

Transcript for the podcast “Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women.”

Hosts: Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

Episode 45— Guest: Ruth Chou Simons

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Elyse Fitzpatrick 00:06

Welcome to Worthy, a Christian podcast that celebrates the value of women. Each week, we'll bring you conversations with women and men on the value of women in the church, home and society. We won't always agree on everything. But we do agree that God is glorious, the Bible is true, women are valuable. and respectful conversation on this topic is essential in our day. Hey there, and welcome to another episode of the Worthy podcast. And, of course, you know, it's our hope in this podcast to talk to women and men about the value of women and to do that in a way that is both respectful and honoring. So we're happy to have you with us here today. I am Elyse Fitzpatrick, of course, and I'm joined by my co-author, co-host and....friend. I was trying to think of another co but I think we've used them all.

Eric Schumacher 01:52

Yeah, codependent?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 01:54

Codependent. Yes. My codependent.

Eric Schumacher 01:58

After two years of working together, that might be true.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 02:00

Yeah, that's true. Eric Schumacher. And so we're happy to have you here with us today. We are here talking with a friend of mine, actually a woman that I first met, although she was already a friend of my daughter's, a woman that I first met when my daughter and I were speaking in New Mexico. And she brought me some pretties. And so once I tell you who she is, then you'll know how it is that she brought me such pretty things. And her name is Ruth Chou Simons. So happy to have you today, Ruth.

Ruth Chou Simons 02:37

Thanks so much for having me. It's so great to talk to both of you.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 02:40

Sure. And Ruth is a best-selling author, entrepreneur, artist and speaker, and she shares her journey of God's grace intersecting daily life with work and paintbrush. And boy if you don't know her work, particularly in watercolor--is that your primary medium?

Ruth Chou Simons 03:03

Currently, yes.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 03:04

Yeah, with watercolor. She has an online shop at gracelaced.com. Stop right now, whatever you're doing, except if you're driving, keep driving.

Eric Schumacher 03:08

Or piloting a plane.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 03:17

Or piloting a plane. Yeah. And write down gracelaced.com. You really, really, really want to see what she does. And she has an Instagram community of more than 100,000 people.

Eric Schumacher 03:32

That's more than both of us combined, Elyse.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 03:34

Yes, it is. But then she has beautiful things--

Eric Schumacher 03:37

And multiplied by 10.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 03:38

Yes, she has beautiful things that she puts there and I can't ever figure out any beautiful thing to put there. So nobody wants to look at me.

Eric Schumacher 03:49

Maybe you and I could start painting.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 03:52

Like I said, Ruth and her husband Troy are grateful parents of six gorgeous boys. Ruth, I saw those pictures you posted the other day of your sons. Oh, you are in so much trouble.

Ruth Chou Simons 04:09

Oh my goodness. I know. I'm feeling it finally, realizing that they're becoming young men. And, yes the girls are noticing. So.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 04:18

Wow. And so tell us their ages, or just age range.

Ruth Chou Simons 04:23

Right? My oldest is 18. And my youngest is 7.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 04:27

Yes. And you have six boys. God bless you. You know I understand the reason that you have to paint beautiful things, because you're surrounded by smelly boys.

Ruth Chou Simons 04:39

Right? And dirt bikes and mountain bikes and guns and dirt and Legos. It's all of it.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 04:45

Yes, I get it all. And she's the author of six books. Her first book, GraceLaced, won a 2018 Christian Book Award. So welcome.

Ruth Chou Simons 04:58

Thank you. What an introduction. So appreciate you. Thank you.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 05:04

So why don't you, for our listeners who don't know you, Ruth, tell us a little bit about yourself, your life, and how you came to faith in Christ.

