

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

**Hosts:** Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

**Episode 56 — Guest:** Carolyn McCulley

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Eric Schumacher 0:06

Welcome to Worthy, a Christian podcast celebrates the value of women. Each week, we'll bring you conversations with women and men, on the value of women in the church. And society. We will not always agree on everything. But we do agree that God is glorious. The Bible's true. Women are valuable, and respectful conversation on this topic is essential in our day.

Thanks for joining us, again, on the worthy podcast. This is part two of a two part interview with Carolyn McCulley. So, there's waves to feminism. And I assume that if someone asks us if we're a feminist, then we should ask them what they mean and identify with the good and the bad. And what about your own life? Your books span two decades, over 20 years, how have you changed and grown? Are there things that you would change now if you wrote those same books again?

Carolyn McCulley 1:46

I think every author has that feeling of like, Ah, yes, that was a moment in time, right, Elyse?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 1:54

Absolutely. Absolutely. Although, I have to tell you, I talked to someone one time a female author, I won't name her. She's written a lot. I said, oh, I really regret saying whatever I said, and she said, "There's nothing in any of my books I would have changed." And I thought that was rather astonishing. But, you know, it's nice to know, Carolyn, that you and I are pretty much in the same boat. Saying, I don't think I would have said that that way.

Carolyn McCulley 2:27

Yeah, exactly. I mean, the fundamental messages I still believe in. I think one of the things that I have seen, the price that we've paid, is the Christian celebrity, Christian platform, in which certain people get quoted all the time and their ideas are quoted all the time. And so there are some people that I would not agree with the outcome of their life and their choices that I've quoted in my books, and some who haven't run the race well. And you know, what, even in the midst of that, you can say that story is not

finished. You know, one of my pastors had a spectacular, you know, public like, I'm no longer a Christian event. And do I think that's the end of the story? No. I've seen the grace in his life and I would understand why he was so burned out that he got to this place, but I believe firmly, and I'm praying for it, that he will have the same restorative experience that Peter did with Jesus. So, we're always in the middle of somebody's story, in our own as well. So yeah, there are some things that I look back on that I wrote in good faith that I think now I'm like, I'm glad that in *Radical Womanhood* I included an appendix on abuse, but I wish I'd really amplified that message and helped people to understand what a transgressor of boundaries looks like, and why you need to be on point about it. But you know what, even our culture didn't, at that time. I have a good friend, who's a Christian therapist right now and she says, "You know what, we didn't understand trauma. We didn't understand the neuroscience of trauma. We didn't have the tools." So to go back and look at people and say, the 90s and say, y'all should have known better, in that way, we didn't. But what we should have known better was the history of people hiding sin has been like this from the beginning. And people aren't that complicated. That's why I kind of laugh at conspiracy theories, because I think people have been about vanity greed and lust from the start, you know, doesn't take that much conspiracy. So yes, there are things that I wish I could change but the overall messages, you know, the thought process behind them I still stand with.

Eric Schumacher 5:03

So I have a follow up question about what you said about abuse and us not understanding trauma, and sometimes not understanding how to respond to abuse, both in the culture. I'm an Iowa native and so the Johnny Gosch abduction case was huge in my childhood, you know, he's the first milk carton missing child and I just listened to a podcast about his disappearance, and they were talking about, back then they didn't, the police didn't know what the word pedophile meant, they waited 24 hours before even opening an investigation and all these things. They're willing to go back and say, yeah, we messed up, we were doing things wrong. I'm wondering as Me Too movement happens, and Church Too and in my context in the SBC, I've been shocked at the number of pastors who haven't spoken up publicly about some very high profile abuse mishandlings, cover ups, those sorts of things. I wonder, do you think that's because there's a number of pastors, who 20, 30 years ago, didn't know how to handle these things, and are afraid that to speak up about it now might reveal something they did wrong back in the back in the 90s?

