

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

Hosts: Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

Episode 46 — Guest: Carolyn McCulley

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Elyse Fitzpatrick 0:06

Welcome to worthy, a Christian podcast that celebrates the value of women. Each week, we'll bring you conversations with women and men, and 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. And women are valuable and respectful conversation on this topic is essential in our day.

Thanks for joining us again, for the worthy podcast. And my name is Elyse Fitzpatrick, and I am happy to be with you today. And to be with my co-author, co-host, co belligerent Eric Schumacher. As we talk with a special guest today, let me introduce my friend Carolyn McCauley to you. Carolyn has been a friend of mine, an acquaintance and friend of mine for maybe 15 years or so. We share a lot of the same church history. And, I have watched her work, I have watched not just what she's produced, but her life for all this time, and I'm proud to call her my friend. So, let me introduce Carolyn to you. Carolyn is an award-winning director, and editor with Citygate Films. It's a company she started in 2009. She produces and directs independent films and collaborates with clients to direct and edit branded content and social good films. She's directed nearly 200 short films for clients, including Discovery and AstraZeneca and Web MD and Chick-fil-A and Adventure Scientists and International Justice Mission. I love AGM and I love those people. Her films have won several industry awards and screen at festivals across the country. She also works with Twenty Thousand Hertz to write and produce several episodes of the leading podcast about sound. She's written about the NBC chimes, ASMR misophonia and audio illusions and more. She's also written three books because she's an underachiever. And so,

Eric Schumacher 3:15

like most of our guests,

Elyse Fitzpatrick 3:16

yes, like most of our all of our guests are really slackers. She's written three books, The Measure of Success, which is a BNH publication, Radical Womanhood from Moody, and Did I Kiss Marriage Goodbye, which is a Crossway Publication, as she's contributed to three other books. We're very happy to have Carolyn with us here today to talk about her life as a woman and the work The Lord has called her to do. So welcome, Carolyn.

Carolyn McCulley 3:53

It's a pleasure to be with you all. And it's a pleasure to be among the guests that you've had here, many of whom I consider friends and definitely a wonderful cohort to be among. So thank you for having me here. And Eric, it's a pleasure to finally get to see you face to face. Because it's been primarily just over social media. And yeah, emailing.

Eric Schumacher 4:16

Yeah, good to finally see you.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 4:19

So, tell us about your life of faith, how you came to faith, and in your walk with the Lord and where the Lord has led you, is leading you now.

Carolyn McCulley 4:33

Wow. Okay, so we had an hour and a half to record, right. I could fill it up with that story, but I will keep it shorter.

Carolyn McCulley 4:42

I grew up Catholic. My mom was faithful to take us to church and I was confirmed in the Catholic Church, but I never really had an understanding of what the gospel was. Later on, when I became a Christian, and I would go back to mass with her then I would hear it woven throughout the liturgy, but I didn't understand at that time. I had a brief interaction with an unbiblical form of Pentecostalism. When I was in high school, there was a youth group that was all about the prosperity gospel and I thought at that point I became a Christian but I can go back and I can look at my journals and see no, no fruit there. But interestingly, in this theme of the worth of women, one of the reasons why I ended up leaving that group was because the youth pastor, who was only 22 and put in charge of the teens, you're just always like that it's never a good idea, was going, you know, one by one through the girls of the youth group. And by the time he got to me, I was already well acquainted with the ways of the world, let's put it that way. And I said, No, no dude, back up, and I turned him into the senior pastor, and it caused a huge conflict in the church. It wasn't even a conflict of sanity, it was rather insane. I left, and to show you that I really wasn't converted, a week later, during the Friday night youth group, I drove by the church hanging out the car flipping them a bird and smoking a joint. So, I was that kind of beautiful woman. So, I left and I went to college, and I got a degree in journalism, and I got involved in women's studies there.

