

Transcript for the podcast "Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women."

Hosts: Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

Episode 7 — Guest: Justin Holcomb

Date Aired: March 16, 2020

Elyse Fitzpatrick 0:07

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.

Unknown Speaker 0:54

[Theme song]

Elyse Fitzpatrick 0:54

My name is Elyse Fitzpatrick, and I'm here with my co-host, Eric Schumacher.

Eric Schumacher 1:01

Thanks, Elyse.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 1:02

Today on the Worthy podcast, we have the honor of introducing my friend, Justin Holcomb. Justin and Lindsey are friends of our family and we're really happy to have him. For those of you who don't know who Justin is, you must be living under a rock. But anyway, Justin is an Episcopal priest. He teaches theology and apologetics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Reformed Theological Seminary. He is the author of several books, including "Is It My Fault? Hope and Healing for Those Suffering Domestic Violence", "Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault", and "God Made All of Me: A Book to Help Children Protect Their Bodies." Each of those is written with his wife, Lindsey. Justin and Lindsey live in Florida with their two daughters, whom my husband calls... What, "Stink Face", or "Stink Eye"?

Justin Holcomb 2:02

I think it's mutual. I think they call him Stink Face, too.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 2:08

[laughs]

Justin Holcomb 2:08

[laughs] Yeah, it is "Stink Face".

Elyse Fitzpatrick 2:10

[laughs] Yeah. Yes. Well, when he knew them, they were very little girls. And so probably at this point, they wouldn't like being called Stink Face. But anyway--

Justin Holcomb 2:19

Oh, they don't mind at all. They love it. So.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 2:22

[laughs] Okay, so thanks for being a guest on Worthy with us, Justin. Tell us a little bit, why don't you, about your faith journey, and as particularly as it pertains to your understanding of women, and how has your appreciation for the value of women developed. We're so thankful to have you with us.

Justin Holcomb 2:44

Well, thanks for having me. And for the work you guys did in the book. And for the honor of being able to do a small little piece, kind of endorse and blurb it. Love doing that. And it's just fun to be joining you all on this. So yeah. I'll do really introductory basic stuff that we can unpack as you all--if you notice something, or go from there. But I grew up in a Christian home. I don't remember not believing. My mom and dad were saved in the early seventies. My dad was walking down the beach holding me as an infant, right after their best friend died at twenty-five--a heart attack on the beach. So he's thinking about life, death, and everything. And a Pentecostal preacher walked up and said, "If you died tonight, you going to heaven or hell?" and my dad said, "Uh, hell." And he kept on, like, you know, telling my dad about the Gospel. My dad said, "I'm--I'm in. What do I need to do to be saved?"

Elyse Fitzpatrick 3:38

Wow.

Justin Holcomb 3:38

The guy kept on going, like, you know, didn't realize this guy was low-hanging fruit and he was ready. So my dad just said, "What do I have to do so I don't go to hell? I want to go to heaven. I want to be forgiven." So the guy, you know, he apparently realized what was going on and, you know, led my father to faith in Christ. My mom went to the Bible study at the church. Two weeks later, she's professing faith and getting baptized also.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 3:44

Wow.

Justin Holcomb 4:02

So, I grew up in a home where just going to church, Jesus, reading Scripture, worshiping Jesus, being thankful, you know, doctrine of the Trinity, real resurrection, all that kind of stuff just had my attention. I got baptized at seven. And I don't even remember thinking about "value of women" as a discussion, like as a thing. My parents never talked about, like, "This is a woman's role. This is a man's role. This is what it's like." Just, I'm thinking through my family. My mom's a strong woman, kind of the big personality of her family. My dad's just more quiet and strong in different ways. He's an artist. My mom is a kind of "get it done" person. She's the one that hosts the parties. My dad enjoys, you know, her hosting a party so he can sit in the corner with his buddies and talk. [laughs]

Elyse Fitzpatrick 4:54

[laughs]

Justin Holcomb 4:55

And so I kind of just grew up with that. And I never knew my grandfathers, 'cause they were all dead. I knew my grandmother. So I kind of grew up in a--kind of more of a matriarchal kind of setting, of just like how the family worked, and who were the players, and all of that. So that kind of played into it. So, that kind of gets me up to like, you know, adulthood.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 5:15

Right.

