

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

Hosts: Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

Episode: 6— Guest: Lore Ferguson Wilbert

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Eric Schumacher 00:11

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 will not 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.

01:04

[Theme song]

Eric Schumacher 01:09

Hey, welcome to "Worthy". This is your host, Eric Schumacher, and my co-host, Elyse Fitzpatrick.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 01:15

Today we are welcoming our good friend, Lore Wilbert. Unlike the way some people might say it, her name is actually "Lore", which is L-O-R-E. So, we're welcoming our friend Lore Wilbert with us on the podcast today. Welcome, Lore.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 01:34

Thank-you. Thanks for clarifying the name pronunciation.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 01:39

[laughs] Listen to me. My name is Elyse Fitzpatrick, okay?

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 01:44

[laughs]

Elyse Fitzpatrick 01:44

You have no idea. Or, you probably do, Lore! And--

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 01:47

I do. Yeah, probably. [laughs]

Elyse Fitzpatrick 01:49

[laughs] And probably you do too, Eric Shoemaker-macher. [laughs]

Eric Schumacher 01:54

I do! It's a lifetime struggle.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 01:57

[laughs] Because, I mean, the name "Elyse". I don't know what was going on when my mom named me Elyse and stuck a "y" in the middle of it. What was that? And then I married Phil Fitzpatrick, which you would think would be pretty straightforward. But no, I usually am Lisa Fitzgerald. So--

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 02:19

Oh my goodness, that's so funny.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 02:20

[laughs] Oh, yes, we have stories. Anyway. Lore's our guest today and Lore holds a degree in English from Lee University. That means that she's a certified smart person. And she's been published by Christianity Today, Fathom Magazine, LifeWay Leaders, LifeWay Voices, The Gospel Coalition, Revive Our Hearts, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, and more. And she teaches writing and she edits on the side. And she has a really wonderful book that's just come out, which I personally love, called "Handle With Care: How Jesus Redeems the Power of Touch in Life and Ministry". So. Welcome, Lore.

Eric Schumacher 02:20

Wow.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 02:27

Thanks, friend.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 02:30

We're so happy to have you on. And we do want to talk about your book, but of course, because we're the hosts, we want to talk about our book first.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 03:17

I love it. I support it.

Eric Schumacher 03:19

[laughs]

Elyse Fitzpatrick 03:19

[laughs] So, you're one of our endorsers on our book. And, you know, our book is--for those of you who don't know--"Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women". And Lore very kindly endorsed our book. And what we're trying to do, Lore, is open, respectful conversations about the value of women. So why don't you, if you are able--why don't you take a moment and just talk about why it's important to have respectful conversations about the value of women in our time.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 03:57

It's important to have respectful conversations about everything.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 04:00

Yeah, good.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 04:02

And part of the problem is that we leave our respect at the door in many of our conversations about anything, really, no matter what it is. And I think around women we've just been so sort of disciplined by... the culture on one hand, which in some ways devalues women, and in other ways tries to place women above men.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 04:26

Mm-hm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 04:27

And then you've got the church on the other hand, which I think has been a little bit of an echo chamber throughout history. Particularly throughout the recent history around women. A lot of those conversations are being had by men and not necessarily including women in the conversation. And so I think that's another reason we need to have these conversations, is because we want to change. We want to be sanctified and brought together as a whole, not just a half, and presented to Christ as a bride.

Eric Schumacher 05:05

That's a really interesting comment you made, Lore, about the church having these conversations about women, and often it being men that are talking to each other about these things. You have a--I think, for me--a significant voice. You're a great writer. You've been blogging for how long?

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 05:30

Twenty years.

Eric Schumacher 05:31

Twenty years.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 05:33

Yeah.

Eric Schumacher 05:33

Wow.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 05:34

Wow.

Eric Schumacher 05:34

That's incredible. I love your voice. You're a good writer, you're a good thinker, and you speak with gentleness that is strong--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 05:45

Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 05:46

--a strong gentleness, to a lot of different issues. How do you as a woman find your voice being invited or ignored in these kind of conversations?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 05:58

Thank-you for saying that I have a gentle and a strong voice. I think that that's a really uncomfortable mix for a lot of people. Because those who lean more toward the gentle--or maybe not even gentle, but just sort of a light, you know, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace" kind of tone--they don't want to hear the firm things. They don't want to hear the strong calls. And those who are only hearing sort of strong, firm, very black-and-white thinking are kind of put off by gentleness. And I think for me, it isn't--I don't want to get my voice, I don't want to insert my voice into places where it's not welcome. But also I don't want to become like a man in order to have valuable things said. And so I am, by nature, a little bit of a more gentle, quieter person. And so that's who I am. And it's not just because I'm a woman, although I think that is part of our womanhood. But I want to bring that with me into these conversations. And so I think it's meant, you know, I feel a little bit homeless in a lot of these conversations, because I'm not going to be a fierce man-like personality. And yet I'm not a pushover, sort of a limp-wristed personality, either. So I don't know if that answers your question.

