

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

Hosts: Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

Episode 5 — Guest: Raleigh Sadler

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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, and welcome to Worthy. And my name is Elyse Fitzpatrick, and I'm here with my co host, Eric Schumacher.

Eric Schumacher 1:04

Thanks, Elyse. How are you doing today?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 1:06

I'm doing well. Thank you. And I'm an old lady, and I'm messing around with the technology. That's how I'm doing. How are you?

Eric Schumacher 1:15

I'm sitting in the basement of my house in Iowa, where a gentle snow is falling and the temperatures are below freezing.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 1:22

Oh, should I tell you that today we're going to have a high of about 79 or 80? Should I tell you that? Probably not.

Eric Schumacher 1:31

You know, that is exactly why the Apostle Paul said women should be silent on the podcast. Because you keep rubbing stuff like that in my face.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 1:41

[laughing] As I have... I have to keep saying it because I pay so much money to live here. So there we go. Okay. Hey, Eric, take it away.

Eric Schumacher 1:52

Our guest today, who may have already logged off the call is Raleigh Sadler. And Raleigh is the author of *Vulnerable: Rethinking Human Trafficking*. That's a subject that he writes and speaks about. He's been published at The Gospel Coalition, The Huffington Post, and the Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission, among other places. And way back in 2013, he started a movement called Let My People Go, which grew into a nonprofit organization that comes alongside and empowers local churches to address the injustice of human trafficking in a holistic manner. And he is also recently engaged and about to get married sometime, I believe. Welcome, Raleigh.

Raleigh Sadler 2:44

Hey, thank you guys for having me.

Eric Schumacher 2:46

Yeah, I hope you're excited to be here after that introduction.

Raleigh Sadler 2:50

I am. I wasn't before, but after the introduction I'm like, Yes, this is exactly where I need to be.

Eric Schumacher 2:56

Okay. Yeah, we're sort of like a milder version of Front Porch with the Fitzes.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 3:02

That's what it's turning into today.

Eric Schumacher 3:07

Yes, but not as much need for editing. So tell us about- First things first, tell us about your engagement.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 3:15

Yeah!

Eric Schumacher 3:16

it's big news.

Raleigh Sadler 3:18

You know, it's funny, I, I didn't plan it like this. But I remember being at a concert with a friend of mine in Long Island when I was still living in New York. And I said, You know what, man? I'm done. I'm done. Trying to date girls who haven't written a book. And he's like, what? I'm like... what had happened was, you know, I had gone on a date, the girl had read my book. And then she asked me, she starts asking me about, you know, she's like, so tell me. I read your book that you struggled with this. I really want to talk about this. And I'm like, awesome. Great. This is a great way- This is a first date. We're just here eating tacos. I'm not ready to talk about my personal life, but that's fine, that's fine, let's talk. After that, I was like, No, no, I need to date someone with skin in the game. didn't really think about it. Next thing I know, I... yeah, one thing led to another, got to know Joy Beth, hung out for a while, put a ring on her finger. Now we're getting married. That's that's the cliff notes. sparknotes rather.

Eric Schumacher 4:24

And she is the author of Party of One. A book about singleness, right?

Raleigh Sadler 4:30

Yeah, absolutely.

Eric Schumacher 4:32

And I think her byline on Twitter is something like "I used to write stuff. But now I tweet stuff." And she says something about she's done writing. Did she write that book just to get you?

