

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

Hosts: Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

Episode 29 — Guest: Karen Swallow Prior

Date Aired: August 17, 2020

Eric Schumacher 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 will not always agree on everything. But we do agree that God is glorious. The Bible is true. Women are valuable, and respectful conversation on this topic is essential in our day.

Thanks for joining us on another episode of The Worthy podcast. I'm Eric Schumacher. And I'm here with my co-author and co-host, Elyse Fitzpatrick. And we are very excited to have one of our favorite people with us, someone we've both grown to love over Twitter, I've grown to love her over Twitter, and really appreciate her voice and her presence in so many areas. I think we could record a podcast with her on probably a half dozen or more different topics and run out of time each time. I'm speaking of Karen Swallow Prior,

Elyse Fitzpatrick 1:46

The notorious KSP.

Eric Schumacher 1:48

The notorious KSP, yes. Maybe we'll get into that too. She is a research professor of English and a research professor of Christianity and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. She is the author of several books, including *Books, Literature and the Soul of Me*, and *Fierce Convictions: The Extraordinary life of Hannah Moore, Poet, Reformer, Abolitionist*. And her most recent book is *On Reading Well: Finding the Good Life Through Great Books*. Karen lives in Virginia with her husband, Roy, and she is the proud mother of two dogs, right? Ruby and Eva... Or maybe they're the owners of her? I don't know. But if you want to see some great dogs, make sure to follow Karen on Twitter. And you'll see those pictures. So Karen, welcome to the podcast.

Karen Swallow Prior 2:46

It's great to be with you guys.

Eric Schumacher 2:48

Yeah, so it's so good to finally see your face and hear your voice.

Karen Swallow Prior 2:52

Yeah, I guess we've never - well at least I was on...

Elyse Fitzpatrick 2:55

Yes, I'm I have to apologize...

Eric Schumacher 3:00

You were on the Front Porch!

Karen Swallow Prior 3:01

I was and that was one of the most fun podcasts I've ever done. So anyway, it's very memorable. So yeah. So it's nice to be talking with Eric, For the first time, I mean,

Eric Schumacher 3:17

I've admired you from afar for a long time. And as we're recording this on May 22, I think it was last week, last week or two weeks ago, I tweeted out that we were on the anniversary of your tweet, which inspired what became Worthy the book. So we're sort of here, Elyse, with the grandmother of Worthy. We're the parents.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 3:45

Where the parents, which sounds kind of weird. Wait a minute. No. No, no, we're checking out of that.

Eric Schumacher 3:55

Yeah, though, our Worthy Twitter account does have a mind of its own. So, Karen, we wanted to have you on to talk about literature, and particularly about women in literature. So anyway, I'm going to ask all three of us who's your favorite female character in English literature. And then Karen is going to tell us something about that character's significance. And if she's brave, she'll tell us what it represents about us.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 4:28

Nice.

Karen Swallow Prior 4:29

Oh, I hope I know these works of literature. It's not like I've read them all.

Eric Schumacher 4:34

Well, we'll be disappointed. Elyse has so many questions about the Twilight series, you know.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 4:46

I won't go Twilight or Harry Potter.

Karen Swallow Prior 4:49

All right, deal. All right.

Eric Schumacher 4:52

Well, Karen, you start by telling us your favorite character.

Okay, as literature geek of course there're so many qualifications I want to make so favorite... Okay, favorite. I just have to not overthink it. Okay, so I think my favorite character is - I'll just be so cliché: Elizabeth Bennet in Pride and Prejudice. If I want to be a little less cliché I guess I would say Elinor Dashwood in Sense and Sensibility. Let's go with her. Am I suppose explain why, now?

No, that's what we'll share. And then you're gonna psychoanalyze us.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 5:46

Okay. So my favorite character is O-Lan in The Good Earth. Yeah, and her story made such an impact on me. And I'm gonna let you psychoanalyze me off of that. But every time I feel like whining about my first world problems, I remember her and think, okay. So I'll let you talk about her.

