). Word, Incorporated.

⁹ Currid, J. D. (n.d.). *A Study Commentary on Genesis: Genesis 1:1–25:18* (Vol. 1, p. 132). Evangelical Press



“....it possibly refers to more than that short period (childbirth). The Hebrew term for ‘**pain**’ can also have an emotional thrust, signifying ‘grief’ or ‘vexation’. Thus it may represent the pain associated with the concept of a child born in rebellion against God, born in sin, and with the deterioration of the physical body”¹⁰

In other words, the woman will feel the weight and pain of nurturing those born in bodies of death. The act of nurturing involves attaching and attuning, not just to her husband, as some theologians and scholars frequently assert. Nurturing involves attaching and attuning to her children by providing safety and security to those she gives birth to by using her emotional intelligence for the purpose of giving responsive and consistent encouragement, feedback, guidance, and wisdom. However, the pain of the futility of nurturing those who will eventually die is part and parcel of the consequences of the Fall. In spite of God’s judgment on the first woman, who now represents all women after the Fall, we know from 3:15 that she plays a major role in obeying God through creating future generations who will ultimately bring forth Christ who will crush her deceiver’s head (Genesis 2:15)

Scripture is clear that God gives the woman two consequences for her disobedience and her penalty impacts her two primary purposes given to her by God: pain in bringing forth children and conflict in her relationship with her husband.

Unfortunately, in an attempt to interpret God’s judgment on the woman, the traditional theological focus tends to be on the words “desire” and “rule” as it pertains to headship but only by considering the second part of Genesis 3:16. Semantic and interpretation gymnastics abound but no commentator or scholar can say definitively that they know precisely how desire and rule are played out in real time. It is enough to say there will be conflict in the husband/wife relationship.

What is often missed is how children, or rather generations, suffer when there is conflict in the marriage relationship. This marital conflict can lead to fractured families and sometimes divorce or single parent realities. This is not to say women are solely responsible for marital conflict because God does include the husband in the woman’s consequence. To be clear, husband and wife are both responsible for marital conflict, but it is the woman that feels the weight of that conflict more directly in her nature as it pertains to her nurturing. Studies have shown that high maternal stress impacts the way a mother attaches and attunes to her children.¹¹ Stress in marital (relationship) conflict leads to maternal deprivation and increases the likelihood of depression, lack of attachment, chronically physically or emotionally absent mothers, which all negatively impact the children’s well-being and emotional resiliency.¹²

¹⁰ Currid, J. D. (n.d.). *A Study Commentary on Genesis: Genesis 1:1–25:18* (Vol. 1, p. 132). Evangelical Press.

¹¹ Nakazawa, D. J. (2016). *Childhood disrupted: How your biography becomes your biology, and how you can heal*. Atria Paperback.

¹² Shapiro, J. R., & Applegate, J. S. (2018). *Neurobiology for clinical social work: Theory and practice*. Norton & Company.

Conflict between the father and the mother in marriage, as well as outside of marriage, can cause interpersonal trauma, which is a result of men and women failing to live out their God created purpose. It includes, but is definitely not limited to, childhood physical and sexual abuse, neglect and witnessing interparental violence.^{13 14} Interpersonal trauma comes in two forms: acts of commission and acts of omission¹⁵, both of which significantly compromise a child's development.

Acts of commission include the above-mentioned behavior, but it can also include abuse from parents where children are repeatedly experiencing verbal humiliation, blame, criticism, rejection, threats, and insults from their parents, as well as living in an unstructured and chaotic home atmosphere. Child abuse in the form of chronic corporal punishment as a form of discipline is also considered an act of commission, though many professing Christians use the Bible to excuse this form of abuse, believing that using a harsh rod of discipline will beat the sin out of their children. It won't.