Raleigh Sadler 4:43

No, definitely not. What I love about her book and kind of her heart there is- I feel like there's just a sea of like, well, English interviews, so many people, and as someone who's 41 and never been married, I've seen like, there's this incipient belief, or I don't know, implicit thing that people teach: "Well, you know,

singleness is good, it's fun. But you're going to level up and be super happy in a marriage, it's so much better." And at the end of the day, they're both gifts. And God uses both. And they're both beautiful. And I think for her writing that book, I don't think she was expecting to get engaged so fast after writing the book, but it's kind of a pleasant surprise. And so, for us, it's been kind of cool as two people who are getting married. We both are really, really, really, really passionate about singleness, because I look at Let My People Go, I would have never started that had I been married. There would have been... I don't think I would have been able to. I mean, I was kind of insufferable for the first three years as I was trying to go through the 501c3 process. So it's like, now I look at it. And I'm like, Man, I'm thankful for that. But yeah, it's been really cool to kind of see how, even though we're getting married, she still is super- she's just so passionate about those who are single because it is a beautiful thing. And it can be a hard thing, just like marriage, right? Beautiful, but hard.

Eric Schumacher 6:13

And podcasting. [all laugh]

So we hope that married and single people will go out and get Joy Beth's book, Party of One, and look for the follow up, Party of Two, Life with Raleigh. [laughing] Speaking about being with Raleigh, he's here with us today on the podcast. Raleigh, what we're trying to do on this podcast eventually is get around to conversations about the value of women in the world, the church, and the home, respectful conversations, we're about celebrating the value of women. And you do work that has a lot to do with how women are valued. So tell us about the Let My People Go movement. And how did you start that? And what's gone on with it?

Raleigh Sadler 7:05

Yeah, so I was a college pastor. And I was in West Virginia. And in West Virginia, it's a historically Caucasian state 97% white, and I was at a historically black college and university. And it was very interesting, because this was a community within a larger community where a lot of the people in the community did not exactly feel at home. And so it was during that season where I had pastors and bishops from the African American community come alongside of me and say things like, "we understand that you know how to proclaim the gospel. That's all well and good, but do you know how to demonstrate it? What does it look like to do justice and mercy for you?" And it shook me. And during that season, I remember taking some of my students to a conference called Passion where they were talking about human trafficking, and Christine Kane, who- you know, as things would come full circle would actually write a blurb for my book, but I didn't know who she was at that point-but she was speaking and someone asked her in kind of a q&a. They said, Christine, do you think there's a connection between the consumption of pornography and human trafficking? And she said, Absolutely. And at that point, I was struck, because here I am, I'm a good college pastor. But I struggled with watching things that I had no business watching. And, I was crushed. And I just found myself repenting. And in that moment, I cried out, oh, my God, I'm sorry. Like, I thought that this was just a vertical sin. I didn't know it had horizontal ramifications. And so even though it wasn't like I was watching it all the time. It wasn't like, it wasn't that but it was enough for me to realize, man, I screwed up. And I'm sorry. And then right after that, I sensed this weird, I don't know, I still don't know how to describe it, I just felt compelled to do something. I didn't know what that meant. And I ran from it for about a year. And then yeah, found out my job was being done away with due to budget issues, like everyone in my role was losing their job. One of my best friends was dying. I was in relationship at that end, basically, my life kind of imploded. And I finally said, "All right, God, I'm ready to do whatever you want me to do." And I sold everything and moved to New York and started raising support to fight human trafficking. And I didn't even really know what human trafficking was at the time, but like, that's how I got to New York.

Eric Schumacher 9:45

What is human trafficking?

Raleigh Sadler 9:47

I would say Simply put, Human trafficking is the exploitation of vulnerability for commercial gain, whether it's for sex, labor, or domestic servitude. Human Trafficking happens when someone with power and status exploits someone with less power and status. Now this person doesn't have to be rich and wealthy like a Jeffrey Epstein. This person could just be a family member, or an uncle or a friend of the family. Oftentimes, traffickers aren't stranger danger. They're people that you know. Traffickers, and those who are trafficked often grow up in the same community. And they're often both impacted by different vulnerabilities. I mean, it's like, Yeah, one goes one way one goes the other. And so, when I hear people say, "Well, you know, when I hear about trafficking, I get scared, because I'm afraid someone's gonna kidnap my daughter, " I'm sure that can and does happen. I'm sure that can happen. But that's not the prevailing narrative that we're seeing. We're often seeing that, if it happens, it's someone that you know. And it doesn't necessarily happen- it does happen in countries all over the world, but it doesn't have to be just happening in Paris, when someone goes there on vacation. You know, it could be happening in your small town. Because at the end of the day, if you have vulnerable people in your small town or your city or wherever you live, you're going to have someone, I hate to say it, who wants to exploit that vulnerability.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 11:22

And so Raleigh. I know that when you talk about human trafficking, you're not just talking about women being trafficked for sexual exploitation. But is there a preponderance? What's, how does it break down between males and females, as far as people who are trafficked?

