

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

Hosts: Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

Episode 22 — Guest: Kristi Mair

Date Aired: July 20, 2020

Eric Schumacher 0:00

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.

Hello, and welcome to the worthy podcast. We're glad to have you back with us. And today we have a very special guest from across the pond. as we like to say. I don't know if anyone says that. But I like to say that. Kristi Mair is a speaker and academic and an author. So a triple threat here on the program. She holds a BA in philosophy and theology and an MA in philosophy of religion and ethics. She is formerly with the UCCF, which is the University and College Christian Fellowships. She is currently combining her PhD studies in philosophical theology, with a role as Research and Pastoral Fellow at Oak Hill College in London, which for our American listeners is in the nation of England. Kristi's first book, *More TRUTH: Searching for Certainty in an Uncertain World* - you have to see the title of a book. Now you got to go search for it on Amazon. It looks like the greater than symbol. So this is gonna be an interesting philosopher to have on the program. *More TRUTH: Searching for Certainty in an Uncertain World* that was published by IVP in 2019. And she recently co edited and contributed to her book *Healthy Faith in the Coronavirus Crisis: Thriving During COVID-19*, which was released in early May. And we're recording this in May. And so Kristi will be able to tell us exactly how she is thriving durig COVID. Kristi, welcome to the podcast.

Kristi Mair 3:11

Thanks so much. Thanks. It's so good to be with you.

Eric Schumacher 3:14

Yeah, it's good to have you here. So how did you and I first meet? Twitter, right?

Kristi Mair 3:20

I think it must have been Yeah, Twitter. You were promoting worthy? I probably said something like this sounds great. When is it out? That's right, because it has a later release date in the UK than in the US.

And you very kindly sent me a copy of it in the post, which coincided with my return from speaking at a UK campus based mission week. So it was kind of like, ah, praise the Lord what an encouragement to find this on my doorstep after having done that.

Eric Schumacher 3:49

I think I talked to you about sending you a copy of the book. And then I had to set up a UK Amazon account. I didn't know you were gone. And so I didn't I didn't hear back to me. So I had to stalk you I think on your campus, college, wherever you're at someplace, you have an office. And so I sat there and thought, well, someone's gonna get this book.

Kristi Mair 4:13

Oh, I had no idea about the backstory. Thank you so much.

Eric Schumacher 4:16

So I'm a professional internet stalker. That shouldn't concern any of the women at all. No, no, I don't stalk people on the Internet. I send them free books. So tell us a little bit just about who you are and your story of faith and how you got to where you're at right now.

Kristi Mair 4:43

Ah, gosh, well, I'm actually originally from Hungary. I was born in Hungary and all my family are between Hungary and Romania. I moved to the UK when I was about six or seven. My parents divorced when I was quite young, and my mom remarried. And he adopted me, hence Mair, Scottish last name. And very sadly, when I was about 10, he went to post a letter and he just died on the way to the post this letter. And I remember all the medics kind of being in the lounge and my mom kind of just saying, you know, sit down Kristi, I need to tell you that Daddy's now with Jesus. And up till that point, I think I had seen God as a kind of a person that you talk to when you've been naughty. So you know, you go and say your prayers at that the end of the day, but I didn't really see the real difference that knowing Jesus really made. So at the age of 10, when my mum said, He's now a Jesus, I just thought, oh, what does that actually mean? And I guess that there are life and death kind of implications. So I think that started, but it didn't start my journey of faith, but it very much put fire in me in wanting to know more about who this God is and what he's like. And I had so many questions. And I was just very angry, actually, for a long time. I'm probably very similar to a lot of the militant atheists that were around 10 years ago. If there's a good God, how could he let a, not even how could he let but how could he orchestrate the death of a 10 year old's Dad, after all, the tragedy that my mom and I have been up to had been, had experienced up

