

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

Hosts: Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

Episode 19 — Guest: Nancy Guthrie

Date Aired: June 8, 2020

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 on the value of women in the church, home, and society. We won't always agree on everything. But we do agree that God is glorious, the Bible is true, and women are valuable; and respectful conversation on this topic is essential in our day.

Hi there, and thanks for joining us today on the Worthy Podcast. Today we have a very special guest with us. Eric Schumacher and I are very happy to welcome our dear friend Nancy Guthrie. And Nancy is a woman that I would say is truly a woman of worth, and she's a dear friend of mine as well. Let me tell you a little bit about Nancy Guthrie in case you live under a rock and have never heard from her or about her. Nancy is the author of numerous books, many I've worked through and Bible study in my own church. I have some of them sitting right in front of me on my desk, and she has videos that go along with them and are really wonderful for women's Bible study. She writes books that reflect her compassion for hurting people and her passion for applying God's Word to real life. And she is a real life theologian. She knows how to do that. Her desire to grow in her understanding of God's word has prompted her to pursue graduate work in theological studies, but don't think, "Oh, she's somebody I'm not going to be able to understand what she's talking about," when I say that. She's very, very down to earth and really knows how to take the word and make it real for those of us who are walking this path with her. She and her husband David host weekend respite retreats for couples who have faced the death of child. She speaks regularly at conferences nationally and internationally and is a regular contributor to The Gospel Coalition, include hosting the Help Me Teach the Bible Podcast. Nancy and her husband make their home in Nashville, Tennessee, where, according to Nancy, life is less about professional pursuits than about the ordinary aspects of being a wife, mother, friend, follower of Jesus, with close to watch emails to answer and a friend to listen to. So having said all that, Nancy, welcome.

Nancy Guthrie 3:29

Thank you so much, Elyse and Eric. I'm really grateful to get to spend this time with you talking about whatever you want to talk about.

Eric Schumacher 3:39

Be careful what you wish for.

Nancy Guthrie 3:41

I better take that back.

Eric Schumacher 3:43

You know, Elyse,

Elyse Fitzpatrick 3:46

Yeah, you never know where we're gonna go with this. But anyway, we wanted to have Nancy on for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that she's a good friend, and she's a woman who loves the Bible and loves to teach the Bible and loves biblical theology. So Nancy, why don't you tell us a little bit

about yourself for the people who don't know you. And then let's talk about your interests and the things you're trying to accomplish, particularly among Christian women.

Unknown Speaker 4:18

Certainly. Well, gosh. Where do I start? I am someone who grew up in the church. I mean, my earliest memories involve being in my Sunday school class, you know, as a little three or four year old and being taught the Bible, for which I am so deeply grateful. You know, my family was at church on Sunday morning and Sunday night and Wednesday night, and you know, for a week of Vacation Bible School in the summer, and so that was very important. My grandfather with us was a Southern Baptist preacher. Today, we would call him a church planter. Although, I don't know if they used that term back in his day when he planted churches in places like Barstow, CA and up in Washington State. So I grew up as someone who knew and loved the Bible. I went to a Christian College, John Brown University in Siloam Springs, AR, and got a job in Christian publishing right out of college in Waco, Texas, at a Christian publisher called Word Publishing. And I guess I'm one of those fortunate people who seem, in my very first job out of college, to just land in my niche. I loved that job. I was immediately working with, you know, some of the leading Christian communicators of that day. And, you know, I had no idea... None of us have any idea where our lives are headed, you know. I find it interesting when I talk to young women who kind of think that they can chart out a course for their life, to become what they want to be at that point in their life. And, you know, none of us really can do that. But at this... I'm 57, so I can look back now and see how God has been preparing me my whole life to do what I'm doing now. And so certainly one of those ways was, at a young age, working up close with a lot of people handling God's word and working out how to do ministry and be in the public in that way. But by being up close, one thing, I mean, is that I saw both sides of it, you know. I learned from incredibly good examples, and I learned from not good examples. The up close exposure, you know, it sometimes could have been disillusioning, but you know, I just I learned from it all. And a lot of those relationships continue to this day and have served me well. So I worked in Christian publishing for a long time, and never thought I would write a book. I remember people used to ask me, you know, "Are you going to write a book someday?" And I would always say to them, "I will never know enough about one topic to write a whole book about it." And...

Elyse Fitzpatrick 7:11

Wait a minute. Wait. I'm interrupting you for a minute. How many books have you written, Nancy?