Acts of omission of interpersonal trauma refer to the incapacity or refusal of parents to adopt interpersonal behavior that is essential to the development of a child.¹⁶ This includes a child not experiencing sustained and consistent responsiveness, along with a lack of parental emotional and physical availability to the child. A child deprived of care, support, emotional and physiological stimulation conducive for feeling safe, secure, seen, heard, and understood results in a child or children expressing relational consequences¹⁷ and severe or complex personality deficits.¹⁸

However, interpersonal childhood trauma does not only occur in families that are outwardly fractured. Parents can become so consumed and overly preoccupied with their own desires, interests and wants in marriage, career and ministry, they will fail to meet the emotional and

¹³ De Young, A.C., Kenardy, J.A. & Cobham, V.E. (2011) Trauma in Early Childhood: A Neglected Population. *Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev* 14, 231

¹⁴ Dugal, C., Bigras, N., Godbout, N., & Bélanger, C. (2016). Childhood interpersonal trauma and its repercussions in adulthood: An analysis of psychological and interpersonal sequelae. *A Multidimensional Approach to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - from Theory to Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.5772/64476>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Bistricky, S. L., Gallagher, M. W., Roberts, C. M., Ferris, L., Gonzalez, A. J., & Wetterneck, C. T. (2017). Frequency of interpersonal trauma types, avoidant attachment, self-compassion, and interpersonal competence: A model of persisting posttraumatic symptoms. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 26(6), 608–625. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2017.1322657>

¹⁸ Mauritz, M. W., Goossens, P. J., Draijer, N., & van Achterberg, T. (2013). Prevalence of interpersonal trauma exposure and trauma-related disorders in severe mental illness. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 4(1), 19985.

psychological needs of their children.¹⁹ Providing a roof over their children's head, buying their children name brand clothes and the latest technology in the form of gadgets and gizmos or attempting to buy their children's affection with trips and luxuries can still fail to provide the emotional resiliency and self-regulation needed for adequate child development. For the record, children who experience interpersonal trauma can grow up into high functioning adults who still lack emotional resiliency and the ability to regulate strong emotions or stress.²⁰

The results of ongoing interpersonal trauma in the form of parental acts of commission or omission often leads to cumulative trauma that shows up later in life when children grow into adults who suffer from depression, anxiety, suicide ideation, substance abuse, eating disorders, health problems, attention and attachment discrepancies or any number of personality and cognitive deficits that effect their own interpersonal relationships.²¹

Furthermore, several studies have revealed that maternal stress or depression and/or lack of maternal attachment to her children leave major deficits in an infant and child's brain development.²² Studies have shown that consistent maternal attention and nurturing give children the emotional and physiological resilience they need to thrive. This leads to children learning faster, maintaining memories longer, and growing into adults who are less reactive to stress and have a higher ability to regulate their emotions in healthy, positive ways.²³

God's purpose for women is not merely to be a physical or sexual companion to man, as many theologians and Bible scholars claim. Since both the man and woman were given the purpose to subdue and fill the earth with generations, man needed a complementary helper to fulfill this duty, not an inferior 'help meet'. The woman's contribution includes caring for and nurturing the blessing of her generations to the glory and honor of God as she exhibits her image of God characteristics. Due to the consequences of the Fall, mankind has been alienated from God (Ephesians 4:18) and creation has suffered and continues to suffer because of that alienation. Alienation results in conflict between the man and the woman, specifically as it pertains to creating generations.

Man and woman's only hope is reconciliation to God primarily (Romans 5:10), which produces reconciliation between the husband and wife (2 Cor 5:18). God the Father initiates reconciliation (John 6:44), who alone gives the man and woman a new heart and new nature, provoking them

¹⁹ Nakazawa, D. J. (2016). *Childhood disrupted: How your biography becomes your biology, and how you can heal*. Atria Paperback.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Shapiro, J. R., & Applegate, J. S. (2018). *Neurobiology for clinical social work: Theory and practice*. Norton & Company.

²³ Nakazawa, D. J. (2016). *Childhood disrupted: How your biography becomes your biology, and how you can heal*. Atria Paperback.

to repent to God and to each other. It is through Christ's obedience and righteousness that God gives reconciliation. It is Christ who paid the penalty of the first man's sin (Romans 5:12), which the generations have inherited.

Through the Spirit, husbands and wives can both become aware of how they both contribute to the Genesis 3:16 conflict (Romans 8:8) and how they both fail at the marriage directives given in Ephesians 5. This can lead to both of them repenting for their part of the conflict (John 16:8) and then seek to depend on Christ through the Spirit in order to positively influence and model to their children to look to and depend on Christ for their own fallen nature (Romans 6:4).

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