Eric Schumacher 07:24

I think that's great. And I think that's one of the things I appreciate about you, is your consistent writing on being who you are, not who you have to be to get into certain circles. And that's encouraged me and helped me.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 07:38

Thanks, Eric.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 07:39

Lore, I want you to--can you follow that up a little bit? Just as you were talking, I want to know what you mean when you say you don't have to have a man's voice, be a man, in order to be heard. What do you mean by that? When I say I don't have to have a man's voice in order to be heard, what I don't mean is that I don't have to have a man's voice in order to be in those places where men are [inaudible] listening to men. I think those voices--as I'm thinking of this past January, when everyone was releasing their "Top 10" list, I was really struck by how many of those Top 10 lists were books by all men, or books by all men with a particular theological bent. And I think those spaces aren't necessarily interested in listening to a woman, it doesn't seem like. Or they don't find good value in what those women are saying, even if they are reading their work. And so I think it's not so much that I feel like I need to be heard by those men. I'm just saying I don't feel, personally, the need to push myself into places where I'm not going to be heard. Because I'm wired in a particular way to be more gentle and artistic and creative, and just try and say things beautifully and not just *theologically correct*, you know? [laughs] Yeah, and I love the way your voice just dropped.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 09:01

[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 09:01

Dropped. Yeah, wasn't it last year, Lore, that you published your "Not Your White Males' Top 10 List" of books?

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 09:11

[laughs] Yeah. Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 09:12

[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 09:12

I really appreciated that you did that. There probably were people who were offended and you probably got pushback. I actually turned it into a book club last year, and discovered I'm not a good book club facilitator. But I read all of those books. And I realized, just from your saying things like that, that most of my bookshelves and the books I instinctually buy are written by men like me in my circles.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 09:25

[laughs]

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 09:25

[inaudible] those things.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 09:34

Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 09:43

And I wouldn't have bought most of the books on that list. And a few years ago, a woman in my church gave me a copy of Tish's "Liturgy of the Ordinary"--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 09:57

Mm-hm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 09:57

Yeah.

Eric Schumacher 09:58

And it's just, those types of things have opened my eyes to: there's voices I don't normally listen to, and I need to. So thank you for doing that. That's great.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 10:09

Yeah, yeah. I think it's not just voices, I think it's tone as well. I think some of the reasons we are not having super respectful conversations around these things is because we're used to one kind of tone around them.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 10:24

Mm-hm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 10:24

And so I--you know, you joked about me having, you know, adopting that deep voice when I said "theologically correct". But that's because I think that, that's the tone that I think, when we talk about theology, people are looking for. And I just think, men, I think we can have a softer tone talking about these things.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 10:29

[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 10:42

Mm.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 10:43

You know, that's really interesting. I wonder also for women--I know that there are women who won't even read books by women, because they feel like a woman speaking is going to automatically be fluffy, and you know, not have substance. Whereas on the other hand, they think that if they read men, men have substance. And you know, one of the things that I have been told--and you know, I used to really think about it as though it was really a compliment, and I'm sure it was always meant as a compliment, but now it's starting to bother me. I've been told by any number of men who read my books--and I've had men tell me that they read me--that they read me because I write like a man. And I used to think that that was a good thing. But I'm not quite sure now that... [laughs] That I think it's a good thing. Because maybe in saying that, what they're saying is that women can't write in a substantive manner without coming off like a man or something. Yeah, I think we're a little bit emotionally anemic in the church today. And by that I mean, we tend to think like: logic is right. Mm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 12:09

