

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

Hosts: Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

Episode 11 — Guest: Evan Welcher

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Eric Schumacher 0:06

Welcome to worthy 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.

Welcome back to The worthy podcast. I'm your host, Eric Schumacher along with my co host, Elyse Fitzpatrick, and we are here to have respectful conversations about the value of women. And our guest today is one of my very favorite people on the twitter.com Evan welcher, he is the senior pastor of Vine Street Bible Church in Glenwood, which is a town in the great state of Iowa. Evan is the author of resplendent bride essays on love and loss, a book that he wrote after losing his wife to cancer, and it's a chronicle of the love and loss of his first marriage. And that's primarily what we're going to be talking about today. Right. Evan now lives with his wife, Rachel welcher. And their dog Frank, also known as the professor in a house on a hill, and he says his favorite color is darkness. That's my kind of man.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 2:19

Yeah, I was gonna say you guys would get along, huh?

Eric Schumacher 2:22

Yeah, we haven't met in person yet. And we're just a few hours apart, Evan. Welcome to the podcast.

Evan Welcher 2:29

Hey, guys, thanks for having me on.

Eric Schumacher 2:31

It is so good to have you. I forget when we first met on Twitter. Has it been a couple years?

Evan Welcher 2:36

At least? At least?

Eric Schumacher 2:39

Yeah. really enjoy you. And Rachel, you too, are one of the best parts of Twitter. And so I hope if our listeners are looking for quality people to follow, that they check you out, you are a peaceful refuge in an otherwise dumpster fire of tweets. So

Evan, tell us a little bit about your church.

Evan Welcher 3:09

My Church is 161 years old. And it was founded in 1857. It was a Christian church restorationist back in the day, and part of that stone Campbell revival that swept the plains in the 1800s. And it's been in Glenwood for a long time. And right next door to it was the First Baptist Church. And they were northern Baptist, otherwise known as American Baptist. And they sat by each other for 100 years. Right next to each other, there was a chain link fence between them. And in 2007, I was hired at the first Christian

church to be the youth pastor. And eventually, I was demoted to the senior pastor. And a couple years later, they had a need for someone to do pulpit supply after some trauma and maybe spiritual abuse that went on with the former pastor, they went through a lot of hardship at the Baptist Church. And so after my first wife died, I was a widower, and I was just looking for anything to fill my time up, you know, and that's, that's part of grief is trying to find something that you can fill your time up with, so that you're not so absorbed in your grief. And, and so the church next door needed someone to preach. And so I would preach at first Christian church, walk out the door, and they had their service started at 15 minutes later, and I'd preach there. And we did that for about three years. Why Tom? And we Oh, yeah. That's a Slovenian. in the same direction, definitely. After a while, it just made sense to merge the two churches because they're right. They have adjoining property. And they believed a lot of the same things. And so that's what we did. And that's where Vine Street Bible Church comes from, is that these two very old churches who may have split off, initially 160 years ago, some of the records indicate that all those folks used to go to church together in some kind of schism happened. They merged and joined. And so that's, that's our church.

Eric Schumacher 5:34

Wow. And when did you first come to Glenwood?

Evan Welcher 5:38

and 2007.

Eric Schumacher 5:40

Okay, and so you've been there? Almost 13 years?

Yeah.

Yeah. Wow. That's

Evan Welcher 5:46

great. And how big is Glenwood? It's 5000 people,

Eric Schumacher 5:50

5000 people in the Midwest, and you've been there for 13 years. You've seen two congregations merge together. You've lost a wife and Ben remarried. that right? That's right. Yeah. And all in that same little town. I, I think that is a remarkable picture of faithfulness, and, and humility. I think I think that's what comes through in your online presence as well. Let's talk about this book, you wrote, resplendent bride. Tell us about the book or or tell us about your wife's death. And in her illness.