to that point. And, I think I just raged really. I raged for a very long time. I have a very patient mother who listened to a lot of my questions. And I think this is where I think my journey of faith is probably a little bit different in that she was raised in the Catholic Church in, in Hungary, she was a trainee nun for six months. And then she was friends with some Protestant reformed students who kept telling her something else. God cares about the little things that you're going through and started just picking apart some of the dogma and teaching. And one night she - we used to live in this big high rise and communist apartment, block - and she just thought, Well, everything I've built my life upon isn't real and isn't true then I might as well just end it now. What's the point in continuing? And at that moment, she looked out at the stars and everything that her friends have been telling her about the Bible and about the scriptures and about the undoing some of the Catholic guilt that she that she taken upon herself. She said, No, God is real. This is Jesus Christ, who did die for my sins. And so I think what I'm trying to say there is that she didn't didn't really know how to bring me up in the way of the Lord. And so when I was then 10 and having these questions, I think she wasn't quite sure what to do with that, because she had very different questions and a very different upbringing. So I just then started reading a lot of CS Lewis, and I think he showed me there, I think the credibility of the Christian worldview. I'd gone to churches in the UK, you know, that have these kind of Christianity Wxplored seeker groups and Alpha groups, and I just got really annoyed with it, because like, people aren't answering my questions. They're just kind of it, Oh, yeah, that's a really good question. So okay, what's the answer? Help e think this through. And then if they didn't know the answer, they'd just kind of fudge it. I didn't see any kind of epistemological humility in being able to say, Actually, I don't know but I'm sure there is some kind of way through it. So I think that kind of just planted some seeds for me actually, in where I am now in wanting to help people think through the credibility of the Christian worldview, in presenting Christ and in wanting to be faithful to the scriptures. So I see how that's really informed my mission work and my my studies and teaching and pastoral care.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 9:43

That's wonderful. It's really interesting.

Eric Schumacher 9:47

So idid that propel you into philosophy?

Kristi Mair 9:53

Oh, for sure. Yeah, definitely. I think to begin with I saw philosophy as a refuge as an atheist. I thought, well, what can I put my hope in? I can put my hope in my mind and in my reason. That will get me through. But very quickly, I saw that that just eroded me as a human being. Who can you really trust with that level of certainty? I can't even trust myself with that level of certainty. And I'm not actually

that rational. And things like the love that I have for my mom, or that she has to me, I can't put that under a microscope. And I can't prove that. But then what was the alternative? So it was just kind of like, I was a reluctant atheist. But hadn't been presented with the beauty and joy and intellectual kind of displays of the flavor of the gospel in any real way. So yeah, I kind of turned to philosophy as a form of healing. But actually, I think it was it actually served to put me further in chains, which then helped, because then the Lord was able to kind of show me that the shackles can't save you. But that there is a role for philosophy, but I was abusing it. So yeah, I think that that did kind of put me onto that track and thinking, Okay, well, what does it look like to steward our reason well as image bearers, and how can this serve others in their and love and devotion to Christ and telling other people about him?

Eric Schumacher 11:43

So how did you come to faith?

Kristi Mair 11:44

You talk to some people, and they have this amazing moment, either a great epiphany. Or they can nail it down to kind of like an hour and a day. And they can just look back on that. But for me, I think it was, it was a gradual kind of chipping away of the Spirit. And so as I started asking more and more questions about who is Jesus, what has he done I remember, I'd sit at the kitchen table with my mum after after school, and we'd just have a bit of a catch up. And I'd soon start getting very angry about Christians, again, who are hypocrites, and they don't know what they're talking about. And then she just gently tell me about Jesus. And she'd just very gently say, well, that isn't the Jesus I know. And she just kind of share with me one of the encounters with Jesus in the New Testament. And I'd cry. And she'd say, Why you crying? I have absolutely no idea why I'm crying. But it's the ring of truth you know, it was the pull of the Spirit. And I then started reading the Gospels. I read Mark. I remember I stayed up all night, just reading the Gospel of Mark, and being utterly thrilled by it, but also scared by it in the repent and believe. And I think as I read that I was more and more compelled by the person of Jesus. And I can't say I then knew that to be true, but it was like I woke up and everything that had been put in place, just synthesised. I just saw the world differently. And I was like, No, he's my Lord and my Savior. This is my Lord and my God. And here I am; send me. And show me more of your face. So I saw my ugliness. I saw my intellectual pride and with that my intellectual poverty and my spiritual poverty and my real need for real love.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 14:03

And where were you in your studies at that point?