Carolyn McCulley 6:36

Or 80s? Or 70s? Yeah, I do think that's fair. I have a friend who was mediating a case. And one of the reasons why this, there was not any support for the teenage victim 10 years prior, it was because one of the elders was involved in an extramarital affair himself and he did not want to be confronted by the problems of sexual sin in his own church, because that would expose him. I think that we are looking at the negative results of pursuing power and pursuing money and misunderstanding that we are currently living in the same context as a first century Pharisees, who expected Jesus to come and return to them

to power on this earth with these tools. And as a result, when you build your church ministry around the same kind of power structures that the world does, you're going to protect them the same way the world does. We also have a legacy of not listening to women. And this is not new. I'm currently reading through 1 Samuel right now and it's interesting how your own life experiences as you read through things, you see things differently all the time. And 10, 15 years ago, I'm reading about Hannah, and I'm like, Oh, she just wanted a child and I want a child to and this time, I'm like, now how come Eli would come in there and accuse her of being drunk without asking any questions? Do men ever ask any questions, seeing it a completely different perspective. And then it gives the Holy Spirit time to go like, Hi, is somebody a little angry, antsy as you're having your quiet time this morning? But I think we have this history that is, you know, it's just embedded into our sinful natures of wanting to preserve power at all costs. You asked about the Church Too movement there and I had the opportunity to speak at what we call the wisdom forum in my church a few years ago, as a lot of these high-profile pastors were starting to fall. A lot of young women in my church were getting really discouraged and just saying, who can we trust. And that's when we put this forum together. And I said, ladies, I know I'm like the grandma in your church. It's like everybody's in their 20s. I want to tell you how much has changed in my lifetime alone, I want you to have a picture of what God's doing. We didn't have rape crisis counseling centers until 1971. I was already born, I was already a kid. We weren't taking sexual assault seriously, until recently. And God is on the move in both the culture and his church. And if you have hidden sin, He will discipline you. And if you don't repent, He will not be mocked, and He will expose it. So, all these things that we're seeing coming out now should not make us discouraged about the church. They should make us celebrate God, like Thank you, God, your Holiness is paramount and you love your church and you love your daughters and you will not be mocked. Hallelujah. Amen. And then let me go confess all my sins. Bring them out into light.

Eric Schumacher 10:00

That is, that is great. That is such a refreshing perspective. I think Elyse and I have both been encouraged. Well, we've been discouraged by a number of the stories that we hear, but we're encouraged that we're hearing them like this is being talked about now. And that's how we ought to look at the Church Too movement is that Jesus said he would build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it, and he's continuing to build it, and push back against hell. We don't need men saying, well, if the women would just be silent in the church, things would be peaceful, we need them to be to be speaking about these things. So, let me let me continue on with your journey a little bit, you've talked to us about your understanding of feminism. You used to identify as a complementarian and that's a word that we use frequently on the podcast, and you used to speak in those circles, and I know at least one of your publishers identifies as a complementarian publisher. You don't use that label for yourself anymore, at least not so much. Tell us about that journey. And where you're landing right now.

Carolyn McCulley 11:21

Yeah, I will tell you what was attractive and encouraging to me about the description of complementarianism as it was presented to me as a new believer was that it was, in my eyes, the antidote to the strife that I was seeing when I came out of the culture and into the church. I was told, and this was during the 90s so we had the promise keepers movement, etc., there were men who are really trying to take seriously their roles. But something shifted in the last 20 years, and it became more about, let us make sure we control the women. Elise and I have a shared church background so I'm sure she can fill in some of the blanks here as I'm going to tell some of the stories. I am here to engage with the ideas and I leave individuals to stand or fall before their own masters. I have loved your previous guests on this show and how they have described their own backgrounds. My big prayer that I asked my friends to pray before we started to record was that I would be full of wisdom and winsomeness because I want to claim and name the problems, while also at the same time appreciating the good that came out of these areas because there's always good and appreciating the people who invested in me, even if now, 10 years later, I completely disagree with a large chunk of things. But to give you an example, my experience as a single woman in the church, under the concept of complementarianism was third wheel out we don't really know what to do with you.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 13:17

Wait for babysitting.

Carolyn McCulley 13:18

Yeah, until actually I babysat and some of the parents and they come home and be like, Why are children wet? I was like, I thought water fights were a good idea.

Eric Schumacher 13:28

So you're good at it.