So, I actually have a certification in women's studies. I'm not sure why I think it was just because I didn't want to take math or biology or something that I was like, sure, we'll chat about women. But you know, that was, I didn't realize at the time I was this generation, that was being part of a big experiment, there was women's studies programs that were being created in colleges around the nation to kind of replicate the second wave of feminism, but I got my certification. And I was out working and doing various things for a few years and, and then my sister who'd become a Christian, through Campus Crusade, as it was called then, in college she just kept faithfully sharing the gospel with me and I just wouldn't hear it. I was like, whatever. But she went to South Africa, to study at the Bible College there, and her now husband went with her. I saved up my pennies to go, because if you live abroad, I will come and visit you at least up until 2020. I went, and this was prior to the fall of apartheid in South Africa. So, I guess I'm old. And I went there and this church was really dedicated to repenting from this, that sin and, and pursuing racial reconciliation. There were other things that I wouldn't agree with theologically, but that spoke to me as an unbeliever. I went there and on Easter Sunday of 1993, I actually heard the gospel as a full story, for the first time, just despite all my other church history. The youth group that I was a part of spent all their time focused on speaking in tongues, their theology was you could have accepted Jesus, but he didn't accept you until you could speak in tongues. So, that was a little wackadoo. You know, nobody had actually told me the whole story, and I hadn't integrated it. When I heard it that Sunday, there's a long story just about how God revealed Himself to me there, but somebody came and prayed over me and the way he prayed I understood this is God, who knows who I am, knows my history, and the specifics of my experience, and was calling me out. I sort of spent the next year backing into the kingdom of God. I knew he had a claim on me, but I remember the rest of that trip in South Africa, we would drive around and I would love these hostel questions from the backseat to my sister and brother in law, like, what about tithing? What do they do with my money, you know, that kind of stuff. You know, that began a process in me, but I knew he had done something and he really had. I had always told people, that I am a trophy of God's grace, but also evidence of his great sense of humor, because he must have been bored having been around for all eternity, just like, let's get the most unlikely person we know to become a Christian and eventually, on the women's ministry circuit, this will be a good one. Let's watch this.

Carolyn McCulley 9:37

And I was so confused that when I came back from South Africa, and I started going to this church, people just didn't understand my story. I'm sure I did not at all describe it with any clarity. But somehow or another, the word got back that I was a missionary returning from Africa. So when I would say things like, I didn't even know that was in the Bible. People were like, I thought she was a missionary, what's going here? So yeah, it was comical from the start. Hmm.

Eric Schumacher 10:08

So now you are an author and you've written three books that Elyse named earlier along with you've contributed to others like the ESV, Women's Study Bible, Women's Devotional Bible. Is there a common thread that moves through these books and contributions? And what is that?

Carolyn McCulley 10:31

I think given my history, I have always wrestled with, what is the definition of a woman? And who defines it? And then what are our outworking of that belief system? My first book with the really awful title, did I kiss marriage goodbye from which I've had, you know, 15 years of levity about the awkwardness of that title? How many people have told me, yeah, I bought it and then put another cover around it, other things like that. But it was really my effort to try to figure out what it meant to be a woman made an image of God, who was currently single. Because, when I came into Christianity in the 90s, we were, in my opinion, in the midst of our idolatry of the nuclear family. There really wasn't a place for single adults. Now, I didn't become a Christian until right before my 30th birthday. So, I came into all this like, what, what are you talking about in this church people? And I think the second sermon, my pastor was preaching on Ephesians 5 and when we got to the whole history of like, the whole thought of women submitting to their husbands, I was waiting for the punch line, I was waiting for the whole church to be like, and then no one laughed, and I'm like, oh, where am I? Yeah, I just had no frame of reference. And so the first book was about me kind of wrestling with, oh, you know, what does that mean that I'm a woman, and yet the church wants me to identify with that adjective. I'm a single woman. And I'm like, no, I'm a woman. And I think because I remain unmarried, one perspective that I think I bring to the church is this idea of don't forget, that's an important role, I'm all for marriage and motherhood and the family, but it points to something beyond us and ends in this life, and they are implications for that. In fact, let me just bust out some potential heresy here on your podcast because I was I've been thinking about this idea. I was reading some systematic theology before we started recording. Because I always think about the fact that it's a single, I bust up people's even numbers. I'm always the odd number dinner parties. A third wheel here and there. But the Trinity is a third wheel. Three people, right? But nobody writes about that. I'm like, flipping through all the systematic theologies like, yeah, I get that it's a community and it shows us what three persons as one looks like, but we always talk about just two, male and females. We don't talk what that means as an eternity. So somebody here, correct me. Eric, you're the pastor, tell me what's wrong with my theology there.