Eric Schumacher 6:25

All right. And so my favorite character is Tess from Tess of the d'Urbervilles. That is my favorite novel. I was introduced to it I was visiting a roughly 95 or 96 year-old widow who was a member of our church. And she loved literature. One day, I visited her and she said, I just got done reading this book. I just read it this morning. And then I closed it. And I wept and wept and wept. I think I probably read it half a dozen times. And there are points in the book at which I've literally gone back a few pages to read it again in hopes that it will be different when I get there, that that's how attached I am to that character. So tell us our futures.

Karen Swallow Prior 7:20

Wow. Okay.

Eric Schumacher 7:22

Well, first talk about both those characters in case some of our listeners don't know anything about them.

Okay, so I have not read The Good Earth for probably 25 years. So I remember very little about it. So I feel a little stumped on that one. But I do remember this woman - she had nothing and then lost more. Over and over and your description of it being sort of a good counter to our perspective of our first world problems is excellent. I remember that I didn't really like the book. I probably need to return to it. I am a very I'm very, you know, British literature is my favorite. So it's just hard to read about... I just like British literature. And yeah, it's a it's a flaw in me.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 8:22

I don't think it's a flaw. I love British literature as well. But the thing about her was, you know, she was born as a slave sold into a house as a slave ended up marrying a wealthy man. She was a faithful wife, she raised her children. But then he was unfaithful. The one part that I remember just weeping over was she finds out that he has taken the things I think that he had given her as, as sort of proving that she had value. And he took them and gave them to his new lover. And, then of course, she went through, she went through the stripping of everything. And yet there she was as as a strong woman seeking to do what was right and care for her family. And I mean, I wept and wept over her. So that's just a little synopsis of you know, the thing about her although I love Elizabeth Bennet. She's just sassy. And I love her.

Eric Schumacher 9:43

Why would you like a sassy character?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 9:45

I don't know.

Eric Schumacher 9:46

I can't imagine!

Tell us about Tess.

Karen Swallow Prior 9:50

Well Tess is one of my favorite works of literature. Tess is not my favorite female character, however, because Tess is really, it's not really about her. The novel is not about her. It's a classic tragedy. And I know exactly that feeling that you described of going back and rereading it to see if it would turn out differently. You captured Hardy's art so well, because it's such a well-crafted tragedy, that there are many, many moments where the whole thing could have changed, you know. One little turn and the whole thing, the outcome would have been entirely different. That's what makes it such a great tragedy. And Tess was just kind of the pawn of fate in the novel. Um, and, and she's not, you know, a lot of critics will talk about how she's not even characterized that well. She's just like a canvas on which, you know, the two male characters, Angel and Alec, you know, kind of work out their salvation, I guess, or lack thereof. So that is a great novel. It's absolutely one of my favorites.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 11:06

Okay, well, you guys hate me if I tell you I've never read it?

Eric Schumacher 11:10

Oh, you need to read it.

Karen Swallow Prior 11:14

Elyse, I'll be writing about it in my series, so it'll be out in two years with my introduction. So wait for that!

Elyse Fitzpatrick 11:21

Okay, I'll wait for you.

Eric Schumacher 11:24

I love what you just said about Tess there because I think that's why I love her as a character. She is in many ways, so innocent and so used, and even maybe by the author. And she just deserves so much more. And so I don't like what happens to her. You know, in that way, I think it's one of the reasons I love the book is because I hate hate the story so much. It just moves, you know.

Karen Swallow Prior 12:04

And it's very, very relevant for today, even though it's in such a different world. I actually I write about Tess in *Booked: Literature and the Soul of Me*. And in it, I talk about the parallels between the evangelical purity culture of today and the sexual double standard that Hardy was fighting in that book that existed in the Victorian age. I mean, there's just so little difference between his world and our world on that topic. And, you know, Tess was a woman who was impure, not by her choice. But she took all the consequences for that without giving too much away for anyone who wants to read it's such an amazing book,

Eric Schumacher 12:54

And that scene where she suddenly has hope - You're talking about the double standards. There, she has a spark of hope that. Yeah, that's a scene that I've read 100 times, wishing it were different. And is, is incredibly relevant to these these things today. Yeah. So you just mentioned your book, *Booked Literature and the Soul of Me*. Tell us what that book's about?