Justin Holcomb 5:15

And then I, you know, went to Bible College, seminary, did a PhD. And then, you know, church life plays into it. Got married when I was--met my wife at thirty-one and got married at thirty-three, and now I have been married for thirteen... twelve, thirteen years. I have two daughters. So my life has been woman-centric, just in the sense of who the players are of influence and my most important relationships. You know, I got a mom, two grandmas, sister, wife, and two daughters, and a mother-in-law. My big thing was, it was just normal. The most influential people in my teens were--there were two, who I--then, were older couples. Now I think they would have been my peers. I'm forty-six. I think they were late forties, early fifties. Two couples who were our youth, you know, youth leaders. The two women, the two--the wives, but the women, of those couples, were *really* the leaders of the youth group. And so even in that setting-- spirituality, prayer, thinking through major life stuff. When I needed someone else besides my parents to talk to, I'd go over to their house and talk to them. So, those are the main contours of my kind of faith journey.

Eric Schumacher 6:24

That is quite a journey, Justin. And I think I want to explore, just a little bit, your church backgrounds.

Justin Holcomb 6:26

Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 6:33

Because that might get into more discussion about views of women in the local church and that sort of thing. But I definitely want to get around to the books you've written, too. So you mentioned your dad was converted through the evangelism of a Pentecostal man. Is that the church you were baptized into?

Justin Holcomb 6:52

It was a Pentecostal pastor. This is just a funny story, not really relevant to the topic, but you'll like it.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 7:01

[laughs]

Justin Holcomb 7:01

They were hippies.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 7:03

Mm-hm.

Justin Holcomb 7:03

And Pentecostals--and we're talking, like, head coverings, and they would wear, like--they wouldn't show their elbows or their knees, like, dresses down to their ankles. And they were talking, like, intense Pentecostal, kind of, like, Pietistic stuff.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 7:18

Pentecostal holiness.

Justin Holcomb 7:20

Oh yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 7:20

Yeah.

Justin Holcomb 7:21

Yeah. And so my parents--my mom would show up wearing cut-off jeans and a tank top, and my dad would wear cut-off jeans and his tank top.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 7:28

[laughs]

Justin Holcomb 7:28

And they were so--the church was so welcoming to them. Like, they weren't judgmental. They weren't, you know, shaming them for what they--those are the clothes my parents had. And they would sit in the car out in the parking lot and smoke a joint before they went in, because it kind of weirded 'em out.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 7:45

[laughs]

Justin Holcomb 7:45

That's all they knew for Christians. They thought, "This is what--we're Christians now. And this is who we are." And they didn't know there are all these different denominations. They're like, "Well, I guess we're Christians. And I guess you kind of speak in tongues, or whatever's happening there. And you get really excited and you wear really warm clothes and a head covering."

Elyse Fitzpatrick 8:01

[laughs]

Justin Holcomb 8:01

"And I guess we'll get around to that, but until then, we're kind of freaked out." So they-- before church, they'd go smoke a joint in the car.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 8:07

[laughs]

Justin Holcomb 8:07

And about, you know, a year or two later, one of the pastors said, "Hey, you guys--are you guys smoking in there?" And they're like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, we're--"

Eric Schumacher 8:22

[laughs]

Elyse Fitzpatrick 8:26

[laughs]

Justin Holcomb 8:15

"Well--really, why?" And they're like, "Well, 'cause, we're just kind of anxious going in. It's kind of weird for us." And he was like, "You probably shouldn't smoke marijuana." And they're like, "Oh, okay!" So they flushed it down the toilet.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 8:26
[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 8:26
[laughs]

Justin Holcomb 8:26
Like, they just had the most warm, welcoming Pentecostal church. They weren't the stereotype of what most people would be thinking. And then we ended up going to a Assemblies of God church when I was like five or six. And so I remember the Assemblies of God pastor. I got--he baptized me in his pool.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 8:43
Mm.