Eric Schumacher 13:26

No, I think that's good. Because I think what's interesting is, if you have four people, it's easy to like, pair off in your conversation. And if you have three people, you've basically got to all be paying attention to each other and there's probably a good lesson there.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 13:43

I love what you just said. And I love the fact that in certain contexts, well, we should just say in general, in big Eva, the focus is on couples. Fun the couple. And, I'm not sure about the statistic, but it seems to me it's something like, half of the women in the church are single. Half of the people in the church are single. This whole thought that what Christianity is about is this marriage. Well, it is, it's about marriage to Jesus Christ. But you know, it's so off kilter to me.

Eric Schumacher 14:39

Yeah, and we've even had some who've tried to make the Trinity into the Father and the Son are a model of marriage and submission and then I don't know what the Holy Spirit's doing over there

Elyse Fitzpatrick 14:54

being a third wheel

Eric Schumacher 14:55

feeling awkward or something and which is which isn't a isn't an illustration the Bible ever uses of the Father and the Son. So, the thread is understanding what it means to be a woman in the church and your experience as a single woman. So, your writing has a lot of historical material in it. Are you a history nerd and you just like studying old things? Or is the history of women's experiences important?

Carolyn McCulley 15:37

It's very important. And yeah, I am kind of a history nerd. I love looking back. History always shows us that we're not that unique. I think we tend to look back at people of prior ages and think they were completely different entities when they just wore different clothes and had different technology, but the human heart is the same and so, I'm fascinated by that. Even though I have my certification in women's studies, we didn't learn anything about the history of women. I don't know what we spend our time on. But it wasn't until I wrote my second book, *Radical Womanhood*, that I really went back into understand some of the elements of womanhood in our experience, and what history has done or not done across different cultures for our experience, and that carried into my third book as well, *The Measure of Success*, which is about women, work and productivity. It's all kind of this through line. My first book was dealing with, you know, hear I am as a Christian, and how do I think of myself, and oh, by the way, guess what, Proverbs 31 is fully applicable to me because it addresses the whole arc of a woman's life. And so that thought continues through all three books. We don't discuss the arc of a

woman's life. We spend almost all of our time arguing about the first 20 years. We don't prepare people, apart from Elyse, who wrote her wonderful book on the afternoon of life, we do not prepare women to think about the second half of life. So, we tell young women, especially today, hey, you can cram it all in right now just every last bit of it. But I kept looking at history and seeing that there were women who were very fruitful and had a lot of impact in the later years of their lives. So how did that happen? So, the 19th century is one of my favorites and we can you know, when on about history for a little bit, if you want there, but that's, that's how I kind of developed it, I realized I initially came in to this this place where I was in the singles group, but I was older than a lot of singles. And, you know, as you get older people are still in large churches trying to, to, you know, partition you by season of life, which I find so unhealthy. Because we're a body, we're supposed to be united. We're not supposed to be separated. But especially if you're 30, 40, 50, 60 in the single's ministry, you're like, I'm more concerned about retirement, elderly issues, taking care, my parents, dating, dating all the arguments about dating, I like what, no, I'm looking for widowers. I'm cruising around, like yes, go into funeral homes. I'm sorry. There's my heart. I know you go back, though. It's like it's not a monolithic culture. So that's why I wrestled with it. But then I just threw everything. It was like how I wrote Radical Womanhood, my second book, to be the book I wanted somebody to give me as a new believer. Why did you come into the church? Thinking the way you did, like Ephesians 5 is the punch line? And why are the people in the church not laughing? And why are they taking that seriously? And really, it was a slight push back on some quarters in evangelicalism that always use feminists as like a pejorative without recognizing that one, there are three waves of feminism, not the second way to always talk about the 60s we have a lot of familiarity with and would have supported a lot of what first wave in the early 19th century, mid 19th century would have accomplished. They were also pro-life. You know, we don't recognize, we don't have any intellectual honesty and saying, thank you, I'm glad I can vote. I'm glad I can own property. Because, this is a relatively new concept, like up until my life. I was a kid before women could have credit cards and their own names, but if you were married, in the 19th century, you had this concept, called coverture, which you were as an individual subsumed, you lost your legal identity. Most of the 19th century was concerned with abolition, marriage reform laws, and looking at the fact that we had such high ideals in our Constitution but didn't live up to them for three quarters of the population. So all this stuff was fascinating to me, but the history of the home, that's my fav.