Ruth Chou Simons 05:13

Yeah, you know, people know me right now as the founder of gracelaced.com, and an artist and speaker and an author, but in previous seasons of my life, Troy, my husband of 22 years, was a teaching pastor of a local church, as well as a headmaster of a classical Christian school. So we are no longer a part of those ministries. We're full-time with GraceLaced. But you know, those seasons as a young mom in local ministry has really taught and brought me to where I am today in the work that I do. But it's ironic that you're asking this question in that today, I posted about the journey the last 20 years, I posted about that on Instagram. And I just wrote about before this, before this. And a lot of times, we don't recognize how many things God has orchestrated in our lives to bring us to the place that we are right now. And it's easy to look at other people's successes or their milestones and forget how long it took and what God has done to prepare them for that. And so for me, I am currently finishing up a manuscript for a book that will come out next year that will tell more about my story. But I was raised in a Chinese-American home, born in Taiwan, and came to faith in my middle school years, to a family that wasn't necessarily subscribed to another religion, but just really believed in self-fulfillment and self-striving. And so between cultural implications of being an Asian-American, and then coming to a new country, I did my best at being perfect for most of my life and striving incredibly hard, making sure that I succeeded at being the best student in every class, in being a piano player whose fingers went off the keys, and just good at everything. Good at everything, but anxiously striving all the time. And so I think I heard the gospel. Our whole family came to kind of understand and know the gospel. In my high school years, my parents came to faith and went to seminary, but it really wasn't until I was in college that I finally, finally--and I'll tell you, Elyse, you played a big part in that. I've told you this before. And that isn't to highlight, you know, the seasons, the differences in our seasons. But I will say, you played a huge part in my young woman years, as I was growing and learning about, oh my goodness, really, like I've been talking about being a Christian, but I don't think I really understand grace, not works, and just how to lay down striving. And so I just want to say, you know, you've played a huge part in that. And I think I've mentioned before, that in my early pastor-wife years, Because He Loves Me played a tremendous part in my growth. And in me being able to share the implications in the powerful transformation of the gospel in our lives with the women that I was ministering to. So that's kind of my coming to Christ in a nutshell, that it was gradual, and yet sudden, when I finally realized, oh, all this striving. God really isn't

saving me so that I could be more amazing. He really wants to wow me with his grace. And so yeah, I've been working on that this summer, just recounting those stories as well.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 08:54

Thank you, Ruth. That's so kind and so encouraging to me to know that the Lord used that book in your life in that way. And then the multiplied thousands and thousands of women, that you through your art, through your skill and beauty, you're multiplying that out, and it's so encouraging to me, Ruth. Thank you so much for that.

Eric Schumacher 09:24

Yeah, Ruth. Yeah, thank you for that. I think I first met you a couple years ago. We were both serving on the board of Risen Motherhood. And I just remember the first several meetings of our board. I think I was just impressed with your knowledge of how to run an organization. I think from everything you've done with GraceLaced, and I think several of our meetings were the rest of us just sitting around listening as you overflowed with wisdom in how things should be done. And I was just really impressed with that. In fact, I just texted Emily and Laura, and thanked them for introducing us. Tell our listeners more about GraceLaced. What is it? And how did it come to be?

Ruth Chou Simons 10:13

Well, Eric, that's super encouraging and affirming, especially for business owners who, in 2020, might feel a little bit like, oh, my goodness, what am I doing? And even though I'm so grateful for that commendation, so much of leading is by serving and learning as you go. I mean, no one comes fully prepared to lead perfectly or run an organization or start a business. And so one of my favorite stories to tell is the fact that GraceLaced, as you see it today, has been in existence for, we're coming up on celebrating seven years. But prior to that, my blog by the same name was started in 2007, I believe. And so that's a long time to be committed to writing. Before anything ever went viral, I wasn't writing because I was expecting to be published, or even trying to get published. That was before I really even understood that there were courses being taught, I mean, about what do you do to grow your platform? None of that was on my mind at that time. I wasn't monetizing. Yeah, the tagline to GraceLaced was simply "Finding grace in the every day," and it was really, at the time, it seemed really cool to smush two words together and capitalize the L, you know, and I thought I was being so cool in the late 2000s. But at the time, it was really just because I was coming into such an awareness of God's grace in my life. And I was like, wow, I am really shifting my paradigm here. Grace is not just for some days or for the mission field or for that moment that you're literally trying to tell somebody the gospel. It is apparent and God's grace is wooing you in your everyday life. And we have to cultivate eyes to see how we are being transformed in the very mundane things of our lives. And so the blog really started as me reckoning with the fact that I was a mom, an unlikely mom, you'll see that in all my profile descriptions, because I don't feel like I'm equipped or just the right girl for a six-boy family. Never thought it would be that way. And I do know what causes it. But I'm just saying I literally had never planned on being a stay-at-home mom, raising six young boys who are all two years apart. So imagine, like, you know, either nursing or pregnant or changing diapers two at a time, and kids fussing over Legos, and it was just constant while my husband was a young pastor who both of you have been or are currently in ministry. So you know, I mean, there's hardly anything more difficult than the local church and how difficult it can be to work out your own weaknesses and your own struggles, while other people are sometimes easy