Unknown Speaker 7:17

Well, just yesterday, I got four boxes delivered of my most recent book to my garage. And I told my husband, David, "I should probably count how many this is because somebody is going to ask me," and here today you asked me. I think it's 26 or 27 at this point. Yeah. So a lot, a lot. Yeah. But that just means I have a lot of words, and I won't shut up. I think that's what that means. But I mean, just, you know, at that point in my life, I just really couldn't imagine that I would ever have that much to say. And so I'm as surprised as anybody to be able to tell you that I have now written that many books.

Eric Schumacher 7:57

What's your favorite book you've written?

Nancy Guthrie 8:00

Oh, that's not fair. Can I say two?

Eric Schumacher 8:05

Yeah, yeah.

Unknown Speaker 8:06

All right. So one would probably be my book "Hearing Jesus Speak into Your Sorrow." Which you know, a lot of my first books came out of the experience my husband and I have had in that we have a living son, Matt, who is 29, and then we also had a daughter and a son, Hope and Gabriel, who each lived just six months. My daughter Hope was born in 1998 with a rare metabolic disorder called Zellweger syndrome and lived for just six months. And then after taking surgical steps to prevent another pregnancy, I got pregnant anyway. And so then, in 2001, our son Gabriel was born, and he too lived six months. And so my first book was written out of that experience. It was my walk through the book of Job, trying to figure out, "How does a godly person lose so much and question God boldly in the midst of loss, and yet emerged from that loss with a life described as good like Job's was?" Because at that point, I thought my life will never be good again. And so that was my first book that came out on what would have been my son Gabe's first birthday in July of 2002. But it was probably 6,7,8 years later that I wrote "Hearing Jesus Speak into Your Sorrow," and it came more out of lingering questions out of that experience I had to get answers to and some of the mistaken or lacking answers I was beginning to see people get handed in that situation. So I took 11 statements of Jesus that I think are often misunderstood or misapplied and sought to understand them in a deeper way. So I think the reason why that's one of my favorite books is it combines this big part of who I am in terms of the sorrow, the loss of two of my children, and speaking from the ability that gives me to speak into the lives of hurting people; but it combines it with this theological side of me that has questions and looks for answers. And so you know, things like, you know, that book has things like, Did God caused this, or did He just allow it? Can I really expect God to protect me? or How do I deal with the promises of protection in the Bible? What difference do promises of resurrection make that seems so far out, now? Do they have any ability to really change my sense of grief, now? Where do I find what I need to forgive people who've hurt me at the lowest point of my life? Why didn't Jesus say yes to my prayers? So those kinds of questions... So I like that book because it's that it's... In some ways, I think there are two sides of me and that some people who are familiar with my ministry know one side or the other. They they know either the "grief girl" Nancy, or they know the "Christ in the Old Testament, biblical theology" Nancy. And so anyway, I suppose that book, I feel like brings together a couple of those sides. That's certainly one of my favorites. And then the other one would be my book that came out a couple of years ago, "Even Better than Eden."

Elyse Fitzpatrick 11:29

Yeah, we were just gonna ask you about that, so go.

Nancy Guthrie 11:33

I like that one. I... You know, when I... I don't know if this is right to say or not, but when you've written a lot of books, like you and I both have Elyse, you know, you just think "Okay, so where am I making a real contribution?" And I feel like that book has the potential to make a real contribution to create a broad understanding of biblical theology, especially among women in the church. And I'm actually a woman on a mission. I have a mission, and that is to infiltrate women's Bible study in the local church with biblical theology. So much of women's Bible study, as I observe, it, can be very felt needs driven, very celebrity oriented, very emotional, very inspirational. And I want to do my part, I've been seeking to do my part, to help make women's Bible study in the local church, instead, theologically and biblically driven and Christ-centered instead of me-centered. And so, to the degree that "Even Better than Eden," causes a lot of women to go, "Aha! That's something I've never understood about the Bible," and pushes them to become more curious about the Bible and helps them to love Christ more, as they see Him from a number of different angles, because I tell the story of the Bible from basically nine different themes, or

from nine different angles: the beauty and the necessity and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. And so to the degree that helps them love Him more, that thrills my soul.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 13:41

So I want to just have you define biblical theology for those who might be listening who don't know what that is.