Systematic thinking is right, and emotions or feelings are wrong. And I think, okay, well... If I want to think critically about that, I'm going to go back to creation, and I'm gonna say, well, God actually created with intricacy and care, the whole human. And that means he gave--and some people are more inclined to feel and some people are less inclined to feel--but he gave all of us emotions *and* thoughts, and he gave all of us reason *and* feelings. And I think when we sort of check our feelings or our emotion at the door, and start to try and only be logical or systematic in our thinking, that's just going to lead to a whole host of problems. We are--and I think we're seeing that in church today.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 12:54

Mm-hm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 12:54

We're seeing, just, emotionally unhealthy people come out of the woodwork, who are super smart and really systematic thinking, and smart in a lot of ways, theologically, but they just have no sort of

emotional health. And we've been told [inaudible] since we were born, you know, to get our emotions under control. And I think that, that sort of-- maybe we've exercised that in such a way that we're familiar with exercising our emotions, and we don't have to be told, "Oh, you're so emotional." Like, I'm not so emotional. I have emotions, and I don't have to check them at the door whenever I speak.

Eric Schumacher 13:34

That's a good observation. There's an author and pastor that I know both you and I appreciate, Lore, whose name I'm not going to say, because I don't know if he wants this--if he would want this shared--but he wrote a great book. And--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 13:35

Mm-hm. What's it called? [laughs]

Eric Schumacher 13:52

What's that?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 13:53

What's it called?

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 13:53

[laughs] "What's it called?"

Eric Schumacher 13:55

I'm not gonna tell you that either. [laughs]

Elyse Fitzpatrick 13:57

[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 13:58

But it's a great book--but he writes from a perspective where he includes his emotions, and those sorts of things. And the book was fantastic. And in talking with him, he said, you know, a publisher inquired about a follow-up. And he sent some samples, and they don't want him to write that way, because men won't read it.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 14:24

Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 14:24

Hm.

Eric Schumacher 14:24

And to his credit, he said, "Well, that's how I write."

Elyse Fitzpatrick 14:28

[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 14:29

So, that's an issue for men and women. I think that you're definitely on to something, and that point needs to be pressed.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 14:38

I think we're seeing a turn, though. I'm seeing this in my writing peers. Among men, I think they're looking around and they're saying, "Man, I've got to get emotionally healthy." And so I see--I feel encouraged. I feel like we're headed in a good direction, for people who are willing to pay attention around these things. Eric, you've been a good example. But I think you wrote a piece a couple years ago that was--it really was quite emotional, about loss that you and Jenny had experienced. And I think that men are learning. And that's a good thing. Applaud that when we see it.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 14:58

Mm-hm. I think that people are understanding more and more the power of narrative.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 15:18

Mm.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 15:18

And women are very good at stories. Women love stories and narrative. I heard a conversation one time that David Powlison had about the difference between sitting in a group of males talking about counseling, and sitting in a group of females talking about counseling. And he said, "Women always talk in narrative." And you know, it's interesting to me, too, that Scripture is really a story--

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 15:50

Narrative.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 15:50

A narrative!

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 15:51

[laughs] Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 15:52

You know, and it's not that I don't love systematics, because I do. But you know, we've got to get back to the power of narrative. And I think that that's a way that a woman's voice needs to be heard.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 16:07

I mean, I agree. I think the the sad thing is that we've--I'm gonna take that thought one step further--is that I think men also experience a narrative. They experience sort of the narrative of manhood or what a man should be, or they're trying to find their place in that story. And I think--whereas women, in some ways, kind of naturally see our place in a story. And I think that's one of the reasons. So I don't want to

say women are the only narrative kind of people. Men are too. And we just need to figure out, okay, how do we walk in the big story of who God is and how he made his people, and walk in a way that's true and honest and not just reacting to the world's narrative of who a man is or who a woman is--or even the church's narrative of who--especially, actually, the church's narrative of who a man is or a woman is.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 16:39

Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 17:02

That's good. What Elyse was saying about those conversations about counseling, and how women talk about it differently than men--I was thinking when she said that, how, if I was in that room, I would probably end up having the conversation in the way that I can imagine, quote-unquote, "men would have it". Because that's who was there. Though, for me, it matters more to me to be able to tell my story and stories that illustrate--I love the narrative, more than I love the systematic logic, but I feel like--I think for men, we're forced into a certain conversation style.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 17:45

Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 17:45

Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 17:45

For some reason. [Inaudible] get out of that.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 17:48

You know, maybe men think--and Eric, maybe you can answer this, or Lore--maybe men think that narrative is not substantive.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 18:02

Mm.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 18:02

You know, that men need to be serious. And men need to talk about important "man things". [laughs] And there went the voice. And that they don't think that narrative is important when talking about significant things like theology.