Evan Welcher 6:36

I met Danielle in college, where Bible college students and she had a long history of cancer in her family. She was actually at the Bible College for a year. And her father struggled with brain cancer and his cancer came back. And so she left. And I didn't see her again for a number of years. She went home to St. Louis and took care of her father. And she was a missionary with African inland mission and taught middle school history. And eventually, our paths crossed again. And I was pastoring out in Glenwood. And that's, that's something amazing about our little churches that they took a chance on a 20 somethings single got to be their senior pastor. But I, Danielle did come back onto my radar. And she was back in America from Africa because her appendix blew up, which was terrible for her but really good for me because I was able to reconnect, and we started dating, and we got married in 2011. And I

was 28 years old. And I know, Rachel is gonna get out of here later and talk about purity culture, and all the stuff that goes with that. But, you know, a lot of us are taught that you're supposed to get married and like super young, right? Especially in Bible College. So I escaped Bible college without getting hitch and, and at that point in my life, I was a pastor, and I really wanted to be married. You know, it was a good thing that God put on my heart. And I felt like I had waited a long time. Looking back. Now that I'm 37 I'm like, 28, not old at all. What was I thinking? Yeah. But at the time, I felt like I had just been waiting, waiting, awaiting, and God brought this woman back into my life. And we were extremely happy. And we worship God and the goodness that he had brought into our lives through one another. And a year into our marriage, she was diagnosed with lymphoma. Wow. And the diagnosis was pretty good. She was young, and the doctors are optimistic, but the treatments just weren't working. The cancer went to go away, eventually morphed into leukemia as well. And may 3 2014, she went home to be with the Lord.

And there's, there's a lot of

struggle and baggage and pain with all of that she was an incredible woman of God. She loved the word and she loves people and, and anyone who matter would say that she had a smile that would light up the room. And she was faithful.

And

so there's a lot. There's a lot of theology that goes with that. A lot of what we in the church are supposed to be doing is preparing people for death and resurrection. I think the church has failed to do that, to some extent, because we won't be happy clappy winners. Hmm.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 9:59

So Evan, I want to, I know we're going to move off of this. But I'd like you just to have a moment if you want to honor her as a woman of value. What was it? I mean, I want to give you time if you would like to, to say, hey, this, this is how worthy she was. If you'd like to do that, if that's not too terribly uncomfortable for you.

Evan Welcher 10:34

Oh, yeah, I love you know, talking about her. That's one of the difficult things about having so many loved ones that eventually people stop talking about them. Yeah. And I think everyone loses a loved one, whether it be a parent or a friend or spouse goes through that. And one thing I would just really say about Danielle is that she was an obedient to the Lord. Yeah, that's not a popular notion. But, um, her whole life was sacrificial love. And if she felt like God was calling her, she would go. And that was all her life, which was service to other people's needs to her local church. And, and going where the Lord would want her to go. And I'm still shook to my core by that example, of just someone who is willing to obey notice matter what the cost, huh,

Elyse Fitzpatrick 11:34

Evan, let me let me press you a little more. That was so beautiful. And I'm so thankful that you did that. If you had one memory of her that you could share that would that would help us to honor her and honor her memory. Well, what would that memory be?

Evan Welcher 11:56

For Danielle it was finding joy

in the midst of immense physical suffering,

that particular cancer that she had in the chemo, and the radiation eventually caused a lot of trouble with eating a lot of sores and her esophagus and or mouth and a lot of weight loss, just love immense physical toil. And I just have this picture ingrained in my head of, of her just incredibly skinny from the lack of food, and a lot of pain and just holding herself up by the sink and brushing her teeth. And I, I think that we're often looking for heroes to do these extraordinary things. The courage is getting up every day and doing what you got to do. Yeah. And for a lot of us, I think we need examples of that, and permeate she was such an example of following the Lord. Not only in the big things, but in the small men's. Yeah, just daily taken up that cross and doing what she had to do. Hmm.

Eric Schumacher 13:16

You you refer to her as your resplendent bride?

Can you unpack that phrase?