Kristi Mair 14:08

Oh, I was probably between the ages of 15 and 18, 19 I think at that point. So I've gone from like precocious teenager who thinks she knows everything to kind of precocious, an undergraduate who thinks she knows everything. Probably remained that way now. So I was kind of embarking on my undergraduate my BA at that point. And that was where the Cartesian kind of skepticism really undid me and did a lot of damage actually. And then at the university that I was at, but again, that's what's formed and fueled my, my studies now and epistemology.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 14:53

So then, early in your undergraduate work is when you started following Christ. Then you have continued through philosophy and theology track into your masters, and now doing PhD work. What's it been like to be a convinced Christian in philosophy departments?

Kristi Mair 15:19

Oh, it's been it's been tricky. It's been tricky. So I was baptized and confirmed when I was like, 15, 16. And then I was still kind of putting things together up until the age of 18, 19. It's been very difficult, I think it depends on the the academic department, the university department in which you're in. The one that that I was a part of, I think there weren't any, or maybe there was one female philosopher that I knew in the department. But I was only one of two female undergraduate philosophers. And in the theology side of things, I was probably among, in a group about 60 there may have been only about eight of us who are Christians, I think. And so it was easy in the theology side of stuff in some some respects but actually not that many, but in the, in the philosophy departments people didn't get while I was doing the joint degree to start. I think they applied a false kind of standard really. In my dissertation for my philosophy degree, I was looking at the rationality of God, how can we believe and is it rational to actually believe in God and I argued it my first marker gave me a first for it, my second marker gave me a third for it because he didn't like the starting point, which is that God exists. And so it's really interesting in that there is a lot of subjectivity around the area of God's existence, but a lot of it boils down to personal preference. And so they'll use the the intellectual kind of a smoke screen to basically discredit you as a Christian. So it was it was very challenging. I mean, one of my lecturers said to me there is no place whatsoever for Christian philosophy. I don't know why you've chosen to do this. And that's where my local church really was such a support and help to me. It's actually the other way around. You can't do good philosophy unless you've got a good God.

Yeah, it was it was really challenging. But I'm really thankful for it as well, because I think it helped me to think through how to gently and hopefully wisely respond to really sharp criticism. But that was as an

undergraduate. It was interesting. When I became a postgraduate, the climate kind of changed. You kind of earned your first stripes and had a little bit more credibility.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 18:21

Right. So what's your day job?

Kristi Mair 18:26

Yeah. What is the day job? I wish I knew! I am based at Oak Hill Theological College. So work here currently, part time. I teach philosophy at an undergraduate level, master's level. I provide pastoral care for full time female students, and the rest of my time, the other part time I'm doing my doctoral work. And then Oak Hill also released me to speak at evangelistic kind of mission events, either weeks or one off events.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 19:04

And so does that happen frequently for you in the UK?

Kristi Mair 19:11

Yeah, it does. I so I used to work as Eric mentioned, I used to work with UCCF. And that was just such a blessing to me in all sorts of ways. But it meant that it gave me the opportunity to link with groups of Christian students on campuses around the UK. And so they quite regularly invite me to speak at one off kind of outreach events, addressing some of the big objections to the Christian faith, like God and suffering, many religions post truth can we know anything kind of questions. Yeah, so my main time to do that is February when I might do one or two weeks' worth of mission events. This past year I had the privilege of speaking at both Oxford And Cambridge events weeks. And then outside of that I might do one or two here and there either through a local church, or again through a Christian Union kind of setting. So it varies. I try set February side and then do what I can the rest of the year.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 20:21

I guess this is a two part question: what kind of response do you get sort of generally doing evangelistic sorts of things in the UK? And then secondly, what kind of response to you get as a woman? Is there any difference there?