Eric Schumacher 18:23

Yeah. And I wonder--I think there's truth to that, and I think particularly in, perhaps, our conservative theological circles. That comes out in preaching where we major on Paul in the epistles, and we can diagram those logical arguments.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 18:38

Yes, yes.

Eric Schumacher 18:39

And we forget that the Bible opens with narrative that begins with a poem.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 18:46

Mm.

Eric Schumacher 18:46

And men don't write that way, like Moses did. And the New Testament opens with, you know, the Gospels, with men writing these narratives, which are written to prove a theological point about who Jesus is, but it's done through story. And I'm trying to--I think I'm in a place right now where I'm wrestling with and thinking through even when we speak about, "Women are more like this and men are more like that."

Elyse Fitzpatrick 19:17

Mm-hm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 19:17

Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 19:17

I heard a great talk by Jen Wilkin.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 19:22

Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 19:22

Who I love, in an appropriate side-hug sort of way.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 19:25

[laughs]

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 19:25

[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 19:26

And she was giving this talk to men who are pastors or church planters or something. And she opened with a psychological study about how women process things and think things, and as she went on through it and got to the end of it, I thought, "That's me!" Like, that's how I process things.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 19:43

[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 19:44

And anyway, it's--I'm wrestling through, what's a "man thing", what's a "woman thing", and what's just a "human thing"?

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 19:53

Mm-hm, yeah. I think the human thing is--I think we, for so long, especially in the church, we've thought of--and I talk about this in my book a bit--we've thought of people as essentially, primarily, men and women, or sexual beings. And I think, man, one of the first things that we hear about God's creation of humans is that we bear God's image. And I think that means that it's so much more complex than just being a man or a woman or a sexual being. I think it's--instead of sort of entering into that complexity of the fact that, well, maybe in some ways I'm wired more like the traditional general male in this way.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 20:38

Mm-hm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 20:39

And Eric, you're more wired more like a traditional female in this way. And I think thinking through those things helps us--thinking through those things in light of being image bearers of a complex God who is many things--many sort of, even, seeming contradictory things like grace and justice and mercy, and all of those things that seem a little bit at odds with one another. And yet, God is those things, and so how can we be imaging him in our complexity?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 21:13

That's such a good thought. And it makes me also think about--you know, we're in a time where gender is being blurred.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 21:26

Mm.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 21:26

And then I think that what happens off of that, is that people feel like they have to draw portraits of what it's like to be biblically masculine, or biblically feminine, even though, of course, "masculine" and "feminine" are not even in Scripture. So you know we have, of course, in Scripture, lots of women who would work outside of those norms that they're trying to build. You know, women who were brave. I mean, you know, Phoebe traveling to Rome to deliver a letter. You know, that's not like hopping on a jet. That's dangerous business. And you know, there are lots of women in Scripture who functioned outside of what we would call normal gender roles. And it's funny because, you know, the culture is blurring gender roles, and maybe what we're trying to do in response to the fact that we believe--

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 22:39

Yes.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 22:39

--that God made male and female, that we're coming back and saying more than we should. Yeah, I absolutely agree with you.

Eric Schumacher 22:49

It feels like we've doubled down on the stereotypes as a way of sheltering ourselves from the culture.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 22:55

Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 22:57

And doesn't that then give to the culture the narrative--gives to the culture the right to call the narrative? You know, what we're doing is we're saying, okay, the culture is going to tell us where we're going to pour our energy, where we're going--you know, where most of the heat's going to be is because the culture is doing X--rather than saying, "These are the wonderful ways in which women and men imaged God." As you said, Lore--"Imaged God, reflected God. These are wonderful ways that they did it." And frequently, it wasn't in ways that we would say are typical gender roles. And part of my problem with all of this, of course, is that there are myriad women in the church who are hearing, "This is what you need to look like if you're going to be biblically feminine." And I personally have always resisted that. I'm a married woman with children and grandchildren, as you know. And what about all of the single women--who just say, "Hey, you know what, I would love to be able to post beautiful pictures of the dessert I made tonight for my family. But I got home and it was quarter to seven, and I've been working myself to death, killing myself all day, because I have to support myself. And so I'm going to take a TV dinner and toss it in the microwave. And is that being biblically feminine?"