to love and sometimes difficult to love, and then preaching the gospel and all those things. And so, we were church planting. We were hurting. We were at times betrayed. You know, we were going through a lot of things that people who are listening who are in ministry will relate to. But ultimately, I got to work out some of those things on this blog. And as I was working out those words, those words weren't necessarily just for myself. It wasn't a journal. I was writing it as a ministry. But ultimately, it was, I just say this for any writers out there. I think it was such a gift that I wasn't trying to become published. I wasn't trying to be famous. I wasn't hoping that every post would go viral. I was simply trying to be faithful with the life that I was given that I wasn't expecting. I thought I would be on the mission field. We thought we were going to be career missionaries in China or in Latin America. We thought we would do something tremendously, you know, notable, and we were in a situation that felt like, you know, just slogging through trying to figure out how to make the mortgage payment and raise little boys. And so through that, I cultivated my writing skill because I didn't get a degree in writing. I wasn't necessarily a great writer. English is my second language, by the way. So I actually stumble over words all the time. Just a side fact, I didn't start praying in English as a heart language until I was in college. And so Mandarin is my first language and I wasn't necessarily expecting to be a good writer. But when you do something consistently for years and years and one year 365 days without fail, you grow. You learn how to do it. And so the hours in the seat really do matter. So as I was growing that skill, I was sharing posts. At the time, I think I was still fairly new to Facebook. But back then blogging conferences were kind of a thing. And so I got asked to speak. I got asked to join as a contributor to some things. And so that just grew into being noticed by publishers. And ironically, when my youngest was born, so number six, my oldest at that point was 11, and a mature 11-year-old. I remember right around the time that he was born, I had been blogging for quite a while and had an opportunity. I started painting for a blog series every day for 31 days in October, and I posted about it on Instagram. I was a new user of Instagram. And people asked to start buying. They were asking to buy it. At the time, it was really, I thought I was being cute and kind of funny about it. But I said, let's call this series, "Drawing Close." I'm going to draw something every day, and I'm going to write something a little bit about drawing close to the Lord. And as a mom who had her hands full, it was just my quick attempt to fit it into the margins of my life and say, "Okay, I'm just going to draw something, one little thing every day." And it was during naptime, half the time there was a little pudgy hand on the table. I was homeschooling, so there were math papers around. But I would draw or paint something every day for those 31 days. And again, this is just another testimony to being faithful with something just small and just doing it consistently, without expecting success. And people started asking to purchase it. This was 2013, October 2013. And by November 2013, I said, "Well, why not?" Now that I have an older child who, like I said, was a more mature older brother who, yeah, he was able to help me and I wasn't taking care of everything in the house by myself. And I just had a little bit more experience as a mom and just had more resources at my disposal to know how to manage my household. And by that November, I took \$300, that I had been just tucking away for, you know, that little run to the Gap store or whatever I need, you know, just a little extra there. I took that \$300, and I learned from the internet, how to scan images, get them printed. My first prints were at Kinkos, literally had no idea. I mean, I just had no idea what I was doing. But I thought, let me just print some and see what would happen if I ship these out. Because it's kind of like holiday time, people are asking to purchase some things. I made lots of mistakes. But a year later, I was totally impressed that we had done like 1000 orders, which is kind of funny now at, you know where we're at now. But a year later I said, Well, I don't think this is just some random little thing that I'm doing on the side. I think I'm gonna put my heart into this. But I was still full time. We were part time

homeschoolers because we were part of a hybrid school, but I wasn't working during the day, and so my husband and I talked about it. And, you know, I just want to throw in there that he was absolutely my biggest champion and didn't feel threatened, didn't feel like oh, my goodness, suddenly, what's going to happen. He said, "You know what, we'll tag team all the things that we need to do at home. And I'll help you wrap up these packages after the kids go to bed." We had no employees. So the boys would go down. And thankfully, they were good sleepers. And back then I still drew little flowers on the packages. And we would send these out late at night till midnight. And that's how GraceLaced started. And here seven years later, I'm grateful that not only have I, you know, become a published author, but we've licensed some of my work. So you will see some work distributed worldwide and at major stores. And then our website, our more boutique flagship site, continues to offer very specialty things that are not distributed. But we're just so grateful to have an audience that's around the world and who really love our products and that we get to really adorn everyone's lives with beauty and truth in a way that points them to continue to look at God's Word and the beauty that reflects creation.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 19:30

So beautiful. That's, I love your story. You know, we were talking with someone, I think, from the Denver Institute for Faith & Work. She was talking about how we never know our vocation or calling until we see it out the rearview mirror.