Justin Holcomb 8:44
And so we were in a Assemblies of God setting for a while. Ended up at a United--a church that was influenced by the United Pentecostal Church, during my teens. You know, they don't believe in the Trinity, so we had some stuff there. Ended up leaving. And then at, you know, seventeen, eighteen, I found the Calvary Chapel church and the pastor took me under his wing. So, you know, Assemblies of God, United Pentecostal, Calvary Chapel. From, you know, all through Bible College--went to Assemblies of God Bible college--and that Calvary Chapel pastor mentored me, and just taught Scripture, theology. And then I stayed there through Bible college at the Assemblies of God Bible college. I went to Reformed Theological Seminary, here in Orlando, and I commuted. So I went to the P--I was going to Reformed Seminary, and I was at this Calvary Chapel. And then when I went to go do my PhD at Emory, I worshiped at a PCA church for a few years, and then started attending, a little bit, the Episcopal Church in Atlanta. And then--that was five years, and then when I moved to Charlottesville, when I was twenty-nine, thirty, that's when I started worshiping in an Episcopal Church, and finally was ordained in the Episcopal Church. So it's been quite the smorgasbord of denominations. Does that get close to your--
[laughs]

Elyse Fitzpatrick 10:12
[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 10:12
[laughs] That gets close--yeah, that gets close to the question. I'm holding your book, "Rid of My Disgrace". And on the back cover, it says you were a pastor at Mars Hill Church, in Seattle.

Justin Holcomb 10:23
You must have an old copy. The new version--the new printed copy says just as an Episcopal priest.
[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 10:31
Okay. Well, I was bringing that up to say there's quite a bit of--on the spectrum of Christian churches, there's a lot of difference in there. And so you're--you're a bit of a theological mutt.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 10:45
[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 10:46
Would that be accurate?

Justin Holcomb 10:48
I'm a denominational mutt. A lot of my theology's actually stayed quite in place. I mean, for a while. I mean, I was a radical. I believed every time you sinned, you lost your salvation. If you didn't speak in tongues, you were not a Christian--not only you didn't have the Holy Spirit. So I had that going on until I was about seventeen. And then that Calvary Chapel pastor got ahold of me and talked about the providence and sovereignty of God. And then--that's why I went to Reformed Theological Seminary. And so, right around that time of seminary--but yeah, I was--I've been around. I've--

Eric Schumacher 11:19
Yeah.

Justin Holcomb 11:21
I've been around.

Eric Schumacher 11:23
So, with that, you have had to--or been able to--work with people, I assume, with a variety of different opinions and strong opinions on things like women's ordination, women's roles in the home, in the church, and the world, probably as well... And I know, just from reading you, that you are not a wishy-washy guy. You have theological grounding. I mean, you're a professor at a seminary. So how does one with strong theological convictions navigate relationships with people who may feel strongly otherwise?

Justin Holcomb 12:04
Yeah. I haven't had to think about that much or talk about it much. Thank-you. Well, there's really good reasons--we'll just pick the women's ordination topic. There's good reasons--Bible verses--to support limiting ordination to presbytyr to only men. There's verses that sound like that. There's reasons for it. There's a reason the tradition has held that position for so long. And there are also some really good reasons to hold a different position, of, is the bishop--is the role of presbytyr or overseer--does that include women also? So it's not a matter--it doesn't have to be a matter of either you're a wooden, you know, a hammer-headed fundamentalist of wooden literal translation, or you don't believe that Scripture is authoritative and you're wishy-washy on Scripture.

Eric Schumacher 13:01
Mm.

Justin Holcomb 13:01
And too often, it gets set in those ways. You listen to more--we'll just use the binary categories we have. It's way more complex than this. Egalitarians: sometimes the stereotype is like, "Oh, all those fundamentalists who are chauvinists, who hate women." And then, you have the complementarians who are pointing over there going, "Oh, you believe in women's ordination? You probably don't believe in the authority of Scripture that Jesus rose from the dead." It's like, how in the world did these get lumped together?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 13:25

Mm-hm.