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 24:16

Yeah. [laughs]

Elyse Fitzpatrick 24:46

You know, we've really got to not let the voices of the culture call out what the voices of the church are going to say.

Eric Schumacher 24:58

That is a great point. How do we think about these things as a church from God's perspective, versus what the culture says? Part of that--as we've been talking about being embodied males and females created in the image of God--is, in some ways, how those bodies relate, how they touch.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 25:20

Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 25:21

And that's my attempt at a segue--

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 25:23

[laughs]

Elyse Fitzpatrick 25:23

[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 25:23

--to Lori's book, "Handle With Care: How Jesus Redeems the Power of Touch in Life and Ministry". That is fascinating. I don't know that I have ever encountered a book on the subject of touch, particularly from a Christian perspective. So, what's your story with touch? And how did you come to a point to write a book about it?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 25:52

Well, I think my story with touch is part of the story of why I came to write a book about it. But I think what I began to realize is that I had a really--I was looking out, sort of at the world, in this sort of Me Too-Church Too culture that we're in right now. I think, in some ways, those of us who walked through the heat of the purity culture are now in our thirties and forties and sort of looking back with kind of a side eye at what was going on there. [laughs]

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 26:23

And so I just began to realize, like, I don't think we're just confusing culture and church around these things. Like, I've experienced a lot of confusion in my own life around these things. And, you know, I just thought, I don't think that we need another "How To" book or "How Not To" book. I think that we need, what I began to call sort of a theology around touch. And I think as I began to write I realized, it's more--I think there's a lot been written throughout church history on the body. But we need a theology that is centered on Christ--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 26:56

Yes, mm-hm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 26:57

--around the theology of the body. And so yeah, that's what I wrote about.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 27:02

And a lot of what you did in this really beautiful book--it's a wonderful, wonderful book, Lore, congratulations.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 27:09

Thank-you.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 27:09

But a lot of what you did is use narrative.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 27:13

Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 27:14

You know, used narrative from the Gospels.

Eric Schumacher 27:19

You know, when I was writing the chapter on Jesus' life and ministry, drafting it for us for "Worthy", I was struck by the woman who comes into the dinner party--

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 27:32

Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 27:32

[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 27:32

--and walks up behind Jesus, and she's weeping tears onto his feet, and she lets her hair down--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 27:40

Yeah.

Eric Schumacher 27:40

--and dries his feet with her hair, and then is kissing his feet. And I remember the commentaries I read were mentioning that some rabbis considered a woman letting her hair down in public to be a grounds for divorce.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 27:57

Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 27:57

Yeah.

Eric Schumacher 27:57

It was a sign of promiscuity.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 27:59

Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 28:00

And Jesus is an unmarried, eligible, popular traveling speaker. And here's this woman, letting her hair down, caressing his feet and kissing him.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 28:13

Mm-hm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 28:13

Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 28:13

This is extraordinarily intimate. Any seminary president who let this happen in a restaurant would probably be fired.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 28:24

[laughs]

Elyse Fitzpatrick 28:24

[laughs, clapping]

Eric Schumacher 28:25

And Jesus doesn't seem to care what it does to his reputation.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 28:29

I think that's the thing about that story that surprised me the most, is that he's not just at a dinner party. He's at the house of Simon, a Pharisee. So he's at the house of the--you know, a Jew of Jews. He's at the house of a legalistic, religious man, and this happens. And I just think--I think so often, our rules around touch, and what to touch and not to touch, are really rooted in fears for our reputation, or like a desire to protect our reputation-- Yes.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 29:00

--or sort of control the narrative that we are living. And what strikes me the most about this story, is that Jesus did not avail himself to the possibility of his reputation being slaughtered in that moment. He availed himself to the gospel, the embodiment of what's happening. Here's this woman who has sinned, like she--I write in the book--like, she got paid to lie on the beds of all the men in the city. And here's this woman, prostrating herself in front of him.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 29:30

Mm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 29:31

Wiping his feet, an incredibly intimate act. And Jesus is availing himself to what's happening in a spiritual moment.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 29:43

Mm-hm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 29:44

And he's talking about forgiveness. And so he's not thinking about his reputation. He's not thinking about the outcome. He's not thinking about what's going to be said about him later. And I think that's really, really, really difficult for us to navigate in a faithful way, in the church today, because we are in

an era when so many people have microphones and platforms where they are just slaughtering the reputations of people.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 30:12

Mm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 30:12

So it's really hard to say, "Okay women, live faithfully," and--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 30:17

Mm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 30:17

--and in some ways not care about my reputation. And of course, we want to avoid the appearance of sin. But it's not sin. That was not sin, what was happening. Jesus was sinless.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 30:25

Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 30:25

Yeah. You know, I think that verse, that you might have alluded to, comes up so often when I have these conversations. Because I'll meet with women for lunch or coffee. Sometimes there are women who feel more comfortable doing pastoral counseling in a cafe than they do in my office, because it's public and they can leave whenever they want.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 30:46

Mm.