Kristi Mair 20:41

As in response from Christians?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 20:47

Yeah, let's say, as far as doing evangelism in the UK, how receptive are the people generally, not Christians?

Kristi Mair 20:59

Such a good question. I found that, I don't know if experiencing this in the US, but particularly in the wake of new atheism, it's kind of just opened up this kind of spiritual hunger and desire for more, and particularly for students on campuses actually, and is that many are arriving, wanting some kind of connection with transcendence. So most of them are probably doing some kind of yoga or they're spiritually seeking, or they say they're spiritual, but not religious, and practicing mindfulness. You know, that kind of stuff. And so at the moment, I think there's an unprecedented level of openness. Again, I think it's more the whole show me the desirability of the gospel. Show me how this is relevant. And then I'll ask the truth question. So a lot of I think apologetics at the moment on campuses is trying to do just that helps us to see this is this is beautiful, and livable, and relevant. And then the question comes, well, how do we know it's true? And that's quite delightful way around it. So yeah, a great response, actually a number of I think maybe about 20 people from one of the mission weeks that I was involved with, that I know of responded in repentance. So yeah. Aslan's on the move.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 22:41

And then as a woman who is giving public messages, what's the response? I would assume the response from students and people who are not Christians are it's a nothing. But perhaps in the church, there's some pushback. What's the climate like there as far as women speaking publicly, speaking to men?

Kristi Mair 23:09

Yeah, I think it's a little bit mixed. I think even in the public sphere of evangelistic events, there aren't that many women doing it. And so often guests seekers will often kind of ask the question, why aren't there more women? And if that is the way the gospel is being presented to them, then that says a lot about what they can expect from the Christian life, too. So there are people in the UK who would use the argument that if the gospel is presented through a lens of oppression, then that is going to severely

hinder evangelism and church growth. So that actually I think helps in getting some of the more conservative churches who might be more wary of investing in women and helping them to see their...it's not pragmatic. It is theological, but I think they see the need, the immediate need much more. And I've personally, I've been nothing but supported, I think, in my public speaking but often that's been I think because some churches may not have thought through it enough, but they don't know how to argue for the contrary position. They can't tell me why they don't think I shouldn't be doing it. And so then he defaults to well, they didn't really encourage but they'll turn up. They don't know which one's better because then you kind of start second guessing yourself thinking well, should I be doing this or should I not be doing this because you don't really know if I should. But you don't know enough in order to encourage me in this, but you don't know enough to say that shouldn't be doing either. But for most of the church leaders that I've been blessed to know and to be loved by have really wanted to release me in that. But again, I think that shows that there's a real willingness to send and equip women in the mission field, kind of a send you out into the world. But what does it look like for women to be a blessing to the local church first, and being equipped there and then sent out to the world rather than gaining credibility in the mission field and then coming back to the local church? That doesn't seem quite right.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 25:47

Yeah. So in your local church, what is the perspective on women's roles? And are they involved in, I mean, if I went into your church on a Sunday morning, would I see women represented? You know, on the platform or whatever?

Kristi Mair 26:13

I've been at my church for about a year. And so I moved to London - I was in Birmingham, before I moved to London for this job. I was in Birmingham for 13 years. And so I'm still I still feel like quite a newbie at my my church. still kind of getting to know getting to know people and the ropes. But if you were to come in on a Sunday, you'd see women reading the scriptures, and you'd see women praying for the church. I've done both of those things. I see women co leading home groups, you see women being involved in mission in the in the local outreach to homeless people. I've been invited in to speak, at evangelistic events in the church, and very generously my church leader one night, basically just gave over the whole of the evening service to a q&a session, which was just me and him. And he was just kind of fielding questions to me from the floor or questions that they'd gathered in a local cafe during the week. So, yeah, I think women are very, very honored. And their gifts are stewarded well, but I don't know enough about the church to know what it would look like to do to intentionally develop women. But if you're there, and you're kind of already developed, they'll release you to do it.