Justin Holcomb 13:25

How did non-essential and--but important--views get lumped in with the things like the Nicene Creed, and Trinity, Christology, resurrection, salvation by faith in Christ, and the authority of Scripture. Now, they're related to each other, obviously. So once you get past those stereotypes... I've worked in two very different settings. I was an Episcopal priest for--which is short Old English for "presbyter", by the way. We don't think that we're actually mediators. So, "presbyter". I've been an Episcopal presbyter for thirteen years. Well, in the middle of that, I actually served at a nondenominational megachurch in Seattle, that--you know, is related to what you just said--where they don't hold that view of women in ministry. Ordained to pastor. And so there's a spectrum. Some believe, "Well, yeah, the diaconate, absolutely." Some say, "No, they can be ministers, they just can't be bishops." And there's a whole spectrum of how that gets played out. And so the way it plays out here in Orlando, is that we have--all of my friends are PCA pastors here. 'Cause, Reformed Theological Seminary. I teach at RTS. Many of them went to RTS. They're PCA pastors. We have some EPC: Evangelical Presbyterian. We have Reformed Baptist nondenominational who are part of the Acts 29 movement. And some of our Episcopal churches. And we get together and go, "Okay, we agree on so much. And we're friends." And we do that. Now, the guys who don't believe in women's ordination--if they throw up in their mouth when they see a woman in a collar or something, then they're not going to work with us very well. And then if you have the other group who has to, like, "You have to believe in our polity." So if you have kind of, like, hammer-headed edgy people from either camp, it's not going to work really well. And so we actually focus on the things that we think are of first importance. Orlando is one of the most de-churched cities in the United States. And so we can either sit around and argue about a woman's place in the church, the home, and other places, and do that, or we can do something else, and still acknowledge those differences. I have a podcast with my buddy Jim Davis. He's a pastor of a Reformed Baptist church. We have a Reformed Baptist nondenominational pastor and Episcopal priest doing a podcast, and it's because we're such good friends. We disagree on baptism. I honestly have a bigger issue with my friends on baptism and sacraments than women in ministry. [laughs]

Eric Schumacher 16:08

Yeah.

Justin Holcomb 16:08

Because I think that's a bigger deal. So...

Eric Schumacher 16:12

I would actually agree with you there. And I really appreciate you saying that. And my head is spinning right now with just the irony of you mentioning your context in Orlando. And, I'm a Southern Baptist pastor. And so right now, there's a bunch of "stuff" going on in the SBC that might be headed to our annual meeting in Orlando. And I'm just thinking, as people in my circles are listening to what you just said--which I'm so glad you said--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 16:47

Yeah.

Eric Schumacher 16:48

--I know of men whose heads are about to explode, because they've never imagined that you could hold to women's ordination in some form or the other without throwing out the Gospel, the resurrection of Christ, the inspiration and authority of Scripture. In fact, some are saying that, you know, Beth Moore preaching a Mother's Day sermon is essentially equal to throwing out the authority and inspiration of Scripture. So, just for those guys--

Justin Holcomb 17:19
And calling her a heretic.

Eric Schumacher 17:21
And calling her--yes, it's awful.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 17:23
Well, yeah. And also saying that asking a woman to do that is is analogous to spiritual abuse.

Eric Schumacher 17:31
Yes, yeah. So--

Justin Holcomb 17:35
On the other side, you actually have people who believe in certain views of women's ministry, church roles, that kind of stuff--who would look at those who don't hold that and think, "Oh, you're a misogynist." I have friends who, their conviction is that women should not be ordained to presbytry. And if I had to think through the people I would want to teach me Scripture in the way that the value and honor and--their view of women is probably way better than many who hold different positions. And so to size up on the other direction is also equally unhelpful as well.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 18:12
Mm.

Eric Schumacher 18:13
Yeah. That's really good to point out. And one of the things we're hoping to do is have respectful conversations about the value of women amongst people who disagree on how that practically plays itself out. Because I think we think that partnership, in the Gospel and in the essentials, matters. And so that's all encouraging to hear. Your books... I've used "Rid of My Disgrace". Really helpful resource to me in thinking about how to pastor sexual assault victims. How did you get interested in that topic and begin to write on it? And maybe connect that with how the subject of sexual abuse relates to the value of women.

Justin Holcomb 19:04
Sure. The other book on abuse is "Is It My Fault?" for domestic abuse, and--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 19:09
Mm-hm.

Justin Holcomb 19:09
--Elyse wrote the foreword for that book. So there's some connections on this. I wrote both of those books with my wife, and the only reason I am writing books about abuse and abuse prevention is 'cause I married Lindsey.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 19:22

Mm.