Eric Schumacher 30:46

And so I respect that. But I'll have people say, you know, we should avoid every appearance of evil. And it struck me the first time--you know, I'd heard that all growing up and in seminary, and it struck me when I realized that "appearance" means "manifestation", in the sense of how something shows up. And so we're being told, "Avoid evil in every way that it shows up," not, "Avoid what somebody could misconstrue as evil."

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 31:17

Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 31:17

Nice.

Eric Schumacher 31:17

And I think that wrong interpretation and that desire to guard our own reputation keeps us from helping and loving people, which is really interesting, that that concern for ourselves ends up isolating and neglecting others, which is the opposite of the gospel.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 31:43

As I've thought about this particular story with Jesus and the immoral woman, and then also with Jesus and Mary of Bethany--

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 31:59

Mm-hm.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 32:00

--and how he defended her. You know, "Leave her alone. She's done this--" You know, it almost feels uncomfortable, but I think we can say this. Jesus enjoyed their touch!

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 32:17

Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 32:18

He enjoyed their touch, and you do such a good job talking about the fact that we can enjoy touch without it being sexual.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 32:33

Yeah, I think that we--I mean, even when I would talk about writing this book, people immediately wanted to go right to the the sexual, the erotic. They wanted to--"Are you talking about this? Are you gonna mention this?"

Elyse Fitzpatrick 32:47

Yeah.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 32:47

And so there just is no construct for touch that isn't sexual. And that's not just in the world, that's in the church as well. And I think... [laughs] I was just struck by how much Jesus--and I don't even talk about every instance--that Jesus was touching, or being touched in Scripture, but it's not sexual touch. It's intimate touch.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 33:10

Yes.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 33:11

But intimacy is the gift of every child who is in Christ. We get to be intimate with Christ, and we get to be intimate with one another. And it doesn't have to be sexual.

Eric Schumacher 33:26

Isn't that interesting that the word "intimate" is so often just synonymous with "sexual" in our culture? We don't know how to think about being intimate with another person without going to sex. And I think that's--that's sad. And I really appreciated what you said earlier, Lore. I don't know how close we are in age, but growing up through that purity culture... You know, when I was in high school, back in the early nineties, it was just normal to get hugs from female classmates. And then even in college. But it seems like, looking back on my own story, the further I got into Christianity--

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 34:11

Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 34:12

--the less that touch happened and was even permissible. And I'm at a point now where I just feel confused about what to do in most situations when it comes to touch. But I will say, as a man, I notice when a woman in our congregation or in our social circles touches me--you know, puts a hand on my arm, offers a hug, pats a shoulder, in a friendly sort of way. And I've noticed that it's rare, and it's really encouraging and appreciated. -and quote-unquote, "matured"--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 34:12

Mm-hm. Yeah, I think most of us don't. I mean, think about if you hadn't gotten married when you got married and you were still single. Think about how little unmarried people are being touched-- Mm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 35:04

Or asking--one of the things I say in the book is, we need to ask people, "When was the last time you were hugged? And can I hug you?"

Elyse Fitzpatrick 35:04

Mm-hm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 35:04

--in the church in particular. And I think that a lot of us get our, sort of, maybe "touch quota", met in marriage. And I think that we really have to understand that there are so many marginalized people in the world who aren't being touched. Not just singles, but so many marginalized people in the world who aren't being touched. And I think we have to start asking them, like you say, just, "Can I--can I put my hand on your shoulder when I'm praying for you? Or can I hug you?"

Elyse Fitzpatrick 35:36

Mm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 35:36

I was thinking about this the other day. I was praying up front in my church--this is almost a year ago--I was praying up front in my church after the service. And it's a large church, probably 1500 people in the sanctuary. And this woman came up--never had this happen before--this woman came up and she said, "I don't need prayer, I just need a hug. Will you hold me?"