Karen Swallow Prior 13:25

Well, that's my first book, other than the one based on my dissertation, which is not anything anyone would want to read. But *Booked: Literature and the Soul of Me* is, it's the first first real book that I

wrote. It came out in 2012, which seems like yesterday, and also, centuries ago, before, you know, I don't know, so much has changed since then. But it's basically my literary and spiritual memoir. And each chapter, sort of, like *On Reading Well* is centered on a particular work of literature. But it tells kind of the story, not of my whole life, but it tells the story of how I found my way back to God through great literature. And the kinds of lessons that I learned from these works of literature that were so much more formative for me and meaningful to me than the kinds flannelgraph Sunday school lessons that I grew up with.

Eric Schumacher 14:24

So both *Booked* and *On Reading Well* - each chapter is devoted to a different work of literature. Is that right?

Karen Swallow Prior 14:32

That's right. Yeah, I'm not very creative, I guess.

Eric Schumacher 14:36

I love that. Because for our listeners who may not read any fiction, you know, I think they could serve as a good introduction plus this series that'll have you tell us about, but to buy those books, and then buy the book each chapter is about, you can read those chapters and know what to look for in that book. And I think you'll appreciate it a lot more. Tell us about the series that you referenced earlier.

Karen Swallow Prior 15:08

Well, I just released the first two volumes in this series that I'm publishing with B&H Publishers, which will be, in the end, six volumes of republished classic works of literature that I choose, and that I provide introductions for, for general and Christian readers and discussion questions as well. So that's sort of the one feature is that I mean, you can walk into any bookstore, go on Amazon, and there are all kinds of paperback versions of classic works of literature, or leather bound ones, or whatever. And they all have introductions, written by editors. But this is the first such series that is published by a Christian publisher with introductions that are written especially for Christian readers. And they're also not cheap paperbacks, although they are inexpensive.

Eric Schumacher 16:05

They're beautiful.

Karen Swallow Prior 16:06

But they're beautifully bound hardcovers with a ribbon bookplate bookmarker. And the first two that just came out are *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen and *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. And then I will be doing, as I mentioned, already, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, by Thomas Hardy, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. And I think I've decided on Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. So basically two at a time for the next couple of years.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 16:41

So Karen, I know that there are Christians who resist reading literature. Maybe because they think that they should be reading Christian books. And so what would you say to people like that? You know, why should we read the classics? What's important about it for a Christian?

Karen Swallow Prior 17:12

Yeah, that is such a good question. And I think they're actually sort of, not to overgeneralize I think there are two different kinds of resistance among Christians to classics. You've got sort of the smart-bookish-nerdy Christians who love to read and they read theology. And then you've got other Christians who love to read, but they're being what's being marketed to them is the Christian self help book, you know, and and women in particular, have this kind of stuff marketed to them. So Christian publishing - they publish the academic theological books for the nerdy people, and then the self help book for the people who really do want to be better Christian, they want to think and live better. And this is what they're given. And so there's resistance, I think, from both of them. So one group might resist reading the classics because it's fiction or it's art, and that's not that important. And then the other group might, because these works are more challenging, they aren't directly applicable to our lives, and the language can sometimes be difficult, or, you know, archaic. And so I write my introductions and, and, and actually also on *On Reading Well* and *Booked*, or to try to reach people within both of those audiences. So, you know, I'm an English professor, I draw from my teaching, but I also want to reach a more general audience. This is our heritage. Most of these writers, not all but most including Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen were devout Christians, or if they weren't, like Thomas Hardy and Nathaniel Hawthorne, they grew up in a Christian environment and resisted and were angry at the hypocrisy or the failures that they saw and were grappling with Christianity. So we have so much to learn from all of these authors and pretty much most of art history in the world that we just tend to not we don't appreciate and learn from it the way.

Eric Schumacher 19:23

I love you know, you're talking about learning theology, and then the self help help books for people who want to be a better Christian, live a better life. *On Reading Well* really does discuss how literature can help you lead a better life. Each chapter focuses on a virtue that is featured prominently in the work that you discuss, and just thinking about *Tess* again, I think reading *Tess* in many ways conditioned me to be sympathetic to the stories of women. That was probably read five years or more before the #metoo movement started. But knowing her story made me want to listen in many ways to other stories. And so talk a bit about how literature can cultivate virtue in Christian living.