Raleigh Sadler 11:47

You know, there are so many statistics out there, but one of the baseline statistics that we use is one that says 80% of those who are trafficked for sex are women and children. And, but at the end of the day, anyone can be trafficked, anyone can be a trafficker. And so, you know, the statistics will look different in every region, that kind of thing. But, traffickers are looking for people who aren't protected, who aren't in community. They're preying upon people's dreams, their desires. And so a lot of one way that people traffic for sex is they use a strategy called Romeo pending. And it's this idea that you ingratiate yourself to someone and get them to fall in love with you. And you are their knight in shining armor, you're filling a void that they need, whether it's their desire for a husband or a father figure. You're coming in, and you're ultimately grooming them for exploitation. And that's why I think that "Taken" that we see in Liam Neeson's movie is so damaging is because most people who are trafficked aren't kidnapped. That's like 1%, right? Well, we've heard less than 1% to 1%, or less than 5% to 1%. But it's like, oftentimes people who are trafficked are groomed. They're kind of... it's over time.

Eric Schumacher 13:20

I want to return to something you said earlier about the connection between pornography use and human trafficking. And with the rise of the internet pornography use is more extensive among people than probably ever before. And we probably have listeners, both men and women who use pornography, and they think this is just a sin between me and God, and it doesn't affect my neighbor. And being a sin between me and God should be enough to stop me. But help us think through how pornography use damages our neighbor, particularly in the realm of human trafficking.

Raleigh Sadler 14:05

This is the reason I think it's so insidious is because one, pornography becomes a functional Savior for us. Whether we're men or women, we look to this as oftentimes a release, a safe place. And the problem is, we don't exactly know, the situation of the person on the other side of the screen. You know, when there are cases of sex trafficking coming out of Pornhub... which is one of the internet's largest depositories for pornographic material... when we're hearing about people being raped and trafficked and their videos actually being on Pornhub, that is a problem. This is not okay. This is not necessarily always a consensual thing. And so, yeah, with pornography, a lot of times and almost every one of my friends who's been trafficked for sex, they will say yes, there were videos that were uploaded online, of their encounters with sex buyers. And so you don't know the story of that person. But you also don't know how, like we don't think about how pornography- what some people would watch for- and I'm using air quotes when I say this "entertainment"- like people who watch this, they don't know that traffickers use this to groom people that they're trafficking. They'll say, "watch this, do this when you're with that sex buyer, do this when you're with that client." And so it's exploitative. And so we are participating in this. And what's really bad is it kind of reshapes our normal. So when we are intimate with our spouses, we bring that stuff in, like this is normal. And the problem is, one, it eroticizes youth. Pornography always does, it eroticizes youth, but more than that, it's damaging in that, it also mingles sex with violence. And so we just get used to this. And I think that's also damaging, because people are trafficked, because I've heard a lot of sex buyers say things like, you know, "well, I went to someone who was a prostitute-" (even though I would say that they were prostituted, I think this is an act conferred upon them) but I went to- they would say, "I went to a prostitute, because my wife won't do that with me." Well, chances are, this girl doesn't want to do that with you either. But you are so conditioned by what you've seen, that you are acting out upon someone else. And it is at its core, exploitative.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 16:52

I'm sorry. I should respond. Raleigh, it's such a blight. And I know that I know that the statistics of pornography use in the church is astonishing. Are you aware of any of those statistics? Just offhand?