Eric Schumacher 20:11

Tell us about that.

Carolyn McCulley 20:14

Well, I think it's because for the majority of history, the home was the small business unit of the local economy and it was only until the industrial revolution that we bifurcated this. And as a result, when the Industrial Revolution came around, you had all these people taken away from being, you know, well, it's complicated. Of course, we always had sailors who were gone from their homes for a long time and

shepherds who were gone. But generally, the bulk of humanity worked in the same sphere. And by the way, kids didn't hang out playing video games and getting prepared to life until they were 25. They were working with the family income when they were younger. So, when you have the home, as a place where you disciple people, you offer hospitality, you created things you bought, and sold and saved and grew things, then the whole contribution of women's work was seen and valued, and it wasn't separated. But capitalism took it out of this space, and into a place where some people went. And we had this idea that it was mostly men. What's fascinating is, the first people who were brought into the first mills in America were young, rural women, and they were the textile workers. And they were also the first to unionize. And the first thing that strikes, first to talk about, you know, these, these whole experience of being workers. And so, you know, it's fascinating to me that when, at least in America, the first industry that was disrupted, was women's work in textiles. That's what women had done primarily for thousands of years at home.

Eric Schumacher 22:01

So when would you say do you think when Paul says, The apostle Paul says, to, you know, encourage women to be busy at home, he means to be working that job involved in the family business?

Carolyn McCulley 22:19

I think when we look at this, we have to recognize the whole phrase that Paul's using there and his goal is that the women's work would be so that the interests of the gospel were advanced that the enemy would have no room to slander others. And being busy at home meant being busy about the employment. I mean, first century, the home generally employed more people than any other space. And so you know, you wanted to or at least, I mean, in the controversial concept of bondservants, Roman homes had a lot of bondservants, which is not like our shadow slips slavery's we've all talked about, but, you know, it was more like enlisting in the military. And so it was, you know, be busy about managing your home, offering hospitality to strangers, rearing your children, like, do these things that are strategic. But you know, because of the Industrial Revolution, there was this divide. And there was this golden age of domesticity, roughly 1830 to 1850, where women saw, upper class women, upper class, white women, saw that there were this whole accolades going toward the new capitalism. And so they said, well, we have got to reclaim the moral authority of the home. So if capitalism is a dog eat dog world, then our home is going to be a place of refinement, and we are going to be in charge of the moral character, the family. Which, in some ways, let men off the hook and that's not scriptural. But, it also led to the moral authority, if it's in the home, to cultivate the refining character, then it also goes out into the culture. So that's why we have early efforts to in the 19th century to end child labor laws, and to you know, reform public drunkenness, and all these things, because it's like if we're the moral authority at home, we will be also in the public square. Eventually though, our consumerism changed the home so much, it just became a monument to our own tastes. And that's why when a leading theologian wants to insult a leading woman, women's ministry person, go home. "Go home" is the pejorative, that is the

place of lesser influence, that is the place that is unimportant, and that's where you need to be. That's why usually when I write I don't even use the word home, I prefer to use the phrase private sphere, because the private sphere affects all of us. And it's actually where the eternal work is done. It's where you show hospitality to your friends and neighbors. It's where you disciple the next generation. It's where you can host your small group, your zoom small group these days, you know, all of it. And it is where your eternal rewards are earned. Your Employee of the Year award that's gone, like by next year. But the private sphere, that's where God does most of its work. And so it's such a pejorative and a misunderstanding to say "go home." It just shows you how the culture has affected our view of the church. I mean, it just shows you how our culture has negatively affected the way we look at the home.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 25:35

You know, when you, thank you for that, thank you. And the amount of heartache and distress that comments like that particular comment have caused me personally, is probably beyond my ability to explain or say. You know, one of the things and Eric you asked about the pastorals, you know, the pastoral letters, and Paul saying be busy at home, you know, we have to understand who Paul's writing to in those letters, because he's writing to the upper class, rich women who had who had servants bondservants, slaves, not chattel slavery, but servants in the home and they were the ones that were with basically wasting time drinking, going around talking and so his counsel to those women are, you know, get about Kingdom business. But, he's not like he's talking to single women, or he's talking to all married women, he's talking to upper class, rich women, who basically had nothing to do because they had slaves in their house. And so, he tells them, don't spend your day going around talking and getting drunk. Do something else with your life.