Justin Holcomb 19:22

Lindsey was--when we met, I was a seminary professor at RTS in DC and teaching at the University of Virginia. And she was a case manager for a sexual assault crisis center near the University of Virginia. So she basically was the frontlines for when mostly women would go to the hospital because of sexual assault. They would contact her to be the victim's advocate. And she also had the hotline phone number if someone needed to call the hotline, so she was literally on the frontlines of people who were being assaulted and wanting to deal with, disclose, and go forward for health, hope and healing. And then after we got married, she became a case manager again. Victims' advocate for--at a place called "S.H.E.", the "Shelter for Help in Emergency", which was a domestic abuse home for women who were abused. And so I remember, we'd go on dates, and I--you know, she'd say, "Hey, how was your day?" And I'd tell her about, you know, grading papers and split infinitives and how they really need to understand these, you know, grammatical things, and helping them write and think clearly. And she--I'd ask her about her day, and she'd say, "Oh yeah, well, that woman I told you about, who had a black eye, she came back with a broken arm this time." Or, "I went to the hospital to, you know, be there for a sixteen-year-old who was, you know, assaulted at high school." And so she just told me these horror stories. And then she just asked--she's like, "So, you know, what do they do in seminary to prepare you for this?" And I said, "Nothing." Like, you know, "I didn't get anything like this." And we had the opportunity later--she ended up teaching a--she ended up going to a women's federal prison to do some survivor/victim advocacy. We use that word interchangeably, because some people don't feel like survivors, actually. And when you force them to call themselves a survivor, it just actually creates more shame, because they're thinking, "I'm not surviving." So it makes them feel like, "I'm not even surviving great. Thanks, for that identity, making me feel like I have to be a survivor." She was going to the women's federal prison. There were nineteen, twenty women. She was going to do some, like, just basic non-religious care for abuse survivors. And, these women said, "Hey, you're pregnant, clearly, 'cause we can see you're pregnant. You know, tell us about the father?" She said, "Oh, well, he's a minister." And, "So, you guys are married?" "Yeah, we're married." And they said, "Well, we're all Christians. And, you're gonna talk about abuse--why don't, instead of doing, like, the obvious basic stuff about, you know, you gotta love yourself and make sure you have a good counselor--" Which we all support. I'm not throwing rocks at that. She said, "Would you do a Bible study with us?"

Elyse Fitzpatrick 22:26

Mm.

Justin Holcomb 22:26

"Like what does being a Christian have to do with this, the shared experience we have." And so out of that, "Rid of My Disgrace" was the outline for Lindsey's Bible study--the women's federal prison, for a bunch of women who said, "Hey, we're Christians, we've all been sexually assaulted. What does the Bible and Jesus and God and all that stuff have to say about it?" So it came out of that context. So I wouldn't have written a single book on this topic, unless I married Lindsey. And now this is, you know--I actually do academic stuff on history, historical theology, and all that kind of stuff, which is fulfilling and fun, but, you know, this is what we're known for. So I'm really riding her coattails. And it was her, who--it was Lindsey who said, "We need to do a kids' book." So there's a kids' book on prevention. So I'm literally--anything about abuse, abuse prevention in the courses for which I'm being asked to teach--you know, I have seminaries out the wazoo saying, "Hey, come teach an "abuse in the church" course with

your wife." So, Reformed Theological Seminary has two different campuses having us teach it, Westminster seminary in California has us coming in to teach it, Nashotah House has us coming in to teach it, Gordon-Conwell and Jacksonville has us teaching it. And so basically, it's because I'm Lindsey's husband. And that's what happened at the university. You know, the year we got married, I won a teaching award. I won the annual teaching award, the Z Society teacher--"Faculty of the Year" award. And so, that was kind of a big deal. But, on the University of Virginia, because I was married to Lindsey, I was Lindsey's husband.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 23:22
[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 23:31
[laughs]

Justin Holcomb 24:02
I mean, she was famous at the university for her care for sorority girls--and beyond--but it was mostly the sorority culture that she was deeply involved in, and working with the women's center there to help women. And so that moment of, "Oh, you're Lindsey's husband?" That's basically what we're dealing with now, is I'm just kind of, you know--and I ask her all the time, you know--we'll write books, and she'll go, you know--she'll do most of the survivor care stats. I'll do most of the, kind of, theological pastoral work, and then we put 'em together. And then she says, "Yeah, I wouldn't say it like that. That sounds like this."