Ruth Chou Simons 19:50

That's so good.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 19:51

And it's such a great line and I've been thinking so much about that and then just listening to you. You know, you didn't know what God was doing. But then once you got someplace and turned around, you could say, "Oh, this is what he was doing!" And so had you always been involved in art and drawing or was something that you just--

Ruth Chou Simons 20:19

Well, that's a fun story in that, you know, my mom has pictures that she's kept since I was like 4 or 5, always drawing, always. I remember I was in high school in my AP courses, you know, overachieving Ruth, drawing, you know, taking calc notes, while drawing my left hand. That's how much I was constantly drawing. And so I was, you know, I say that to say I was constantly practicing, cultivating the way you can look at something and put it to paper, and I never thought I would do it vocationally. At first, I didn't, I was a biochem major. I was following the path at Berkeley.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 20:55

Of course you were.

Ruth Chou Simons 20:56

And very much thinking, I'm gonna graduate in three years. I'm gonna go to Berkeley. And I'm going to be a biochemist, you know. And it's too long of a story right this second, but you know, I kind of hit a wall where I rebelled in my heart, not on the outside, rebelled in my heart to everything. I wanted to stop performing for everyone, which was a good thing. But I think I was motivated out of things that were not

really Christward at the time, and ultimately changed my major to fine arts. And it was not because I was feeling freed. It was because I was feeling angry. And at the time, I think I was feeling like I was just going to give up. I was giving up on all my academic achievements, and I was giving up on a lot of things. But now that I look back, I go, "Well, that's hilarious." You know, it's kind of funny that I was given these opportunities to, you know, I was just trying to take something easy and something that I would enjoy doing. But from there, we actually went to seminary. And you know, everyone's stories go through many, many seasons of change. But for us, I would say, for my husband and I, we constantly look back and say that we see how the Lord has honed us as individuals, has made us, has sanctified us to be more Christ-like, and what we are doing with our hands looks a little bit different from season to season. But really, he's always purposed us for the same things. And so whether we were going to seminary or I was working retail, it was constantly this wrestling with the Lord of why am I here? And how am I going to use my gifts? And so, yes, right now, it's very public. It's super public. I'm on social media. I speak on a stage. I publish books that you can find all over the place. But I think that it's all the stuff that I was working on in my inner life, when nobody was watching, that really mattered. There was nothing that I could be writing about. All that content you see on social media now, that really is because I'm 45. And there were two very hidden decades that nobody really knew that I had any giftings at all. And so I just say that to encourage anyone, any woman out there saying, you know, I don't know, I don't know if I have any gifts? Well, I didn't necessarily know that I had gifts, either. I just knew that I was pressing into using what I could see right in front of me, and it grew.

Eric Schumacher 23:27

Yeah, that's great. I love hearing that story. And I loved what you said at the beginning about how you were beginning to understand and experience grace. And, you know, for listeners who only know the public side of you, just what I've been able to glimpse in private, through serving on a Board of Directors together, grace really does pervade your life. And, you know, I've heard you talk about how a ministry should think, or a company should think about serving its employees, how it should think about serving its audience, all those things. And I was always struck by how gracious you were in terms of wanting to serve other people. And so this isn't just something that you say, you know, for the sake of some platform, or whatever. This is, I've seen this as something that's really true and pervades your life. And I'm wondering, you know, obviously, you didn't set out to be an entrepreneur, to found and lead a company, to have a team of employees that you have to think about and all the legal stuff that goes with being such an entity. What have you learned through that journey? And maybe specifically, what have you learned about grace?