Karen Swallow Prior 20:25

Yeah, I love how you just described the effect that *Tess* had on you, because this is really what I talked about in *On Reading Well*, yes, these works of literature that I discuss, contain or embody or exemplify lessons that we can learn and literature is great at doing that. But the thing that it does that it is more important that I also address is that it forms us, and it prepares us and it shapes us and molds us. So *Tess* is a very tragic, despairing, almost nihilistic work, you could say. Its lesson is essentially, oh, there is no God, and I'm mad that he doesn't exist. In a sense, that's the lesson of the story. But beyond what it says, it prepares and shapes our perspective, it enlarges our understanding, in such a way that we are ready to receive and think about these situations in real life more, because we've been primed to attend to them and to see through other people's eyes. So in *On Reading Well*, I kind of try to tackle that tough balance between the ethical and the aesthetic. So the ethical would be like the content, the lesson, the story that's told, and that's one part, one thing that a work of literature does. But the aesthetic experience is not what is told but how it's told. So, for example, in my chapter on the virtue of faith, which is one of the great theological virtues, faith, hope and love, I discuss Shūsaku Endō's novel *Silence*, which has a lot to tell us about faith. But there's also something else that happens in the process of reading it in the process of, of experiencing 17th century Christian missionary's struggle over what the right thing to do is in a situation where Christians are being tortured and oppressed. We have to ask those same questions ourselves. We're asking, what would I do? Or how would I face this? And so we're being aesthetically primed to think about these questions and respond in a way that far

exceeds that situation, which is, which is so different and foreign from our experiences, 21st century American Christians.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 23:03
Thank you.

So I read and really enjoyed *On Reading Well*, and then I went through the different books that you're talking about. And those I hadn't read, I read, I think most of them. But to talk a lot about virtues and the classical or cardinal theological, heavenly virtues. So what are they? And then why did you decide to use certain ones and then not others?

Karen Swallow Prior 23:41

That's a good question. So there are endless lists of virtues throughout the ages. Um, and so if you should see my notes in my notebook when I was working on drafting this book and putting it together. You know, there are just there are a lot of different virtues in Greek and Roman history and Christian history, and different categories for them. And they aren't all the same. There's overlap, there's differences. And so, basically everyone agrees on the four cardinal virtues, which are temperance, courage, prudence, and justice. And so I thought those are the foundational virtues. That's why they're called the cardinal virtues. I'll start with those. And then the rest, I just kind of, they're different. They're different lists. And I kind of went through and I thought about the works I wanted to write about and the virtues I want to represent and again, there's so many endless ways I could have done this. And so I finally just settled on the cardinal virtues, the theological virtues, which are different because virtues are considered, you know, things that human beings can do to become excellent. But as Christians, we have a little bit different understanding than say, Plato and Aristotle would have had. We understand that there's an element of grace, there's a supernatural element to our ability to be excellent as human beings. And so the theological virtues are ones where I kind of wrestle with that directly. Faith is a gift of God, yet at the same time as the ancient pagan philosophers recognize, it's also something that we can strengthen through our own effort, or lack of. And so that that's just an example of how I wanted to wrestle with that tension for my Christian audience. And so it was just a matter of kind of putting a puzzle together, listing all the virtues, the works of literature, I could talk about and, and putting it all together in a logical way.

Eric Schumacher 25:52

I'm still thinking about the publishing for Christians being theology and self help, I found that sometimes Christian fiction can, or approaches to fiction can either be they'll read the classics, and those things are just sort of entertainment, you're just reading it for the story. And what I hear you saying is that reading well requires thinking well. Sometimes I see fiction that is little more than a story that's a setting for a sermon, or setting for a moral lesson. And, and so I'm wondering if it's difficult for some Christians, maybe some of our listeners who haven't read much serious literature, I'm wondering if you could talk to us a little bit more about that aesthetic value? And then what are some tips for how people can get started?