Elyse Fitzpatrick 24:49
Mm.

Justin Holcomb 24:49
And so she basically has veto power over all of our books.

Eric Schumacher 24:55
Well, I'm glad to meet another co-author who is riding the coattails of the woman that he's writing with.

Justin Holcomb 25:01
No kidding.

Eric Schumacher 25:01
So, I know how that is.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 25:03
[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 25:05
What I find interesting about that is you said, "I'm writing on abuse because of my wife." And I think most of what I've learned about abuse, and caring for abuse survivors, and preventing abuse in the church, has been instigated by women. And it seems to me like--I know, that's totally anecdotal-but it seems to me like women are more attuned in general to that subject. And, an environment where men--particularly in leadership--aren't valuing them and listening to them, could be an environment that could be more ripe for abuse to happen. Would you agree with that?

Justin Holcomb 25:54

Yeah, absolutely. Well, what ended up happening, unfortunately, is abuse gets tagged as a women's issue. And it's not.

Eric Schumacher 26:03

Yeah.

Justin Holcomb 26:03

One in four women and one in six men will be victims of sexual abuse in their lifetime. The problem is that men, because, for different reasons, the amount of shame that men have is, you know--there's a different kind of shame that men have. It's not more, it's not less, it's not a competition, it's not a shame competition. It's just a different kind of social reality for men who are sexually abused. That's actually my story. When we put in the book, you know, "We know this from professional, pastoral, and personal experience," everyone assumed--we did interviews and gigs--"So Lindsey, tell us about your story." Which, first of all, is not how you're supposed to ask someone for their story. They'll disclose it if they want to.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 26:44

Mm.

Eric Schumacher 26:44

Yeah.

Justin Holcomb 26:43

So I'd have to go, "Well, it actually wasn't Lindsey, that was me." And people are shocked by that. So I do think the issues of--now, domestic abuse is **more** of a women's issue.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 26:52

Mm-hm.

Justin Holcomb 26:57

One in four women, but one in twenty men, or more--and when we wrote our book, we wrote it to women survivors of intimate partner abuse. And people criticize us for not talking about men, but we just wanted to talk directly to women who have suffered that. Now in the church--the scary thing is that the church could be the place where--the church should be the place that is talking about abuse, oppression, power, how sin plays itself out, more. And what's almost more concerning is that the cover-ups and some of the worst kind of abuse actually happen in religious environments. So for example, religious church-attending abusers of children have more victims and perpetrate more violent sexual abuse than non-religious perpetrators. Women who are abused in a Christian environment--in a domestic intimate partner setting--domestic abuse--they stay longer, and they suffer more abuse--emotional, spiritual, verbal, and physical abuse--than non-churched women. And so there's something happening to how the church has been talking about this that actually causes more pain. Instead of being, like, the prophetic voice against, you know, violence against women, it's actually the opposite. Now, hopefully, that's changing. It sure looks like it's changing.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 28:30

Mm-hm.

Justin Holcomb 28:31

I'm thrilled with the kind of progress that I'm seeing about the churches being aware of this. But the church is a place that can bestow identity. You're a child of God if you have faith in Christ. Like, all the promises--there's identity being bestowed. And that's important because that's part of the message. We proclaim Christ and him crucified. The effect of that is the payoff of our identity--'cause identity is one of the biggest issues for those that have suffered abuse. And, you know, just talking about the idea of value and worth of women mean identity is a key thing.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 29:07

Mm-hm.