Evan Welcher 13:25

She was resplendent in every way, she is luminous, but full of joy in the midst of suffering. Somebody who was a light, she reflected the light of our Lord and Savior. And that's, that's what I mean by resplendent. There's a lot of good looking people. There's a lot of even kind people, but she reflected the glory of her Lord. Mm hmm.

Eric Schumacher 13:53

Tell us about the book. How did that come to be? And what do you do in that book?

Evan Welcher 13:59

The book is just a bunch of rambling essays that I strung together. It's called respondent bride essays on love and loss. And they were things that I wrote throughout the period when she was sick. And then after she died, and really just, anyone who's a writer, you know, that's how you process and that's how you think. And so this monumental thing had happened in my life. And I was just trying to process and trying to figure out in the midst of all that darkness, where is my Lord? Where's my god? What's he doing through this? What's the point of it all? And, and will I see the goodness of the Lord and the land? Like Psalm 27 says, and so some of them are written during her treatment, and some of them are written after she went home to be with the Lord. And it's just a man trying to grieve theologically if I could put it that way. Sure. Yeah. Try not to be too pompous. But it's trying to grieve theologically.

Eric Schumacher 15:09

I'll be, I'll be pompous for you.

It reminds me a lot of CS Lewis's book of grief observed, processing Joy's death from cancer. And you're a good writer, and a good thinker and a good poet. And is the book still in print?

Evan Welcher 15:32

I'm afraid not.

Eric Schumacher 15:33

But it's on Kindle, right?

Unknown Speaker 15:35
It's on Kindle. It is on Kindle.

Eric Schumacher 15:36
Someone listening, who publishes books needs to pick up responding bride and get it back out there and print because it's a it's a valuable resource from a good from a good thinker.

And I loved what you said,
about Danielle being a hero.

In that she had the courage to get up and do what needs to be done. That's such a beautiful picture of courage being holding yourself up with a sink and brushing your teeth. Yeah. And often, I think when we think of valuable women, we think only women who are out there in the world, doing big things that are celebrated by millions. Can you just unpack more about what it means to be faithful? Like didn't Danielle was faithful.

Evan Welcher 16:35
I think one of the beauties of Christianity is that Jesus taught us that all people have value, regardless of what we're able to produce, regardless of what we're making, what manufacturing, what kind of impact we're making upon the Lord. And to be faithful in small things was something that Danielle excelled at, especially after the cancer. And I have these, these images seared in my mind of, of how much she valued other people, that even when she was quarantined into the hospital, because of the blood cancer that she had, she had auto immune deficiency. And anytime she had a fever, she would be in the hospital for two weeks or three weeks. So we spent an enormous amount of time in the hospital. And she would be there writing cards to our elderly chatons from the church,

just to encourage them.

And so you think about someone who's immensely sick, who shut up in a hospital room. And, and taking time to write cards to encourage other people. And that was one of the things we found after she died was that she had just boxes of cards ready for any occasion, you know, birthdays or people, other people who are sick or people

locked into their house and

her life was planned out in such a way to encourage other people because she saw their value. Wow.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 18:24
So I mean, thank you for sharing that with us. I wonder.

Eric Schumacher 18:33
Hey, friends, this is Eric. Elise and I are so thankful for the responses that we have received to the worthy podcast. We've heard from so many of you, who have told us these conversations are helpful, thought provoking, and even refreshing. The episode that you're listening to today, was recorded before the nationwide coronavirus outbreak in response. And as you know, this time has brought a few changes to how the world works. One result has been the cancellation of many speaking engagements because

people can't gather. And those cancellations have resulted in the loss of important income. And while we are not suffering in the ways that so many may be, we do pay the costs associated with the production of this podcast. And while those expenses are not excessive, they are significant in a time of lost income and uncertainty. We have another 14 episodes left to record and we have the funds to produce those. However, we feel that if we're unable to raise consistent funding for future episodes, we may need to suspend the podcast. That said, if you would like to support us at any amount, we've set up a Patreon account So that you can do so visited@patreon.com slash the worthy book. And there you can schedule recurring donations of any amount from \$1 to \$50. And you'll also find some gifts and rewards at various amounts of donation, as our way of saying thank you for your generosity. Again, that's patreon.com slash the worthy book, you can also find a link to it on our webpage worthy book dot o RG, or in the show notes. Thank you again for listening, for being our friends, and for joining us in these important conversations.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 20:44