Ruth Chou Simons 24:50

Yeah. So as you can imagine, with my personality traits and what I'm naturally inclined towards, I want to do everything right the first time. I want it to be perfect the moment I launch anything. I don't want mistakes. I don't want my employees to make mistakes. I don't want us to ever say, "oops." I don't like the word oops at all. You know that's what's in my nature. My nature is, you don't have to say oops if you anticipate everything early on. That's the way I operate by nature. By nature, I would be somebody who would expect to have my 10-year plan within the first six months. And so running a business has really, really humbled me. As an employer, as a boss who reviews employees every year and receives upward reviews about how I'm doing, I subject all of us to that, because I've learned the hard way. You have to be humble enough to receive and to give good criticism and to grow from that. We've said oops

a lot. I remember early on everything from pricing something incorrectly or posting something for all the world to see and then find out you did it wrong. I even--oh I can't believe I'm going to do this out loud-- I've even sent out prints with a typo on it. This has happened. And the most hilarious thing, I just have to tell you. The most hilarious one was that we have a two-part of the famous Proverbs 31 verses. When I had originally painted it--so we paint everything, I paint everything by myself by hand, and then we scan it, and then I have a graphic designer on the team that manipulates and creates everything. So meaning, she takes out the background. She takes out specs. She makes sure things are even and formats them for products that we're going to sell. So I'm not the one doing all of that. I used to but I'm not anymore. Well, when I scanned in the "She laughs at the days to come," because some of us have memorized it in various forms I painted, "She can laugh." And we caught it initially. But somehow, for some reason, when we had proofed it with the printer, we had sent the wrong one initially. Long story short, that file somehow snuck back into the printing queue. And our customer got a "She can laugh," and I wasn't laughing. I was not very happy about it. Because I hate looking bad. I hate feeling like I'm not doing it all just right. And quite frankly, in a culture of comparison, it is so easy to constantly go, well, should I be growing as fast as that one person over there? Why isn't our company doing it this way? And that is the temptation of every creative. Every author. Really, I think this is a very, very sad trend even among pastors, because I think men are looking around going well, I haven't published a book. Am I even a pastor if I don't have an award-winning blog or a podcast? It's really changed, right? I think for both men and women. So for me, it's really about, when I hear you say, Eric, that you've observed me personally, I don't think I could receive a higher commendation than for my team or people who know me in other contexts away from social media to say, "Yeah, you're the same person." I think that's probably the biggest commendation I could receive is for somebody to say, "you really stand behind the mission and the heart behind why you do what you do." Because I have to fight for that. It's really easy to take girl power to another level and just be like, well, I'm gonna just roll with what I'm doing here. And I just, you know, I know I'm on the Worthy the podcast here. So I'm just saying, there's a healthy and beautiful version of saying, absolutely. I'm so grateful at the opportunities that are given to me as a Christian woman right now. I am so grateful for the ways I can serve and minister and can use my God-given gifts. But there's also the other side of it that can be idolatry. A wise woman once wrote in Idols of the Heart that it could be anything that causes you to sin. Because you don't have to, because you don't have--sorry, I'm already misquoting you, Elyse.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 25:11

That's okay. I'll misquote me too.

Ruth Chou Simons 29:34

If you sin because of not being able to have something or it requires you to sin to get something, then you know that's become an idol. And so that really truly is a test for me weekly, if not daily. If I'm trying to get more followers, get more clients or customers, if I am trying to get more efficient hours out of my employees, and the way I'm getting that is by means that show that I am prioritizing and first and foremost wanting something that ultimately is showing a sinful desire, then that's become an idol. That productivity is an idol. Or that revenue is an idol. And so yeah, that's something I have to think on all the time.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 30:25

Thank you for that.

Ruth Chou Simons 30:28

I got this close.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 30:29

Oh, no, no.

Eric Schumacher 30:31

You can paint that.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 30:32

Listen, here's the deal. Sometimes, I'll hear some quote and I'll think, "Boy, that's good." And then they'll say, "Yeah, you wrote it, moron."

Ruth Chou Simons 30:43

I do the same thing, honestly. I go, wait, did I really write that?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 30:49

Yeah, I want to talk--I'm so thankful for your transparency there, Ruth. That's really lovely to talk about, you know, the struggles of, am I being successful? Am I keeping up? And then fighting that. And then bringing yourself back around to remembering grace. And it's not about how good you do, and remembering that Jesus as a carpenter was the perfect businessman. And so that's your record. And so, you know, that's helpful as well. I want to switch this up for a tiny bit if I can, because you are an Asian woman. And I want to know, have you faced any sort of pushback? I wouldn't think from the world, but maybe, but from the church in any way that here you are, you're a woman, you're an Asian woman, you're a mom, and your husband in essence works with you. How has that played out in the church for you?