Carolyn McCulley 27:18

Yeah, and I'm really good at rabbit trailing. So you asked me a question. And then I went off in a whole-nuther art. Come back to answer your question. But the thing that was a real burden to me, by the time I wrote my third book, was the fact that we look at the Pauline epistles, and we read into them our modern experience I'm on and we divorced them from Paul's actual actions and then narrative accounts. So, you know, we read our influence in there, and we think, oh, go home or be home or like, just get out of the public sphere. And then we fail to acknowledge that he worked with Priscilla, and he commissioned Phoebe. And, you know, he received the support of Lydia and her influencing and he partnered with women, you all have written about this, you talked about it. But because we don't integrate those accounts, we tend to think of Paul as being very limiting rather than being very frame, rather progressive for his culture. And also strategic about the importance of women's work. I mean, and I don't mean like just income producing, I mean, productivity, like what you do with your day, how you spend your time can be so strategic for the gospel.

Eric Schumacher 28:29

That's good. So you mentioned earlier, a little bit about the first wave of feminism. And some of our listeners may not even realize that there are waves to feminism. And it's a word that's often used as a pejorative, you know, you start talking about the value of women and you're just a feminist. Or people ask you, are you a feminist? And it's one of those labels where you have to ask the question, well, what do you mean by that? Could you explain these waves of feminism? Just give our listeners a brief overview. And what's good about it? What might be some concerns? Yeah, educate us.

Carolyn McCulley 29:14

You know, asking people, what they understand by that term is so key. I completely agree with you. And before somebody, you know, wants to understand my position on something, I want to understand what they think of it. Because if it's like, oh, do you mean men and women are made equal? Yes. Page one of the Bible. And I can take you on and yes, equally made an image of God. Yes. Equally in need of a Savior. Yes. Co-heirs in Christ when we receive him as a as a as our Savior. So it is, you know, equality is written through Scripture, what we're experiencing right now, and I'm sure this will be a follow up question, but the crisis we're experiencing in the church right now, is how we fumbled that. But, to answer your question, our nation was founded on this great ideal. But immediately the women were like, Hi, hello. If we're all, you know, having a contribution all men are made equal kind of thing like hello. And so even Abigail Adams was writing her husband early on and saying, "Don't forget the ladies", and "your sex is naturally tyrannical so don't forget our ladies." They had a good marriage, she wasn't trying to usurp him, she was trying to remind him of a universally acknowledged truth in her own words. We had this, this huge experiment that the founding of the United States was it swept the world, this idea that there could be equality and liberty. The women very early on were like, "Mm hmm." The first wave started somewhere around 1848 and it was during this time period, I was telling you about with the industrial revolution starting here, and the textile factories, etc. And there were women who were saying, we need to have rights for women, too. And what's interesting is so many of those women were Christians who were in the first wave, not all of them would be evangelical in the way that we would define it now. One of the leading women of that time went on to publish the woman's Bible, and she basically excised out every reference to what she considered masculine theology. I'm not unsympathetic to her in the sense of the times she lived in must have been really oppressive.

Eric Schumacher 31:39

Some people think that's what *Worthy* is.