Eric Schumacher 27:50

So a little bit follow up on that then. So for the the woman who's listening to the podcast right now, and she is, like you very theologically, philosophically, academically minded, and she's thinking about pursuing a degree in philosophy, say, and she's a Christian woman. What would you say to her about the importance of that? And then I'm just curious what you plan to do with your degree. I mean you're using it now, I don't mean to imply that you're not!

Kristi Mair 28:38

I would cheer that woman on and say that is a wonderful desire and an instinct. I would encourage her to get involved in I think one of the things that that really helped me as I pursued my undergraduate studies, and even more so now was making sure that I was part of a local church where I could ask those really hard questions like how does faith and reason kind of go together? You know, I'm being told that Jesus is a myth, being told that the scriptures aren't actually trustworthy, what's historical reliability, this will be manipulated by this guy who collated the scriptures at this point under Constantine, blah, blah. Yes, I think I think probably the theological milieu is probably a little bit different in the States and in the UK, depending on where they were wanting to study. But still, I think the importance of having a good kind of group of friends who you can actually ask those hard questions together kind of pursue biblical reflection and, you know, to steward to biblical truth well is a vital importance. I'd encourage her to get in touch with those who are kind of already doing what she's doing and wanting to do, and ask for a little bit of advice about what their next steps were. And I encourage you to read and to listen. And I think that was what really served me well. I was thinking I wanted to do this not to have a platform, but so that I could listen to Jesus better. And I think I'd encourage you if you're if you're listening to keep listening and putting his word, first and foremost in whatever studies might come next, but keeping that devotional time. I think that's one of the things that I don't know if you found this, but in studying theology, this kind of disconnect between what your profession they're kind of doing, and then your own relationship with the Lord. And that can just grow into quite a bit of a chasm if you don't keep an eye on it. Keep sitting under the word and not being over the word. Yeah, so I don't think I'd have anything kind of particularly tangible other than keep your first love your first love, and watch your heart. And, yeah, and then I think, from my studies, what do I want to do with it, I wish I knew! If you have any suggestions, let me know. I kind of started it because having gone through the damage of my own undergraduate studies in knowledge, I kind of want to serve the church in what does a good kind of biblical robust epistemology look like? And what difference does this make to us? Particularly as we do outreach, also start everyday Christian lives? Esther Meek has already got there. I don't know if you've come across her work in covenant epistemology. Really good, really good. I'd recommend her book *Longing to Know*. Yeah, so she's already got this. I think I would love to use my studies to serve the local church. And I don't know if I want to stay in kind of a confessional setting, teaching or go into the academy in the UK. Or do none of that and think more about the evangelistic side of stuff. I don't know, again, I'm just open to wherever the Lord will lead me in that, but just trying to be faithful with what he's put in front of me for right now. And then see what, that's great.

Eric Schumacher 32:49

I love the sort of the mixture there of passion for good academic thinking, philosophy and being in community, in a local church, having that kind of accountability and encouragement is so important and can be rare. You know, it's easy for us, as we gather degrees and knowledge to think we're above the church, and don't need that community. And that's so not true. So, listeners, you've been listening to Kristi Mair, and she is a speaker, academic, and an author from London, England, and someday will be a doctor. And then we can interview her about COVID. So if you've been enjoying this and our other podcasts, we hope that you will rate them, review them only if you're going to say nice things, share them with your friends and on social media, spam your family. And if you'd be interested in helping us cover the cost of publishing these podcasts, we'd invite you to visit our Patreon page, and you can find the link to that in our show notes. And there are special perks and bonuses for those who support us. And one of those is the final question feature that we've started. So we're about to ask Kristi two more questions. One of those she'll answer on the podcast and the other one will only be available to Patreon supporters on our page. And it's going to be such a controversial, I mean, you will not want to miss this question I'm going to ask her. So, Elyse is going to come up with that while I asked the last question