Ruth Chou Simons 32:02

That's a really interesting question. I would say, I don't feel that I received much pushback in general. But I have felt at times that some of the characteristics that are common to Asian women. Asian women tend to be a little bit more soft spoken. I'm not always soft spoken. I'm really feisty, but not always in large crowds. A little bit more acquiescing to others. A lot of the traits that are kind of characteristic of Asian women, sometimes I feel that it's not enough for mainstream speakers, or I'm constantly sharing the stage with really dynamic women who are very gestural and maybe pound their fists, or known to do push-ups on the stage, you know, or are incredibly funny.

Eric Schumacher 33:15

Is that Elyse? Does Elyse do that?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 33:17

No, no that is not me.

Ruth Chou Simons 33:19

I've seen Christine Caine do push-ups on the stage.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 33:22

I was gonna say, I bet it was Christine Cain.

Ruth Chou Simons 33:24

Yeah, it was Christine when I thought of that. I've had to fight that feeling that an Asian woman couldn't be on the same stage. I've had to fight that a little bit. I think because it makes you want to change who you are. It makes you want to change the way you do things. I tend to be a lot better in small groups. I don't crave--the Lord keeps bringing me in front of, you know, thousands of women. I think I almost passed out when it was like 7500 women, you know, and so I'm not necessarily equipped for stage, but I keep getting those opportunities. And I keep stepping into them, because I actually feel like the majority of my work is so perfected, because by the time it arrives in somebody's hands or on social media, it's been filtered and perfected. It's just really nice and packaged well, and that for me to show up in all my hand-waving, stuttering, imperfect word choice way helps my audience know that I'm real. And so that's why I keep doing it. But I will say when you mentioned, being an Asian-American woman, I feel a little out of place sometimes. And sometimes I have to fight the feeling that I get asked because I'm Asian. Yeah, so sometimes, if I'm honest, I think sometimes I have to think through that. And then recently, I have a Bible study coming out. It's a Bible study through the book of Colossians about preaching truth to yourself. It's called TruthFilled, and it's coming out with LifeWay on November 2. And I am the first Asian Bible study writer they've ever had.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 33:37

You're kidding.

Ruth Chou Simons 35:03

And that's just a really, it's just fascinating. I think it just makes me realize how much I assume. And I think of myself as absolutely belonging, and I do. Nobody's not causing me to feel belonging. But when I have 200 women line up after I'm done with something, and they're ready for me to sign books, and so many Asian women come up and say, it is so good to see someone who looks like me teaching the Bible. It's so good to see someone like me, who looks like me, choose a career, not in medicine, or science. It's kind of interesting, right? And it's interesting for someone like me to be a mom AND, and not a mom who has laid aside all those other things the entire time that I've been mothering. So, you know, I think I'm fighting several different versions of cultural norms. And sometimes I'm caught between two worlds myself, and so I'm still navigating that a little bit. But yeah, thanks for asking that question. That's food for thought for sure.

Eric Schumacher 36:30

Yeah, I want to ask just a little bit about your involvement sort of in the art world. I think when we think about ministry to the world, it's easy not to think about art--

Ruth Chou Simons 36:46

Absolutely.

Eric Schumacher 36:47

--as a genuine form of ministering to and loving our neighbor. And so could you just talk to us about why it's important to have art in the world?

Ruth Chou Simons 36:56

Yeah. I love that question. I think for too long, we have separated the sacred and the secular and we think that somehow, to get a good theology book or a good doctrinally sound book, it's got to be leather bound and tiny typeset, and it's got to be written by some seminarian.

Eric Schumacher 37:17

Unattractive.