Carolyn McCulley 31:44

No, not at all. But I do I as a fellow human being empathetic to why these women would look at the church and see the church not upholding the values of the Scriptures and then say, well, you're the problem. And so start to redirect toward another ideology. And this is, this is an issue I think, is

important because when I speak to people, I say, God in his general Grace has given each of us the ability to accurately see problems like we perceive them, generally, we do see the problem. But it's your worldview that shapes how you interpret it. And so a lot of these women are correctly saw that things were wrong in our society, but their worldviews, and their experiences shaped them to push toward alternate ideologies and alternate theologies, actually. And so in the church, what we have to say is, there were wrongs that needed to be righted, they got righted in legality, they often swung to wrong ideologies, and wrong theologies blaming God, for our sin. And we can bring it back in. The church needs to have intellectual honesty, that things that needed to be corrected, were corrected, and we're grateful for them. But like all movements, we need to kind of bring it back to what the point is. So the first wave, 1848 to 1920, was essentially about marriage reform laws, and about obtaining the right to vote. And then we got really distracted with the crash, depression, and World War II. But it's interesting, those things actually contributed to the rise of second wave feminism, because we had this huge industrial complex. We had told women in the 30s, don't you work because you're stealing a job from a man. And then by World War II, we're spending \$125 million to say women get back to work because we need you. And I can't imagine having lived through this, like, which one do you want. So we come out of that, and we have this huge manufacturing capacity, and nationwide television for the first time in 1951 so now we can sell you this whole idea of consumerism in a way that we couldn't, you know, in the 1920s and earlier and sell you an ideal, it's driven by your possessions and what you own and how your possessions will fulfill you. And that gave rise to the second wave, because they were like, I am not fulfilled by my stuff. I am not. And so you have all these, you know, ads of women who are wearing shirt waist dresses and curls and they're like, thrilled by their ovens and thrilled by whatever. And I can tell you, yes, we all get momentary pleasure. I'm sitting in my new house right now. I love my house. I'm grateful for my house. It doesn't fulfill me. And I think that's what these women were saying in the second wave was we need economic parity. But we often think of the second wave as being the place of the sexual revolution. And this sexual revolution actually happened earlier in the 1910s. And you can see some of this, if you watch Downton Abbey and other programs you can start to see this bubbling up. It was the contraception revolution was what the 1960s was about. And I think Margaret Sanger is a really good illustration of both of these points. She's the founder of Planned Parenthood. And she helped finance the contraceptive pill, which was revolutionary during this time. But it's because as a nurse, she would walk into these crowded, poor tenements and see women whose husbands had drunk themselves to pieces, spent all the money in the midst of a lot of corporate greed that just, you know, went through human beings, like they were pieces parts, and they had a lot of children and they lived in crowded and unhealthy conditions. And instead of rightly seeing all those contributing factors in this sense, she just went, look at all them children. We got to do something about this. And that's what I mean about your worldview, shapes your solution. Her solution was we have to stop birthing people. And she was a eugenicist. So she only valued people who could, in her opinion, bring contribution to the world. So if you had any kind of disability, or if you happen to be African American, or, you know, any kind of lower class, you weren't worthy to reproduce anyway. But that's a good example. And so that drove the contraceptive revolution. Now, is contraception wrong? You know, I get asked that question all the time. And I say, well, as a single woman, let me give you my opinion.

Carolyn McCulley 36:28

But I think, like anything, these things are tools. And I can pick up a hammer, and I can use it to build a home for you or I can bash your skull in. And contraceptives, if it's not affecting the actual conception and birth, if it's preventing the conception, then I think that that married couples can have some wisdom in the space and timing of how they do things. And I remember one man telling me, his wife had had two really awful pregnancies. And he didn't want to her to go through this, again, the sleeplessness and all these health problems, so that they would build their family and other way.

Eric Schumacher 37:09

That's good. And so what was the third wave?

Carolyn McCulley 37:11

So the third wave, and some would say right now we're in a fourth wave, it's kind of hard to know when you're in the midst of something if something has changed, but the third wave is roughly, so the second wave I didn't even define it's early 60s to early 80s mid to late 80s, and then the third wave would be very late 80s to early 90s, somewhere in that time frame start to now or maybe only 2010's and now we're in something new, so we're not really sure. The third wave was in response to something that I personally agree with out of the second wave which is pornography objectifies women. And it is not good. But the second wavers went on and on about this so much that their daughters were like, nope, I'm going to reclaim sexual power. And so we had a very sexualized third wave. And so this is where the highlight pornographized, highly sexualized world of the third wave came about.

Eric Schumacher 38:18

This concludes part one of our interview with Carolyn McCulley. Join us next week on the worthy podcast for the conclusion of our conversation. Thanks for listening.

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