So let's say I'm a pastor, I am a pastor. We don't even have to imagine. And a woman comes to me in my congregation. And she says, I'm interested in learning, more philosophical theology, something along those lines. Or she has your degrees in philosophy and wants to use them to serve the church. Should I send her to another woman in the church to have her train her in these things. Or since I have a master of divinity, I've mastered all the divine things, should I be instructing her and discipling her in sort of these academic pursuits? And then when she gets her degree,

Elyse Fitzpatrick 35:32

Wait, this sounds like the question that you should ask at the end.

Eric Schumacher 35:42

Okay. Well, we'll see what happens. We might edit this and mix it all.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 35:46

Yeah, we're gonna edit this.

Eric Schumacher 35:47

Yes. So what role should the pastor have in discipling her in these academic pursuits in guiding her versus handing her over to a mature woman in the congregation? And then when she has those degrees and those gifts, should I ask her to go do apologetic theological training with women? Or should I find a place for her to be able to teach these apologetics and philosophical questions and epistemology and all that to maybe in a training event or something like that to everyone in the congregation? What are your thoughts on that?

Kristi Mair 36:33

Oh, gosh, this is such a great question. Okay. Well, I think it would depend who the mature woman in the church is. I mean, have they been trained, at what level of training and understanding are they? Would this be a good kind of next step for this person who's come to you, and if so wonderful, that that would be wonderful. And if, however, you are the most qualified, and in order to invest in her and, and train her in and disciple her, and I think one of the things that I found really helpful is, is when one of my pastors got a group together, and kind of thought, okay, well, here's a book that we can all read and we can all discuss some of the themes and how this applies. And you know, think through some of the the philosophical, or theological implications, and having that kind of small group setting with a few people who are intentionally wanting to go in a particular direction, and wanting that kind of intentional development and investment has been really, really wonderful. And so I think it would it would very much depend on on the pastor and on the mature women in the church. I think depending on what the pastor's instinct is in answering that question, and I wonder if it's more of a heart issue? Would I be passing her on because this is a gift that can only be used within a women's ministry setting. And therefore, even if and when she does get these degrees, she shouldn't? The way in which to wisely kind of steward that would be through, as you mentioned, the women's ministry. Or is there a wider kind of application? I think having a mixed group, if you're thinking wider application earlier on can be really helpful because I don't I don't know if you've found this but one of the things that I've loved about parachurch ministry is having that opportunity to learn in mixed groups as well. And that really just increased my confidence. It's much harder, I think, going from a single sex group to then being told, oh, you can now go and then we love you to teach and train this kind of mixed age. Yeah, mixed sex group. And I think just in terms of how to what is the end goal that you're thinking for this for this woman? And how with her can you intentionally steward her gifts? So for me, I'd say, Pastor put together a group of people who are at a similar point in their, in their journey, in their development and invest in all of them. And as a community bring about that kind of fruit under the Lord. I think it's such a gift, the local church, that it's a wonderful gift to the women's ministry, but it's also wonderful gift to the wider church too. So if there's a way in bringing both of those about then then I think that's a no brainer.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 39:58

I could see it causing marriage problems if all the women in the church were trained in logic and philosophy, and then they went home to argue with their husbands. I mean, that might that might be

the best thing too. So that that was a really good answer. And that I think we should keep that as our final question on the podcast because we don't want to make people pay for that. Like, we need people hearing that.

I think it was really good. So Krisiti, you've just written just released a book called *Healing Faith and the Coronavirus: Thriving During COVID-19*. Can you in a nutshell, tell us what's your advice is to people during this very difficult time? And boy, you wrote that fast. So yeah, what would your advice be?

So, listeners, we're gonna say goodbye to you right now. And you can you can hear Kristi's answer on the Patreon page.

And thanks for being with us on the Worthy podcast. We're really happy to have you here and we hope you'll join us on Patreon. Please do rate and review us. Thanks for being here.