Raleigh Sadler 17:20

you know, I would like to be able to rattle them off right now. They're in my book. I hate to be that guy.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 17:27

No, that's fine.

Raleigh Sadler 17:28

But Barna did a great study that I that I quote in the book, and it basically says that the percentage of women who view pornography is very high, like at least almost half of what, men who are watching it. So it's like, everyone's kind of engaged in this thing, and the millions and millions and millions and millions of people who watch it regularly, like when we think about these numbers, it's astounding. It's to the point where we're seeing in like, New York Magazine, and in The Times and different periodicals that aren't coming from a Christian perspective, they're saying that pornography is a health crisis. And so when we realize this is impacting us in a way where it's creating demand, but it's also bringing in people to be exploited, but it's creating a demand for something. And so now traffickers are like, oh, wow, all these people are watching porn, they have a hunger for it. Let's give a supply.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 18:25

So I'm just wondering, you know, we're, Eric and I are really trying to have respectful conversations with brothers and sisters of the faith, about the value of women. And so I want to ask you two questions.

First of all, quite obviously, how does human trafficking diminish the intrinsic value of women in the image of God? And then secondly, how has the church played into a wrong view of women that makes exploitation almost acceptable? So let's start with the first one, how do we respond to this in light of the fact that we are all created in the image of God with value?

Raleigh Sadler 19:15

You know, it's interesting, because when we think about sex trafficking, oftentimes, if we really, really, really dig into it, we'll realize that a lot of those who are victims of human trafficking, they're hidden in plain sight right behind our assumptions. I was speaking at a church in Jacksonville, Florida. And I'm just putting it out there. And next thing I know, a gentleman asked a question, and he says, "All right, all right. All right. We don't know where these "sex trafficking victims" are, but we know where all the "prostitutes" are. And boy, are they rough." That's what he said. And it made me almost want to like, I don't know, I think I held back, but like, I was so incensed in that moment, because here you are talking about someone, whether you think they chose it or not, this person is made in the image of God. And you are talking about them as an object, and I think what we're finding when we look at the image of God here is a lot of sex buyers will say things like, "if I thought about this person, like she was my sister, or could be my mother, I couldn't do the things I want to do to her,"

Elyse Fitzpatrick 20:29

Right.

Raleigh Sadler 20:31

Objectification rules in sex trafficking, and sexual exploitation. And so objectification ultimately leads to commodification. And so how I think for us, and for Let My People Go, when we talk about this, we're not just saying, "Don't play into these broken systems that allow for human trafficking to prosper." We're saying, "you know, a great way to fight back is to love your neighbor, to see the humanity in them, to treat them like another human, to realize you're vulnerable, just as they are vulnerable." And so rather than you trying to fix them, because they just screwed up their life so bad, you're going to them and saying, "I have issues too. Let's just pace together and see what God does." And so for me, I think we have to revisit that idea of dignity.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 21:25

That's so good, and then how- I think I want to put a finer point on it- how has a wrong view of women- "women are temptresses/ women are easily deceived/ women don't have perhaps the intrinsic value of the male" -do you think and first of all, do you see that in churches? And secondly, do you think that that plays into the exploitation of women?

Raleigh Sadler 22:00

So, yes, I do think it plays into the exploitation of women. And I yes, I do see it in churches. And honestly, I think I saw it before I got engaged to Joy. She's written on this a lot, you know, and her stuff out there is really good. And at the end of the day, she will say, "when people will blame someone else's exploited behavior towards a woman on the woman," yeah, that is the worst thing that could ever happen. "Well, this wouldn't have happened if you would have dressed more modestly." "This would not happen if" like, there's all these things, and at the end of the day, I think I'm gonna assume they're well meaning pastoral types. But they do not know how to speak to women. And I don't know if... I just, I have a friend, she is a professor at Moody working with sexual exploitation, whose name is Dr. Pamela McCray, she actually teaches a course for pastors, would-be pastors, on how to talk to women from the pulpit. She is fantastic. And I think there is a need, because oftentimes, pastors will say, "Well, you

know, well how were you dressing?" How are they gonna take that, how's a woman gonna take that? She has no one in her corner. So yeah, I think the church is actually in some ways, if it's not watching itself, we're setting people up to fail, and we're driving them right into the arms of exploiters.