Carolyn McCulley 13:30

But it became this, like I was the thing that needed to be managed, rather than the sin. And I'll give an example of a case where I had to take a flight with another pastor to go and support him at a conference, I was going to run the book table. There was one flight a day coming from DC to the city where we needed to go and he asked me to take another flight so that we wouldn't be on the same plane. And I was like that means I have to schlep all the heavy stuff through two connecting flights like, okay, chivalry out the window, but also Hello, I'm going to go and get on that plane and ignore you the same way I ignore every other married man who's on that plane. And then like third of all in all these

situations too you just want to go Hi. I'm sorry. If you were the last man on the face of the earth, we still have no problem. Don't forget, I get to have a choice in this like, not struggling with you, buddy. Not at all. Thank you. And so in this case, I was like, Why? Why am I the trouble? Like why? We are colleagues together. And this is the burden always got put on women with this Mike Pence rule or Billy Graham rule is older people would know it. The heart of it is a good idea. The heart of it is to avoid temptation. But the actual practice of it is to put people in boxes like you're a problem. And so I must avoid interacting with you as a sister in the body of Christ instead label you as a potential problem in the body of Christ. And we fumbled siblinghood through complementarianism, like crazy. It just became about married couples. And then the rest of you all in the waiting room of adulthood, like, eventually you'll come in. And we don't think of ourselves as a body. We don't think of ourselves as siblings. And so instead of understanding that we're in this joint, fight together against and in spiritual warfare, that we are together pilgrims on the way home, that we are together in a battle against common enemies. Instead, it became, we have to push away people who might be temptation, and we have to avoid the appearance of evil, rather than the actual evil. And I think you all had, when Darby Strickland was on, she talked about the lack of curiosity. Yeah, and the lack of curiosity. I mean, I don't know when this will air, but I can tell you that it'll there'll be some other scandal where other people just overlook big red flags. But you know, we're all talking about a recent case where we're, there were big red flags about why certain investments were made and why certain activities were held by somebody who was in high profile. And this lack of curiosity about hidden sin, is the reason why we don't help each other when we're under attack. And you put people in boxes, and you say, okay, you have to go away from me now, because you could be a temptation, rather than how am I monitoring my own heart? So I am going to remember your question this time, Eric, and come back to it after my long rabbit trail. And it's this, I am still faithful to the biblical ideas. But the practice has become, as some of my friends and I joke, it's all about the manhood and shuttling the women somewhere else. And it represents more of hyper idealized American culture than it does anything that's biblical. And, like you all have written, if people would listen to the voices of women, we hear the gift that has been given to them, to the church, and to marriages and the voice of women, we would be advancing so much in our understanding of spiritual warfare. We're not supposed to be at odds with each other, we're supposed to be working together against our common enemies.

Eric Schumacher 17:18

Yeah, that's good. I remember, there was a case in Iowa that you might remember where a dentist fired his dental assistant, because she was too attractive. And he was afraid that, you know, it would cause an issue. And I remember Russell Moore describing that approach to women, he said, "You know, Jesus told us that if your eye causes you to sin to pluck it out. But he didn't say, to pluck out your neighbor's eye." And that's what's happening, like with you on the airplane is, for whatever reason, he can't be with you on an airplane. And maybe that's an area of temptation for him, I don't know. But you get left, literally, with the baggage, like, you have to carry all this heavy filming equipment, through the airport. And that, I think both Elyse and I would very much resonate with what you said about wanting to hold the biblical principles but seeing these ways in which this has been applied so poorly and so wrongly

where we talk often about taking implications of a principle, and then making applications and laws based off of based off of these principles. So, professionally, you're a filmmaker. And I'm sure that is a very interesting vocation as a Christian, tell us about it?

Carolyn McCulley 18:51

Well, it allows me to have a foot in the church and foot in the progressive filmmaking documentary world. And what's cool about that is, it's allowed me to see that my fellow filmmakers are very interested in serving humanity and improving humanity. They are passionate about their positions because they want to see others not harmed or held back. And some of their solutions wouldn't be biblical solutions. But I can identify with the passion of wanting to serve and help humanity. And there are times when I'm in conferences, and their speaking of Christians is that we couldn't possibly be present and Christians are people that hate speech. And it is interesting to be on the receiving end of another group, thinking aloud when they don't know you're present. And it's helpful because I think it cultivates humility. I think it's helpful to hear other people when you're inside the room and it helps you to understand the biases that you bring and the perspectives and I love the fact that it gives me an opportunity to build bridges with people that, especially in this particular culture, we've divided, you know, our lives and our affiliations and our social networks up in such a way that it takes face to face communication. And I love doing that. So, from a ministry perspective, that's one view. But the other thing I really love about being a documentary filmmaker, is that people can trust me with some of their hardest stories, their deepest, most profound moments and say, make a film out of this, even if it's a short film, for a ministry client, or for a branded content story. I love having that trust, and I, I feel a profound charge to handle their stories accurately, and to try to honor them in the story making.