Karen Swallow Prior 27:01

Thanks for bringing that up. Because I want to acknowledge that reading literary fiction, or poetry or any literary works is a very different kind of reading than reading, an entertaining work, beach read, or a blog post or whatever. It is very different. And I think what happens is because we spend so much time reading, reading blog posts, reading recipes, reading the newspaper reading Christian self help, that when we come to something that looks very similar, it's it's a book, it's got pages, it's got words, it can

be very disorienting when we find that I don't understand what's going on, or I have to really concentrate. And it's very, very different. A different kind of reading. It requires a deep, immersive, reflective, attentive reading. It requires rereading. Sometimes, with a well written literary work, you actually have to go back and read a sentence again and say wait, what just happened in that sentence it took me to a place I wasn't expecting. So it's a very different kind of reading. So we need to understand that and approach it that way. So we need to put the phone aside and have some time, even if it's only 15 minutes, 20 minutes, where we can just immerse ourselves in this work and realize it's going to make demands on us. And we have to pay attention to it. Again, in the same way, we watch films that demand more of us than other films that are just, you know, eye candy. And books work the same way. But the rewards are so great. I mean, I struggle, I struggle - I think people should understand that. I'm on Twitter, I'm writing I have to read for class; I have to grade student papers. And then, you know, I want to pick up a novel, a classic work of fiction that I'm reading just for fun, and all these words are in my head, and there are different kinds of reading required for each one. The first thing is to just recognize it's a different kind of reading. It makes more demands on you. You will be rewarded. But you still have to meet the challenge. And that it's okay if it takes longer. We're also used to skimming and reading quickly. And I want to encourage people that do pick up a novel like *Sense and Sensibility*, which you know, is mine that just came out - it's a demanding read. But if you read five or 10 pages of that a day, you're going to get more out of it, I think, than reading five or 10 pages of suspense novels in the next few weeks. They're different experiences. They're different things, but you will get something different out of even the time that you invest in a literary work. And then the second half of your question is why, what does that do for you? Well, it does for you all of these things that I just talked about. If it requires time, attention, patience, intelligence to just, you know, thinking about it, then it cultivates those things in you it. It cultivates patience, attentiveness, diligence, and critical thinking skills, that other kinds of reading doesn't, doesn't cultivate. And so it shapes us in that way that it causes us to be more reflective, more circumspect. And then just going back to your example, Eric, of *Tess*, reading a work of literature like that made you more sensitive to the real life experiences of women who have had similar circumstances. And that's what literature does for us. It shapes us as people, in the same way that people shape us when we listen to them, we have conversations with them.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 31:24

Sometimes when I finish a really wonderful novel, I'm almost sad. Because I feel like I have to leave a friend behind. People who can write that way - I know I don't - but people who can write like that, what an amazing gift. But also, it demands so much of the author as well. And I think particularly female authors, so many of them, particularly in the past, had to pretend that they weren't so good. What do you think? And you're an author as well; what does good literature require of the author?

Karen Swallow Prior 32:22

Yeah, that's a good question. I don't consider myself really a creative writer, I think that's different. I mean, I try to be creative. I'm definitely more of an analytical writer. And so that's why I write nonfiction. Not just books, but articles and essays. And I think creative writing is kind of, you know, it's a similar but different animal. I think they require the kinds of thing that is so scarce today. And that's attention and reflectiveness. And we live in a world that, I mean, there, there are books now being written about this, a number of them about the attention economy, how it is our attention that is being bought and sold and bargained for over and over and that we're losing. And that is that one of the most valuable things in the economy today. And it's attention that is required to really write well, on even to think well, and to think, you know, not just in a logical coherent way, which is very good, I'm in favor of that, but also to think in a way that provides new insights and sees things in a different or fresh way that can be helpful to make new connections. I mean, that's really what, what creative writing is, that's what

poetry is. It's just kind of making fresh, new connections between things in the world. And there's so many things that are going on right now, you know, you talk about Maslow's hierarchy of needs - so many of the things that are going on, even before the pandemic have to do with basic survival, right? We're kind of trying to survive even in our first world problem way. I'm so this doesn't seem to strike me today is a very creative age, for these reasons, or very much of a reading age. Because a lot of us feel like we're trying to survive.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 34:30

I heard someone say one time that Americans read like they're a conquering army. Like you just read through the book, so you can say you read through it, and you're like an army conquering it rather than marinating in it and thinking about it and going back and revisiting and being involved in it.