Nancy Guthrie 13:53

Yeah. Well, and it is used a number of different ways, so I... My working definition would be: It's a way of approaching and understanding the Bible that understands that it is one story about the... centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ, or one story that helps us to see what God is doing in His world through Christ. And that also, that the divine author of this book, the Bible, has written into His book a number of themes, just like any good author does. They have themes in their their book, and themes in a book are to help us get the important message. And so my contention is that as women grow in their ability to recognize major biblical themes that the divine author has written into His book, we're better able to get the divine author's intended message. It keeps us from making the Bible mostly about what it's not really about, and it helps us to major on what God intends for us to major on in terms of what He's communicating to us through His Word.

Eric Schumacher 15:17

Yeah, man. See, that's one of the things I really appreciate about you. I don't know where I first came into contact with your material. I remember, for a long time, respecting you and knowing you are out there. And I remember picking up your "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus" and "Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross," which you edited with readings from contemporary and historical theologians. And then I remember, just being so thrilled when I got a copy -- I think I got a preview copy of "The Promised One" - - and what you were doing in that series to point people to Christ in the Old Testament. And then at some point, I got a copy of "What Grieving People Wish You Knew about What Really Helps (and What Really Hurts)," and I may have heard you talk telling your story on the radio. And at some point I thought, "Wait, wait, this is all the same woman." And like you just mentioned, there's the grieving and there's the biblical theology. I love that you're sort of a renaissance woman who was in all these different places. I wonder if you would say a word about how biblical theology as you've just described it: one story centered on the personal work of Christ. How does biblical theology help us in our suffering?

Nancy Guthrie 16:38

Oh, this is so important, so important.

You know, no one emerges from significant suffering without asking the question "Why?" And I'm no exception to that. And so in the midst of my loss, as I was trying... You know, here's one thing about that question, though. A lot of people look for a philosophical answer, or they look for a circumstantial answer. They want to see something in their circumstances that they can point to and say, "Okay, this is why God did this or whatever" My search became a scriptural search, looking for a scriptural answer. And I found the answer in Genesis 3:15. Now, I'm someone who grew up... I was surrounded by a lot of Bible, but you know, just a more generally evangelical approach to the Bible. Nobody ever told me how important that verse was in the Bible. I didn't understand it. But in my search for the answer to "Why has this happened?" I look there and I look at this curse that was put on the the serpent and then in Genesis 3:17, the curse that is put on the ground. And in between, the way this curse is going to impact the the woman and the man. You know, it's it says that there's going to be pain in childbearing for her.

And, you know, that's not just the pain of labor and delivery. That's the pain of being a sinner birthing sinners in this world and parenting sinners. It's the pain of infertility and miscarriage and stillbirth and birth defects. And so, I mean, no one who's ever been a parent would ever want to argue with pain in childbearing. That's the reality of it in a fallen world. And so that was kind of a foundational place for me to get an answer to that question, "Why?" And, you know, as I continued, looking through the Scriptures, I mean, it's amazing to me how many places in the Scriptures the writers actually use the words "This happened so that" which is like... It's almost like you asked the passage, "Why did this happen?" And then they're answering you, "This happened so that..." And over and over again, I began to discover really good purposes for which God in His sovereign plans and purpose is not just able to but intends to and can use suffering in our lives to accomplish good purposes. And that just begin to reshape my thinking -- and I suppose and my feeling -- about suffering. And, you know, the foundational thing I think, is to understand, okay, why has it happened? It's because this world doesn't work right anymore. And that while God didn't curse men and women, we feel the impact of living in a world under a curse. We can't escape it. You know, and when I look that verse, what I see is that sin has infiltrated the creation so pervasively that it has impacted even my genetic code.

So if you ask me, why have my husband David and I had two children born with a metabolic disorder, I will say to you, because of the impact of the curse of sin on this world. And I guess one way that that has maybe driven me toward biblical theology is the story doesn't stop there, though, because that's just the very beginning of the story. And actually, the rest of the Bible is an outworking of God, accomplishing what is necessary to rid this world of this curse and to lead us into a better garden. And so for example, at my biblical theology workshops that I lead, as I'm training women, how to trace a particular theme, maybe we'll talk about this particular theme of offspring that begins right there at Genesis 3:15. With this statement, I'm going to put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring, he will bruise your head, you will bruise his heel. And as you begin to trace that curse, and you work your way through the Old Testament... I mean, you get to the very end of the Old Testament, and the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, ends with a word that could be translated curse, and you're like, "Well, this is not getting better." But then you turn the page, and then this one comes into the world. And in Galatians, we read that on the cross, He took the curse upon Himself. And even in the vivid pictures of it, we see a crown of thorns being pressed into his head. Well, back there in Genesis 3:15, with that -- or 3:17 -- the impact of the curse on the ground says thorns and thistles are going to grow. So if you didn't believe the Word, you could see it in pictures that He entered into this world and took the curse upon Himself so that you and I can be free of the curse and can enter into this ultimate blessing of a new garden. And when we get to Revelation 21, we read these incredible words. And therefore, then no longer will anything be a curse.