Eric Schumacher 20:50

So your recent book, most recent book addressed women work and productivity, what's the one thing you hear most about that book from your readers?

Carolyn McCulley 21:03

Well, I wrote that with another friend of mine, who's about 20 years younger. And we wanted to bring two different perspectives and two different life experiences, because she's married and has children. And I think what people said, almost uniformly to both of us was the fact that we help women think not only about the whole arc of their lives, like I mentioned earlier, but also the fact that you don't have to live in a one size fits all box, whether you have people telling you, you should or shouldn't have children, you should or shouldn't get married, etc. I think the big theme of this was understanding the implications of the parable of the talents, if, as we see in Matthew 25, that Jesus has given us the things that we are supposed to invest, the time, the talents, the treasures, the opportunities, the capacities, we

are not responsible for what we've received. But we are responsible for what we steward and what we invest. And that means that our tendency is women to compare ourselves, like she has more capacity, she has more money, she has a better husband, or so we think from the outside, you know, whatever any of that is, that doesn't matter. What we do is we take what we've been given, we invest it for the glory of God, and we return it to our master. And we say this is this what I did for Your glory. And, that helps us to think through a measure of success, the reason why we call it this, is it's not Employee of the Year, it's not CEO in the corner office, it is well done good and faithful servant, you did much with what I gave you. You're not responsible for what I gave you, but you're responsible for what you did with it. And that means that my life is going to be shaped a little bit differently than other people's lives and there's not to be a comparison about that. And I think that was the most freeing thing.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 23:02

Carolyn, we're so happy that you're with us today. And we have one more question for you. But I want to remind our listeners, thank you, Worthy listeners, to get on whatever your podcast platform is, and rate and review and subscribe and tell your friends and enemies so much about, tell your friends and enemies how you are so thankful for what the Lord is doing in this podcast. Eric and I, I know are personally so blessed to be able to talk to the people we get to talk to. And although, as Eric said earlier, some of the stories are very disheartening, it's also really encouraging that I know Aslan's afoot, you know, He's working and things that have been hidden, and structures that have stood strong and wrongly so for years are falling. And so in that sense, we're really thankful Eric and I are to have had the opportunity to do the Worthy podcast. And if you are able, and can help us with a production of the podcast, we'd love for you to do that on Patreon. And you get special bonus content if you're willing to do that. And so we'd be very thankful for that. And, Carolyn, thank you for your life. Thank you for the way you've stood strong and I just have one last question for you. You and I think we have somewhat of a shared history. And sometimes it's pretty hard to say okay, I'm going to I'm going to continue on in the faith. You know, this has been a rough, rough time. Again, good because structures are falling and people are seeing what actually is going on, but on the other hand, it's pretty disheartening. So how, how is it that you're continuing to walk in faith, and that you still go to church? Because I know a lot of women who aren't.

Carolyn McCulley 25:15

That's a profound question, Elyse. And I think if I didn't have the view that I have the Lord's commitment to His Holiness into his name and to his glory, that I would see the failings of the church, which there's always a failing, and every generation, we're dealing with the particular form of it, but there's always a failing, I would see that and be like, I'm out of here. I'm not a member of this human organization. But because I see that it is the Lord and He is redeeming us, He is purifying us He is at work, then I can hang in there with other people, and muddle our way toward the finish line together because I am confident that the Lord is building his church, I am confident that he will accomplish His goal of refining us. And I'm

fairly confident too, that we're going to fumble it and stumble along the way. But if I look at the whole history of the church, I see him building, building, building, building, and I know He loves us. I don't know why He loves us, honestly. But I know he does.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 26:30

Carolyn, thank you so much for being with us today. I sincerely, honestly, really value you and the work that you do. Thank you so much for taking your time to speak to our listeners today. And listeners, thank you for being there. And we look forward to speaking with you again.

Carolyn McCulley 26:52

It was my pleasure. And my honor. I really enjoyed this conversation with you both.

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