Justin Holcomb 29:07

And, regarding abuse, people who have suffered abuse have been verbally told--but just by the abuse they've experienced--they're bestowed an identity of "unworthy", "not valuable", "damaged goods", "dirty". And so the idea of a book called "Worth", an idea of a podcast talking about value of women, actually is front line for women who have suffered in very painful marriages, intimate partner abuse, child sexual abuse, adult sexual abuse, elder abuse. It's actually an affront. Abuse is Satan's most powerful tool. And it sounds like hyperbole. But if I'm Satan, if I want to demolish someone, I'm going to use abuse, because it gets to the core of who you are. It bestows an identity. It buries a lie deep inside your soul and it festers. And if I can get the church to be silent on it, so you feel like you're damaged goods and that "good news" applies to other people but not to you--man, that's some powerful tools of evil right there. And so I want the church to be more attuned to how important--regardless--I mean, I'm bettin' you guys are probably getting hit like a pinata for writing a book about the value of women, 'cause people are going, "Oh, you must be liberal, you don't believe in the Bible." Like, it's a book about value and worth of women. It comes from the doctrine of creation. This is in the Bible. You can find Bible verses that support everything you guys are saying about the value and worth of women. Well, the fact that people are going, "Well, what do you believe about women's ordination?" Like, really? Like--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 30:43

Yeah.

Justin Holcomb 30:43

Can we frame that question out for a few seconds? Like, I didn't tell you guys what I believe about women's ordination, because--we can talk about it, but I want to talk about the thesis of what you guys were talking about: worth and value. Because to me, that seems like the most pastoral, most culturally important thing for us to be talking about.

Eric Schumacher 31:03

Amen.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 31:04

Thank-you. Thank-you. [laughs] Justin, thank-you so much.

Eric Schumacher 31:09

Wow.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 31:09

Wow. You know, it's interesting to me--and I'm just going to throw this out there. We are getting--we are getting hit. Seems like anyone that wants to talk about this topic, *from* a complementarian perspective, is automatically suspect. But I want to throw this out, because you were talking about identity. And we completely agree: our identity needs to come from the Lord. And, you know, what the Lord Jesus has done for us in our justification. And so we believe that. We hold to that. But what's so interesting to me, is a lot of the hits that we're getting are coming from women. And *I* think--and I'd like you to speak to this, Justin, if you want to--I think that there are women who find their identity not as, you know, women who have been abused or anything, but really find their identity as women who are uber submissive, and really really love their identity as being the righteous ones who hold to complementarianism. And when we start talking about the fact that women have worth *apart from* their family--which, you know, both Eric and I are married, and you're married, and we all have kids, and I've got grandkids, and we love our families--but that's not my primary identity. My primary identity comes a different man. [laughs] The Lord Jesus Christ--that's where *my* identity comes from. But boy, we get pushback from women. I mean, it's been really pretty shocking.

Justin Holcomb 33:00

Yeah, well, I think it's 'cause you guys--there's a "slippery slope" worry, that if you're gonna talk about the value and worth of women, is that coming from, like, a feminist agenda that's undergirding this? Do you have different--do you have like some type of, like, progressive feminist womanist ideological presuppositions that--you know, if I believe that, what else is there that's lurking around the corner?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 33:24

Right.

Justin Holcomb 33:24

So I think you're disrupting kind of the tribal language for that group. And you have to do a lot of work to turn the Bible into like this public-private distinction of being homeward-focused. The home--you know, some people they read Paul saying, "Women need to be focused on the home," or something like that. You're like, well, the home, the way they're describing it, was a small business. You actually had to be able to... [laughs] There's a bunch of different things that are involved in even that "homeward-focused" type of thing. But that comes more from--less from the New Testament--more from, like, the industrial revolution.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 34:02

Mm-hm.

Justin Holcomb 34:02

That actually made this public-private distinction. Well, that's--it's interesting that there's a public-private distinction. "Well, there's this public place where men are in charge, and then this private place where women are responsible but men still are in charge. But women need to be leaders in the private realm and not the public realm." It's like, what in the world--that sounds more like European Industrial Revolution ideology than biblical worldview. It sounds more, kind of, America 1950s--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 34:31

Mm-hm.