And you know, it's one thing to read that because you're just reading through Revelation, but it's a whole other thing to begin that story and feel the hopelessness throughout the Old Testament of ever escaping, being bound to and subject to that curse. And then feel the hope as Jesus Christ comes into this world and takes the curse upon himself. And then read Romans 8, where it says that all creation is groaning. Long... We're longing for the day when all creation will be set free from futility and experience, in a sense, the resurrection of the sons of God, that the whole earth is going to experience this resurrection newness. And that's the day when we'll be able to say no longer is anything accursed. And I think... I'm convinced, you know, that so much of our ministry to grieving people can be very therapeutic, but I guess I'm one for saying it has to be theological because you have to understand these things to be able to grab hold of solid hope. Hope is not this vague, "Everything's gonna turn out okay and get better." Hope is centered. It has... Hope has a weight, a solidity, a substance. And these things, these promises of our own resurrection and the renewal of all things, these are the substance of our

hope, and these are the things that we can hand to grieving people. And until they feed on them, chew on them, think them through, it's very difficult for them to escape the despair of this world.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 24:45

Right. You know? Okay, so first of all, Nancy...

Nancy Guthrie 24:51

Yes?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 24:54

Your teaching gift that we just heard is such a blessing. And I mean, I've heard you so many times and read you, and, boy, I'm so thankful for your teaching gift. So thank you. I really trust that everybody who just heard what you have to say, will avail themselves of all of your resources because you're on fire my sister, and I'm so thankful for you. And as I've read Scripture, and, you know, every genealogy is and he died and he died and then he died and he died. And our only hope, our only hope is the one who died and now lives.

Nancy Guthrie 25:55

Yes, that's it.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 25:58

And, you know, I... We're getting close to the end of our time. Rats. But you know, I... what I want you to do is, you know, I want you to talk about why this message is so important for women. Let me let me say something first to our listening audience before we get to that. You know, thank you for listening in audience. We hope you'll consider supporting us on Patreon. We hope you'll consider subscribing, reviewing, and sharing whenever you subscribe. We need your help to enable our podcasts to keep going. So there, I've done our commercial. Please consider it. So Nancy, why is this particularly important for women? And why do you think that this is not the message women are getting? And I know it makes you as crazy as it makes me to know that there are certain books that may be encouraging in some ways to women -- and I would be glad for any encouragement women in particular get. But why is this... Why is this not the broad message, do you think?

Nancy Guthrie 27:19

We've become so pragmatic in the church. Right? And that means that so often people are looking for something -- and I'm putting air quotes around this, even though you can't see me -- "practical." They want something practical, right? And I'll hear some leaders sometimes "Well I need something that you know, my people can use on Monday." And I get all of that, but I just tell you what, the deepest need we all have, is to -- I'll use John Piper's words -- "see and savor Jesus Christ." And there is nothing that is more practical than to equip women to see Him in his fullness and to become more enamored with Him, to recognize how dependent they are on Him. You know, David and I were just praying over lunch before we started this interview, and you know, here we are in the middle of Covid-19. And we're all finding ourselves, you know, a little unnerved, and we all feel a little bit helpless. And perhaps more dependent on the one who upholds the universe with the power of his hands like never before. And just as we were praying, I just was having that thought. I was just like, "This is good. This is good." Because the truth is, we are always all that needy. We are always all that needy, but we just, especially us modern Western Christians, we're able to fool ourselves into thinking that we're in control of our destiny, and we're in control of our security and our safety and our future. And, you know, the blessing inside what certainly is an impact of the curse right now, is that it is hopefully bringing more of us to our

knees to confess to Him our... maybe our failures in the past to live in light of our dependency upon Him and to ask Him that, you know, once people start getting better and the case number start going down, that that strong sense we have today of need for Him to guide, protect, to work in his world accomplishing His purposes, that that will not be diminished. And so I don't know. I got off track, maybe with your question there.