Ruth Chou Simons 37:17

Right? And then you think, "Oh, well, all the pretty books with all the flowers on it come with teddy bears and a mug." And that's honestly probably the way I always thought about it. And so I never used to think that I could serve others with both. But the bottom line is, we were created in the image of God. We are image bearers, as the Bible tells us. And so are we perfectly imaging him right now? No, we are being sanctified day by day, and we will ultimately do so. But right now, we are not perfectly imaging him. But at the same time, we have been given the very privilege of reflecting his glory and reflecting his likeness, and reflecting his creativity. And so it is a travesty for the church to not be more engaged in training up biblically thinking artists. I think for too long, we may have said, "Well, let's incorporate the arts." And so therefore, let's just get somebody in a ballet shoe. And let's, you know, look at a ballerina on stage. Let's get an artist on stage. And you know, there's a place for those things and I'm not knocking that, but I just think at some level, it's not just about including something visual. It's not just saying, hey, let's just throw in something visual in the same way that you wouldn't get the best singer on a Sunday morning. That's not the qualification to have that singer lead worship. No, it's a pastor, a pastor of worship. The musician is somebody who is teaching through music, the Word of God. And when we sing, we are responding, or we are calling up what we see in Scripture. And so for me, even if I do a painting that ultimately has no scripture or words, or even some inspirational thoughts on it, and I didn't write "behold," across it or anything like that. Even for a painting where it doesn't have anything didactic in it per se, as a believer and as a woman who can speak about God's glory imperfectly but spending time in God's Word in trying to understand my salvation and understand the Word of God. What I bring when I paint something, is something more than just paints on a canvas. I'm trying to bring to you everything that's gone into why this inspires me, why I look outside and see God's glory and why I want to reflect it. So there is a difference between if I paint a sunset, I hope that it brings everything that I can say about God's glory in the sun that's setting each night, more so than somebody who gets the colors just right. And so I'm just saying it's all beautiful and artwork is beautiful, and that the common grace of God makes it possible for us to enjoy a canvas painted by somebody who doesn't love him, right? So praise God that there's beauty to behold in so many places and so many ways outside of the church. But we ought to be raising up the next generation of artists who think Biblically, who love the Word of God, who aren't straying from sound doctrine, who do believe that their very presence in holding a paintbrush or a guitar or stepping into ballet shoes has an opportunity to reflect the ultimate creator.

Eric Schumacher 40:55

Yeah, that answer really reminds me of a lot of things I read and hear from Makoto Fujimura. I don't know if you're familiar with him. Yeah, he's, I don't know. I think he's in New York, I think an artist. Yeah, does fine arts and I think he does like expressionism paintings. Same idea that our art, particularly in painting, doesn't have to have "behold" on it, or a Jesus fish, you know, hidden in the painting somewhere. I'm wondering what artists have inspired you?

Ruth Chou Simons 41:32

Yeah, I have become friends with Jake Weidmann who is a master calligrapher and a fine artist. I mean, he is not writing little words or cutesy--he doesn't do--I mean, I make a lot of artwork that has scripture or quotes and thoughts on it, because I want things to be accessible for the everyday woman, you know, but at the same time, I am such a fan of exquisite collectible limited edition fine art. And that's kind of more the tradition I was raised in. And Jake Weidmann is an exceptional talent. I'm pretty sure he was coined the youngest Master Penman, by the Penmany people, whatever it is, by the folks who register those who are actual calligraphers. He is incredible, and you can find his work online. He is a sculptor. He carves and sculpts. He engraves. He is a believer, and he is someone who truly finds the process just as important and as intentional as the final product. I'm just really honored to call him a friend. And he's a great inspiration to me as someone who's current.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 43:02

Ruth, thank you so much for being with us today. Thank you for the work you're doing. Thank you for your diligence in seeking to perfect your craft. Thank you, not just your craft as far as your art and your writing, but even your craft as a business owner. Thank you for being the sort of person that wants to perfect that, and then also being the sort of person who's willing to walk out on a stage and not be polished or not do push ups, so that the rest of us who aren't close can say, "yeah, the Lord could use me too." And so thank you for that, Ruth. Thank you for being with us today. It's really been a privilege to have you. Patreon supporters, we love you. We're so glad you're here listening, and we'd like to encourage our audience to support us if you can. We would appreciate that. And otherwise, would you please be sure to rate, review, subscribe to this podcast, and just track down people. If you happen to go vote--by the time this comes out, voting will be over. But you can just stand in line someplace, maybe at, who knows, Target and ask them "Do you listen to the Worthy podcast? And if you don't, why not?" So thanks for being with us, people. We look forward to seeing you again next week.