Eric Schumacher 23:35

You said earlier, Raleigh, that the victims of human trafficking are hidden in plain sight. And in your book, you make the case that anyone can fight human trafficking by focusing on those who are often the most targeted. How do we see who is, or is at risk to be, trafficked? And how do we help prevent that?

Raleigh Sadler 24:04

This is where I'm going to say things that may be frustrating for the listener. And I'm just asking you to pace with me here because, oftentimes, those who are trafficked are those who are most vulnerable in our community. And those who are most vulnerable in our community are those who we we kind of discard. The people that we villainize are the people that are victimized. So when we say, Well, you know, "I hate these immigrants that are coming into our community, our community's changing, I can't stand it." You know what, one, these new neighbors of yours, they feel that. They sense that. But two, exploiters also know that, because they're like, Oh, wow, they don't have the protection of the community. They don't have the protection of this church. This church is trying to distance themselves from them. Or, I mean, I've seen it in a million different ways. Like, there are a lot of groups...Like, the people that we say, "Well, those people, we're glad they're not here." Those are the very people that we need to be loving, regardless of where we fall politically. And regardless of whether we agree or disagree with them. This is where I think we can take a page from Jesus and say, "look at the people that Jesus loved. These were social outcasts." And you know what? social outcasts are those who are often exploited.

Eric Schumacher 25:30

What can a pastor do to help his congregation be aware and active in loving the vulnerable? And how should women be included in that? And why does that matter? Why is that important?

Raleigh Sadler 25:50

So one of the things I started to do, when I started Let My People Go, and I was a pastor was not assuming that I knew everything. In fact, really recognizing I don't know that much. And so I want to bring in women who are leading in this area, to speak into my life and to speak with me as I have various speaking engagements, or as I share at my church. And so I cherish the voices of survivor leaders, and many of these women who've worked with Let My People Go, have been through it, and they've come to another side where they're actually working to equip and empower women who have been in similar situations. And I think we have to listen to women. I mean, it's not like, "Oh, well, we get to." No, no, we have to, because there is something... approaching this as a man, it's very easy, if you do not have people speaking into your life, you could re-exploit people, and not even mean it. And so one thing I think pastors could do? One, bring in voices, bring in voices of women who have been there, bring in voices of men who have been there. But as you're doing that, talk about it to your church, for the love of all that is pure and good. Talk about vulnerable, the vulnerabilities of your community, in your church. And do it in such a way where you're not being like, "well, we got a bunch of these homeless people." No, no, don't do that. Say, you know what, we've noticed that some of our neighbors are experiencing homelessness. And these are people who have had very similar life experiences to you. But something happened, that didn't happen to you. Because at the end of the day, we're all one medical emergency away from being on the streets, something like that, even if it was just an illustration. If you did that eight to 12 times a year- and when Let My People Go works with churches, when we work with

churches, we help them think through how to develop a team that will discover your most prevalent vulnerability in your community, and help the pastoral team preach about it and help them set up safeguards so that they can protect vulnerable people. All those things, because we need to be preaching about this regularly, we need to know who our neighbors are. Because, you know, like, you're not going to be the hands and feet of Jesus, if you're not His eyes and ears, because you can't love someone if you don't know they exist.