Eric Schumacher 30:33

That's great.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 30:35

That's great. You know, I... That's.. In a prayer time I was having yesterday, it really came home to me that... And I would have said to you, "Hey, Nancy, we're finite. We're not in control. We are..." You know, I mean, I would have said that to you a month ago...

Nancy Guthrie 30:59

Of course.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 31:01

Because I believe it theologically. I've never felt it the way I feel it right now. And that I see that I need to start approaching, first of all, repenting of my pride and hubris that would say, okay... And you know, you and I both schedule stuff way out in advance, you know. How many times have I ever actually when I scheduled a conference said, like... James tells me I need to say, I will...

Nancy Guthrie 31:33

If the Lord wills.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 31:35

If the Lord wills. And forgetting that I'm a vapor. I'm a vapor who is here today, and how dare I say, without saying, "Deo volente. The Lord wills," without saying that about everything I'm planning on doing. And you know, that I need to begin to approach these days, my life, with less hubris, and more love for my neighbor, particularly, as I interact with different neighbors who are responding to this in ways that I would disagree with. --- people being angry, people having fights about packages of toilet paper at the grocery store -- and not to look at them and say, "What's wrong with you?" but to love my neighbor and understand these are people who, for the first time in their life, have faced something that's completely beyond their control. And how, how important that is.

Nancy Guthrie 32:57

And have no sense that there is one who is in control, in whom they can put their trust. Even if they lose their life, that they could know that they could lose their life and yet not perish. And I think the other way, I'm feeling challenged, Elyse is I think about interactions... I mean, here I am this person who goes around teaching the Bible, but I just really wonder, when I have the opportunity to interact with some of those people who are afraid, I'm saying to myself, "Are you prepared to share the hope that you have within you?" And because never before have people perhaps been aware of facing their mortality in a way that never before. And that means openness to the Gospel, and so I'm really thinking to myself, you know, I'm thinking about like... Just yesterday, I was walking in my neighborhood and passed a few different neighbors. And as I passed them, I just thought, "Well, do they know Christ? And am I willing to look foolish to ask them that question as we talk about this virus? To talk about an eternal reality."

Eric Schumacher 34:10

Cause what we have right now is a bunch of people... We don't know what's going to happen. And we haven't been through something like this. We're facing our own mortality, and this is where biblical theology comes in. Not to be trite, but we really do know the end of the story. Yes, we know there is a world that will be under the reign of Christ, and He will raise us to reign with Him. And all sickness and sadness and fears are gonna be wiped away. And...

Elyse Fitzpatrick 34:39

Nothing accursed.

Eric Schumacher 34:41

Yeah, yeah. Amen. That'll be good.

Nancy Guthrie 34:44

Nothing unclean will ever enter it. Ah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 34:47

Think of that.

Eric Schumacher 34:48

Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 34:49

Think of that. Well, I can't believe it, but our time is gone. Nancy, my friend, we love you.

Nancy Guthrie 35:02

I love you, too.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 35:03

We value and cherish you. I'm so thankful for your voice. Keep speaking.

Eric Schumacher 35:10

Amen.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 35:11

May God grant us all... May God grant us all the humility and love for neighbor to share the Gospel now, like we never have before because just knowing how terrified people are around us. Be well, my friend,

Nancy Guthrie 35:32

You too, my friends. Thank you. In fact, do you remember the very first thing I ever said to you, Elyse?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 35:38

I'll tell you what I remember. I remember you and I were standing, I think it was at a Crossway booth someplace, and I thought what you said to me... I said to you something like.. well, we were getting our picture taken, and I said, Suck it in." And you said "I already am" or something like that.

Nancy Guthrie 35:59

No.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 36:00
What did you say?

Nancy Guthrie 36:01
I said, "Could we be friends?" And so thank you for saying yes.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 36:10
Yes. And what's really wonderful is, we will be eternally. And a day is going to come sooner, maybe rather than later. We don't know. When you and I'll be sitting around in the New Jerusalem and chatting, and our Savior will walk up, and we'll say Lord, we were just talking about you. And he'll say I brought lunch. So I love you, my friend.

Nancy Guthrie 36:39
Love you too.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 36:40
Be safe. And thank you all to all of our listeners. Thank you for being with us today. Let me remind you again, if you can support us on Patreon, we really need your help. And we pray that you would continue to spread the word about the worth of our Savior who has made us worthy.

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