I wonder if you can maybe address the, you know what you learned. And I hate to even say that if you can address the things that you now understand about the worth the value of people, of women of people, as you interact now, in your church, with, with women and men who are suffering, I mean, I'm not not trying to say okay, so tell us all the wonderful things. I mean, that's not what I'm saying. But there is a wisdom and a depth that I'm hearing from you that I would love to share with our listeners if, if that's something you'd like to do.

Evan Welcher 21:36

Yes, yes. One of the things that we're bad at in the American church is seeing people as being valuable regardless of what they contribute, or the produce. And that's sadly true even in church. Yeah. And so you have all sorts of people who shuffle into Sunday service, many are heartbroken, many are world weary. Many are not in a position where they can lead Sunday school, or clean the building or do much of anything. And in our Go Go church world, oftentimes, those people aren't seen as valuable. You know, even if they can't throw anything into the play, or they can't serve, or they can't go and do things for the church, are they a value. And one of the things that churches need to realize is that our job is to proclaim the good news of Christ to all people. No matter where they are in life, no matter how broken or hurt, they may feel, no matter how much they can contribute. One of the things that our churches can do better is that we all need to slow down and take time to hear people's stories, just to sit down and pray with people to visit people in the nursing homes or in the hospitals to comfort people. And, you know, Eugene Peterson talks a lot about this how often, ministry becomes the enemy of ministry, the church, get in the church to be successful, or whatever that means, becomes the enemy, enemy of being Christ like. And so we view all people to be a value, we need to spend time with them. Because time is not money. Time is eternity.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 23:30

Say that again.

Evan Welcher 23:32

Time is not money, time is eternity.

We are preparing people for death and resurrection. And so the the message of the church, that Christ has been crucified for our sins so that we can have eternal life is the very most important thing. Yes. And to communicate that, and to make people believe that and have that be felt by our actions as the most important and valuable thing we're going to do in any given day.

Eric Schumacher 24:01

Amen. I hope I hope our listeners backup the podcast about three minutes and just listen to that all again. Because we really need we really need to hear that I remember sitting in Christian doctrine class at seminary, Rushmore was my professor. And he was talking about the worth of people and I remember him saying, you know, in our churches, we who do we invite to give a testimony. We invite the woman who wins the Miss America pageant, but we won't invite the woman with down syndrome who bags groceries down at the grocery store, right? And, and that just struck me the ways that we value people based on how the world celebrates them, and not who they are as the image of God and people being redeemed to conform to the image of Christ. You know, I think one of the ways that that can play itself out is in how a church chooses and treats its pastor. I don't know all that about your history at your church. But I have to commend your church, there must be something wonderful in how they're grasping the gospel in that they've been willing to walk through so much with you. I know that in talking to friends, and churches, as they look for a pastor, sometimes it's spoken, sometimes it's unspoken, that what they want is a married pastor with children. And the idea is, that will attract for us, couples with kids, because that makes all the ministries sort of overflow. And so the pastor is valued for his attractational qualities. You got you were pastoring there and you're single, and then you got married, and then you lost a wife. And then you get married. They've been through with you through so many stages. And I just wonder, what would you say, to churches out there about how to care for their pastor and his wife, as his wife is dying, or after she's died?