Elyse Fitzpatrick 35:56

Mm.

Eric Schumacher 35:57

Wow.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 35:57

And I thought, I want to be that kind of brave. Like, I want to be that kind of brave when I need a hug, to just walk up to a stranger and give her a hug. And so I just held this woman for five minutes, and she didn't cry, she wasn't--and it would have been fine if she had--but she just wanted to be held.

Eric Schumacher 36:16

Mm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 36:16

And then I just thought, I want to do a better job at that. I want to touch people. I tell a story in the book about John Piper going to the hospital with this woman who continually would--she would put herself in the hospital on purpose, and he would go visit her. And finally he said, "Why? Why do you keep doing this?" She said, "I like it when they touch me."

Elyse Fitzpatrick 36:40

Wow.

Eric Schumacher 36:40

Wow.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 36:41

And I just thought, this woman--I mean, putting herself at great risk on multiple levels, is putting herself in the hospital because it's the only place where she's going to feel touch. And I just want--I mean, I'm not the world's best hugger or toucher. But I want to be the kind of person who, people know when they see me-- --they're going to receive--if they want to--they can receive good healthy touch. And I want men--my prayer for this book is that men would be able to read it and see how healthy and good it is, and how hard it is to navigate these waters today.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 37:04

Mm. Mm.

Eric Schumacher 37:26

Yeah. I love that story about that woman coming up to you and asking you for a hug. I think that speaks volumes about you. You know, one of the things I think about, even in the stories we've discussed of women touching Jesus--it must have been something they saw and heard in him--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 37:43

Yeah.

Eric Schumacher 37:44

--where they knew it was safe. And I wonder if being conformed into the image of Christ means we become the kind of people that people are willing to come up and say, "Can I have a hug?"

Elyse Fitzpatrick 37:57

I think this might go back to what we were talking about in the beginning. But--and I say this also in the book--a lot of my ideas around this subject come from Andy Crouch's book "Strong and Weak". But he talks about how we can't have human flourishing unless we have both authority and vulnerability. And not just as a culture, but individuals. So a woman who comes and touches Jesus anoints him for burial--Mary, she's coming in vulnerability, she's bringing her vulnerability in that moment--risking rejection. But she's also coming in authority, in a sense, like, she has autonomous power over her body in that moment to come and care for him. So she's carrying this sort of traditional male thing--authority--and this traditional female thing--vulnerability--in tandem. And that's what leads to flourishing. And I think that that is--every single time in Scripture, whatever Jesus was doing, I see him carrying both authority and vulnerability, in allowing himself to be touched, and allowing himself to be subject to maybe malicious gossip, and then ultimately allowing himself to be nailed to a tree. Mm. Mm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 39:17

But then also walking in the full authority that he was loved by his father, known by his father, sent by his father, and would be received by his father. And I just think, man, I want that for the church. And so this woman who seemingly was coming to me in total vulnerability was also coming in authority.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 39:36

Mm-hm.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 39:36

And as I'm standing up front there, in a form of authority, I'm also standing there with my vulnerability and willing to embrace someone who needed it. And I think we just need--and again, that's all Andy Crouch, that's not me. I think we need to really embrace that in the church today.

Eric Schumacher 39:55

That's good. That's Andy Crouch, but we know that you also speak with those kind of insights. We're talking today with Lore Ferguson Wilbert about her new book, "Handle With Care: How Jesus Redeems the Power of Touch in Life and Ministry". So if you've enjoyed this conversation and want to hear more from Lore, we'd encourage you to go out and buy yourself a copy, or five--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:19

[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 40:19

--of "Handle With Care", sold wherever quality books can be found. Lore, would you tell us how people can find you online?

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 40:28

Yeah, I'm on Instagram or Twitter: @lorewilbert. L-O-R-E Wilbert. And then they can also read on sayable.net. S-A-Y-A-B-L-E dot-net.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:43

Thank-you for being with us, Lore. We're so grateful for you, for your life, for your voice, and the tenor of your voice. Thank-you.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert 40:54

Mm.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:55

We really appreciate you.

Eric Schumacher 40:56

Thank-you, Lore.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:56

If you have enjoyed this podcast, you can help us. And you already know what I'm going to say. Please go on iTunes: rate, review, subscribe to our podcast. Let people know that what we're trying to do is promote a perspective, a conversation, about the value of women among Christians, and thanks for being here.

41:29

[Outro song]