Karen Swallow Prior 34:53

That is very insightful. I'm probably going to end up quoting that. That's exactly right.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 34:58

I'll find out who it was that actually says that and I'll send it to you.

Eric Schumacher 35:02

Eric Shumacher.

Karen Swallow Prior 35:02

(Laughing) No, it's so true. I don't mean to get anyone upset or anything, but a lot of times people will ask me, how many books do you read a year or whatever? Like, I have no idea, I don't know, I don't even think to keep track of that. And I don't read books to keep a list or to get through them. I mean, like, I, we started out on this program, there's so many books that I haven't read. It's not an accomplishment or a conquering to me, it's just part of my life and part of what shapes me and I'm trying to, like most of us are now, trying to overcome all of the draw to the digital media so that I can do more of it.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 35:48

Yeah.

Eric Schumacher 35:49

So thinking about virtue, you're a bit of an activist as well. Is that fair to say?

Karen Swallow Prior 35:59

Probably so. Yeah. Okay. I can't really help myself.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 36:03

She's an accidental activist.

Eric Schumacher 36:05

Yes, yes, notorious.

So you wrote a book about an activist, Hannah Moore, who was a poet and reformer and abolitionist. And could you tell us just a little bit about her? Why you chose to write on her life? And then maybe we can talk about some of your similar passions?

Karen Swallow Prior 36:32

I discovered Hannah Moore in the process of writing my PhD dissertation, which is in the area of the 18th century British novel. And I had intended to write about a much better known male novelist. And I was researching him and trying to find something to say, you know, kind of spinning my wheels the way one does when one's trying to write a dissertation. And in all my research, all of a sudden, in this one book, I stumbled across the name of this woman named Hannah Moore, who was part of a literary circle, and I wanted to learn more about her. And so as I did, I decided to write my dissertation on her but it was about a novel that she wrote. She wrote one novel along with a lot of other works of literature. I discovered her through her literary contributions. But in the process of discovering her real life, I learned that she was an evangelical, she was an abolitionist. She was William Wilberforce's his best friend, she helped him end the slave trade in England. And, yeah, so I wrote my dissertation, again, with a more literary angle. But one of my sort of my ex officio dissertation committee members who was supporting me along the way, who was an atheist, but he was an agnostic, actually encouraged me. He said, someday you need to write a popular biography of her. And so I had hoped to do that. And it took me a long, long time, but that's what Fierce Convictions is. It's just really the story of Hannah Moore's life, who is this kind of now forgotten woman who helped to end the slave trade in England. And the short way to describe her, someone else mentioned this, to me, is to use this term, and I've used ever since that, is that, you know, I always say she's the female Wilberforce. And then my friend said, no, Wilberforce is the male Hannah Moore.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 38:31

There you go.

Eric Schumacher 38:34

Karen, tell us a little bit about your book, Cultural Engagement.

Karen Swallow Prior 38:39

I serve as co editor of Cultural Engagement, along with my colleague, Josh Chatraw . And Josh was the founding director of the Center for Apologetics and Cultural Engagement at Liberty University. He taught there, I taught there, I've just finished up there. And so apologetics and cultural engagement was kind of our thing. It's become my thing over the years along with literature. And so we co edited this volume of essays. And our goal really was to give a snapshot version of where the conversation is within the church today on a range of issues. The book came out last year, but it was a few years in the making, and they're definitely you know, things are happening so fast these days that there are definitely perspectives that we that, you know, if we were doing it now we would include and topics that I wish that we could have included, like artificial intelligence, which has kind of really become a big thing in the past year. But it's really just kind of a range of views that we have found Christians are talking about, especially our students. I mean, we're both professors. Well, Josh is now outside of academia, but still teaching. But we have found when when our students have questions, they're going out there reading things on the internet, reading blog posts by Christians of all stripes. Christians who, you know, often make claims that we would disagree with, but our students are, and more than just our students, people out there are reading these points of view on, you know, whether it's issues of sexuality, or war and weapons, or the environment, reproductive ethics, all of those things. And when people are all claiming this is the biblical view, or this is the Christian view, and they contradict one another, what do we do with that? And so we wanted to provide those points of view as well as a framework to help readers and students think these issues through biblically so that hopefully, they can really come to the biblical conclusions.