Evan Welcher 26:17

Our church was so wonderful to me throughout all those seasons of life. What's amazing about our church is how incredibly ordinary it is. It is just an ordinary small, regular, small town church, and we're not out there making the news. We're not out there with explosive growth that, you know, pastors read about and maybe secretly are not so secretly covet. Yeah, we're just a group of ordinary people trying to see the face of Christ. The beauty, though, of having a church with maybe more older people than people find desirable is that there were a lot of people in my church who had had cancer, and then a lot of people who lost a spouse. Yeah. And it's incredible. What people have buried in their past that you don't even know about, you know, I remember one guy. He had cared for his wife through scleroderma, his first wife until she had passed, and that was years of caretaking. And I had gone to church with him for a number of years and had no idea. And so when I became a caretaker for my first life, he was right there. He knew what it was like. He understood. And so my church was incredibly wonderful. Like I said, we spent a lot of time in the hospital. And so for the first portion of Danielle's cancer, I, they allowed me to just stay at the hospital with her. And so I slept at the hospital, I spent all day with her, and I would prepare my sermons and, and drive back to Glenwood, the hospitals in Omaha. So I drive back to Glenlyn and preach. As her cancer got worse, they eventually just let me stay with her. And we found guest preachers. And so we had preachers from shout out to a mass Bible Church in Omaha and we have a Yeah, guys from Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, they drove up here drove up and preached and there were just a lot of churches who helped fill our pulpit while I was taking care of my wife. And after Danielle went home to be with the Lord, the churches just incredibly understanding. And, and I did and so many different ways. And they let me have a sabbatical.

Probably a year after she passed,

and they did fundraisers for medical bills, and they were just a salt of the earth and so many ways.

Eric Schumacher 29:13

It's one wonderful. That's wonderful. Tell us a little bit.

Just about how you and Rachel ended up meeting and getting married.

Evan Welcher 29:24

Rachel and I met on Twitter.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 29:27

Yeah. Twitter's I was so

Eric Schumacher 29:30

excited when that happened.

Unknown Speaker 29:33

You know,

Evan Welcher 29:34

yeah, as much as a dumpster fire as Twitter is, you gotta admit some good things that come out of it. And so hey, are booking out of it? That's right. Yeah. Whenever I'm tempted just to dump Twitter. I'm like, my whole family as a result of Twitter's and the providence of the Lord but he used Twitter, ironically enough. So Rachel was, she's an author. She's a writer and we're both writing about the dark suffering, it sounds so morbid, right? Like, what brings people together? our mutual suffering?

Eric Schumacher 30:09

Yeah. Well, she writes to funerals than Easter at the time.

Evan Welcher 30:13

She was working on it. Okay. Yeah, yep. But she had a little book of poetry called bluetarp. Good shows her first book of poetry. And it's a lot of suffering and loss in there. And she was writing for like the gospel coalition. And so somehow we had read each other's stuff. And we just started talking. And I was a total liar and said, I wasn't interested. And

I totally want you

Unknown Speaker 30:41

to play it.

Evan Welcher 30:46

Well, and one of the things I knew, from my being a widow, or widower is that I was there's so much dignity and worth and being single, single, but I knew from my own life experience that I thrive when I have someone to take care of and, and when I can live with someone who loves me. And so for a lot of widowers, you know, they might just say, Lord gave and the Lord took away and I'm good. But when I was getting to know Rachel, I knew this is someone who I can build a life with. We could be happy together. And, and that's one of the things we talked a lot about, which is, in certain streams of theology, there's this whole thing against being happy. And almost as if you earn your salvation through being unhappy, and being we had both been through so much pain and suffering, and we're just kind of like, let's serve God and be happy together. And yeah, and so one of the things I wrote in our vows was, was, let's not be too stupid, to be happy, or don't be is to be happy, something like that. That's great.

Eric Schumacher 32:05

Can you

win in whatever degree appropriate, just sort of feel, fill our listeners in on what some of Rachel's suffering was?