Eric Schumacher 28:22

You know, we have a ministry that just moved into our city here in Iowa that works with helping survivors of human trafficking. And it was interesting to me, I went to one of their presentations, and they had a survivor share her testimony. And I learned so much just from listening to her. And a big part of that was how "normal" her life was before she was trafficked. Just like you were saying, it wasn't a kidnapping thing, all that. It was vulnerabilities that were preyed upon. And then even just some of the practical issues of caring for these survivors, they've moved to our city because it was a grassroots movement that started in a small town in Iowa and has a home- they work primarily with women, so for these women- to live in. And they just noticed that being in a small town, everybody quickly picks up on which house it is. And if they want to go to church, there might only be one gospel preaching church in town. And so well, there's "those women." That's kind of how the church can see them. And so even trying to know what the right term is, is to leave the trafficking and reintegrate in a community in a healthy way. It was eye opening to me to see the number of factors involved in that and how insensitive it could... we can easily be to those kind of things. Raleigh, you mentioned that you at Let My People Go serve churches. What kind of services do you offer? And how can churches find you online and take advantage of that?

Raleigh Sadler 30:16

So we do several things for churches who want to learn about human trafficking, we offer something called the "Justice Weekend" where we go into your church. And we talk about human trafficking from a 30,000 foot view, the exploitation of vulnerability for commercial gain, and how your church can love vulnerable people. Then we talk about the myths of human trafficking in another session. And then we have a session where we do a panel where someone from Let My People Go joins someone from local law enforcement, someone from local social services, someone from a local nonprofit, and they talk about the needs of the community. And then following that, we will meet with the church and say, "Okay, what would it look like for you to do something on behalf of the vulnerable people in your community?" And so that's one thing that's called the "Justice Weekend." We also have something called the Let My People Go Experience, where people can come to New York City, to learn how to recognize and respond to their vulnerable neighbors, the neighbors that are right in front of them. And it's, I've loved doing that, because I see people come from universities and churches around the country, and they're like, "wow, I think God's calling me to change my career, I think God's called me to change my major." And I've heard that story so many times, I'm beginning to forget these stories, because it's just when you put a person a vulnerable person, in the path of another vulnerable person, and the God who became vulnerable for them shows up in really rich ways. And in addition to that, we also consult churches in really just helping churches make this a part of the DNA, like to kind of inject justice and mercy into everything that they're already doing. Find this find out more information about us on our website, which is LMPGnetwork.org, (like Let My People Go) LMPGnetwork.org.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 32:06

That's so great. Raleigh, thank you so much for the work you're doing. And do you feel like you're part of a winning battle? Or how's it feeling for you?

Raleigh Sadler 32:23

I really appreciate that question. I think if you've ever hung out with people in the nonprofit world, especially when they're working with vulnerable populations, it can start to feel a little like a gripe session, you know, it's like, "well, this is happening. And that's happening." And, you know, it can, sometimes it can be really heavy. And I think for me, the only thing that keeps me going is realizing that one, the world is not mine to save, it's just not. God is bringing a kingdom. And he is going to fix all that is wrong. And so I'm looking at this and thinking, "wow, you know, this is hard, but you know, it's not always going to be this way." This isn't the way it was supposed to be but it's not always going to be this way. And so I can rest in the fact that my God is using His people to change lives in the here and now, as we wait for the not yet. And so, yeah, it's, I can rest and know that, you know, we may not fix everything by any means. But as we're suffering, as we're just trying to just live every day on just walking in the footsteps of our Lord, like as we're doing that, we can love other sufferers. And that gives me hope that we don't have to fix them. Because God is bringing His solution.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 33:51

Well, thank you. Thank you for being with us today, Raleigh. Congratulations on your engagement. We're so happy about that.

Raleigh Sadler 34:01

Thank you.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 34:01

And thank you also for you know, the work that you're doing. We so value you and respect you and what you're doing. So thank you for laying down your life for the vulnerable. And to our audience, thank you for being with us today. If you enjoy this podcast, you can help us and you already know what I'm going to say. Please go on iTunes, rate, review, subscribe to our podcast. Let people know that what we're trying to do is promote a perspective, a conversation about the value of women among Christians, and thanks for being here.

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