Eric Schumacher 40:59

That's the book Cultural Engagements; A Crash Course in Contemporary Issues. You've been listening to us talk to Karen Swallow Prior about several of her books. And most recently, we've been talking about discussing various perspectives on Christian issues. And before that, we were talking about Hannah Moore. So I'm going to come back in a second with a question about how those two merge, having conversations between perspectives, and doing activism, and how that's received today. So we hope you listeners have been enjoying this conversation with Karen. And we hope that you will share and rate and review this podcast and consider supporting us on Patreon so we can continue on publishing these conversations. One of our goals at Worthy is to have respectful conversations with people who have different perspectives on the value of women. I know, Karen, it may have been a bit controversial for you to include multiple perspectives in that book. Some might be concerned or giving a platform to people who are just flat out wrong. I'm thinking about, as you have spoken out on various issues, you have spoken out on things like the treatment of animals, from a Christian perspective, which I think is great, and often not considered at all. You've spoken out about the abuse of women. And I think you've been a key voice in raising awareness of abuse of women in SBC churches, and some of those issues. How have you found yourself to be received as an activist in those things? And do you feel like we value right now listening to various perspectives, having respectful conversation?

Karen Swallow Prior 42:59

That's a great question. My activist roots are actually in the pro life movement. And those go back about, well, 30 years, I would say.

Eric Schumacher 43:09

You were arrested, right?

Karen Swallow Prior 43:11

Yes. Yeah. In the old of the protests at the clinics, and so forth. And so, it's strange for you to ask this question because my answer now is so different than it would have been then. In those activist days, it was like the church against the culture, right? You know, the people who were pro life were the Christians and the church. And we were out there against, you know, the counter protesters were not just for abortion rights, but they were for gay rights, and they were against, religion, and in lots of ways, I mean, and now it's all much more mixed up. And it's not as black and white. It's much more gray. And I'm finding that the debate is within the church and that we are fighting one another, rather than the culture. And it's not that the church should not have disagreements, of course, we have disagreements and and we want to refine one another. But it's not even like we're working together toward a bigger goal. On the abortion issue out at the abortion clinics, you know, we would have people from all different denominations and the Catholic Church. And we all knew we disagreed on a lot of things but we were working together because this was so important. I don't see that kind of co-belligerence. That's actually the term that is used about Wilberforce and Hannah Moore and the abolitionists when they were working together to fight this evil of slavery, despite their differences. We don't have that sense in the church today. And now it's basically if you have a position that's different on one issue, it's as though you can't be accepted on any issue. You are an enemy if you differ if there is a divergence in one area, even a small one. So, I don't think I, you know, we don't disagree well, and, and the polarization continues to increase and often I think people feel like if we lose ground on this one step in this one area, we lose everything. There's kind of a desperation and a fear. But I think that we have been manipulated into that by political for people who have a lot to gain from polarization and fear,

Eric Schumacher 45:47

Elyse, do you have a final question for our Patreon listeners?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 45:50

I do. Notorious KSP, you have taken a lot of heat from certain quarters, I think, particularly when they found out you were going to Southeastern, and maybe that was some sort of a sign that Southeastern was sliding into liberalism or something. And I have watched how you responded to that, how you have responded in grace and patience and even humor, calling yourself Notorious KSP. Talk to us about how we should respond as women and men when we are wrongly accused, even though we've said over and over again, that's not who we are, that's not what we believe. How should we respond? And how are you able to do that?

Eric Schumacher 46:50

That is a great question, and we're gonna send our listeners to Patreon to hear the answer to that question. I'm also hopeful she'll tell us which novel will help us develop the virtue that she's going to tell us about Thank you, Karen, for being on the podcast. And thank you, listeners for tuning in. Catch you next time.