Evan Welcher 32:17

Rachel was abandoned by her first husband, he left the faith, and as a first Corinthians seven type of situation. And he divorced her. And so that was the incredible traumatic portion of her life. And everything that everything that would go along with that, you know, she met her ex husband at a Christian University, and she did everything you're supposed to do, right? Yeah. The parents involved and sought Godly counsel and prayed about it. And her life did not go the way she thought it would go. And for a lot of people, their suffering is compounded by people making promises that God never promised that if you do, yes, if you do it right, your life will go smoothly. And for both me and Rachel, you know, we did what we're supposed to do, and our lives still ended up in a place we never thought it would go. Right. And so, one of the things we have that we talk about, is this idea. And it might be snobby. I don't know, but that there are puppies in the world, people who really haven't been through the wringer. And then there's the world weary.

Yeah.

And one of the things that drew us together, so we had both suffered, by the grace of God, we were clinging to the cross, we, neither one of us had abandoned the faith. And that's all grace. We're not taking credit for that. But we found that attractive about each other. That Okay, this is someone who has suffered and still clung to the role of Jesus for dear life.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 34:06

So, you know, I asked you to talk about Danielle and to honor her value. I wonder if as we're starting to wrap up our time now, if you'd like to take a moment and and honor Rachel

Evan Welcher 34:28

I would yet I have to just staring at me, right?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 34:33

Yeah, so you better work it out. Man. You know, you better do a good job and say everything you're supposed to say okay.

Evan Welcher 34:41

I value Rachel and love Rachel because she loves the Lord first and foremost, and has clung to the cross or deep adversity. And she still finds joy every day. She finds joy in the most mundane things that other people take for granted.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 35:00

And she's giggling, I can hear in the background.

Evan Welcher 35:05

And she, she chooses, each and every day to worship the Lord through the joy of his creation and, and the joy of literature and the joy of writing and the joy of cooking. She is enthusiastic about things. And so she remembers each day to find, to find joy in the land of the living, to find the goodness of the Lord. And that is, manna from heaven for me.

Eric Schumacher 35:38

That is great. That's, that is so beautiful. And I think one of the things that comes through and both of you, I just hear it, in what you've said with us today. And I see it in your tweets and your articles. And your book is there's a joy that you and Rachel both grasp, that I think is coming out of your suffering. There's there's a happiness that's deep and not flippin. And I love that. And I love how you are always pointing people towards Resurrection Day are blessed hope. We're getting towards the end of the of our time. There's one thing I want to bring up. It's kind of a deep topic. But Rachel is divorced. And with biblical, you know, biblical grounds. She's free to remarry in many churches, a a woman who has been divorced, whether or not she was abandoned by her husband, or a man that's divorced is sort of labeled with the Scarlet D, I guess you would call it. Mm hmm. And in overt or subtle ways, their value is diminished. What would you say to the women listening, who have been divorced? Or to the men listening, who are interested in a divorced woman who loves Jesus, but they have this weird hesitancy about the fact that she's divorced? What would you say to them?

Evan Welcher 37:28

I would say first and foremost, that God loves you.

We do have value, that you're not damaged goods. And I would say to the men, don't be too stupid to be happy. Amen. You know that I can't put it any more simpler than that, that you? You should seek the Lord in the scriptures. You should seek the wisdom of your church. And you shouldn't be afraid to be happy. Hmm.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 38:04

That is good. That's, that's really good. Thank you.

Eric Schumacher 38:09

Yeah. Thanks for being with us, Evan. Where can people go to find out more about you or find your your writings?

Evan Welcher 38:17

Oh, you know, it's Lance and I kind of just want to fade away into obscurity. That's one of the beautiful things about having a book out of print. You can't take yourself too seriously. Yeah. But I'm on Twitter, Evan Walter.

Eric Schumacher 38:34

Yeah, look him up. look him up. Well, thank you for joining us today with our guest, Evan welcher. It has been a delight. And I do think that this, this episode will be helpful to a lot of people. And so if you're listening, we hope that you will, will share this and in the hopes of encouraging and blessing your neighbor. Join us next time. As we interview our guest, Rachel welcher Evans wife, and I fully expect it to be just as much of a blessing.

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