Justin Holcomb 34:34

--American culture on gender roles, than it does Bible stuff. And so the irony is that while some of the intense complementarian crew are worried about *you all* having this ideology that's not from the Bible--the irony is that, for some of them, the animating commitment is not so much the Bible, but a cultural commitment that they don't even know--they just got baptized with Bible verses. So I'm not surprised because if someone--and this is kind of the compassion piece for me, is if--think about this. If you--this is what's so painful for women in domestic abuse. If you carve out one role: "Your role is mom and wife." And--which is fine. My wife's main role in *her* life, she would say, is wife and mom. Well, she's also an author, she's also a professor, and she teaches at seminaries with me--or a guest lecturer. And she's also working at an anti-sex-trafficking organization. She has some business acumen. There's other things, just by amount of time and energy though. And my primary role is husband and dad. [laughs] I'm a presbyter second. I'm a seminary professor second. But if your identity--if you carve out this niche, and then when someone is abused, and they're told that they're a failure at their marriage, or they feel like a horrible mom--domestic abuse has a way of getting a really small circle for influence, and then the shame that women feel in religious communities for domestic abuse is that they look like a failure at the two things that they were called to do. And so there's a pain that's involved there. And so moving that to, like, this very intense complementarian, kind of hammer-headed complementarian approach.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 36:36
Mm-hm.

Justin Holcomb 36:36
There's a very gracious way of talking about complementarianism. And then there's the hammer-headed approach. The hammer-headed approach--that language of value and worth would probably scare them. It disrupts it for them. Maybe some of the women--that you're basically undermining the very sense from which they actually find their--inappropriately--find their identity--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 36:46
Mm-hm.

Justin Holcomb 36:49
--is wife and mother. Yeah! That is part of their identity.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 37:04
Mm-hm.

Justin Holcomb 37:04
Husband and father are parts of my identity. But you have to have a primary identity that the other ones subsume to. So I think you're pulling the rug out from underneath some of their identity issues.

Eric Schumacher 37:14
Mm. Justin, you've written a book for children that I just want to give a plug to: "God Made All of Me". You and Lindsey wrote that book to help children protect their bodies. And I just want to tell our listeners that I read this book on a regular basis with my young children, and they bring it to me to have read. They love it. And so I just want to emphasize that parents, grandparents, check that out and educate your kids. Something you said earlier: that in church environments, in religious environments, those that are victims of intimate partner abuse--domestic abuse--tend to stay in that abusive relationship longer. Why is that? And what do pastors need to know and do?

Justin Holcomb 38:03

Yeah. Just so you know, there's another kids' book that's going to come out in the next few months called "God Made Me in His Image: Helping Children Appreciate Their Bodies".

Eric Schumacher 38:14

Oh, great.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 38:14

Mm!

Justin Holcomb 38:15

So it's all body image stuff. So we only do horrible topics: child sexual abuse prevention, and body image distortion.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 38:21

[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 38:22

[laughs] Sounds like my emails.

Justin Holcomb 38:23

Bring us to your dinner table and we'll be the Debbie Downers for ya.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 38:28

[laughs]

Justin Holcomb 38:29

So the reason women stay longer--religious women stay longer--is, well, a few reasons. One, is most women--I'm talking specifically about women--most women in a abusive relationship are choosing between homelessness--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 38:45

Mm-hm.

Justin Holcomb 38:45

--and staying. So if you've grown up and you've been told, "Hey, women's education is not important. You don't need to have a job. Here's your domain. Stay at it, and don't venture out of it." And then that person is abusive? You don't have a job to support yourself. You might not have any connections, because usually abusive husbands shut down those connections of friends and family. They have been isolated already. So most women are choosing between staying in an abusive relationship or being homeless with their children. And then the other reason--so that's just reality in general. Put that in a Christian context and you have--the most common response, unfortunately, from more of the kind of hammer-headed responses of pastors is, "You know, God hates divorce." Like I've heard "God hates divorce"--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 39:40

Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 39:40

Yeah.

Justin Holcomb 39:41

--so many times to abused women. What's fascinating is, God does hate divorce. He said so like--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 39:47

Mm-hm.

Justin Holcomb 39:47

--two or three times. He also hates violence. Guess what? He says he hates violence and abuse way more than he says he hates divorce.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 39:55

Right.

Justin Holcomb 39:56

But when the message is said to women, "God hates divorce," and that's the only thing that--they're afraid that they're going to let down God and God's gonna...

Eric Schumacher 40:05

Yeah.

Justin Holcomb 40:05

And they already think that they're being abused because God's getting 'em back because they had an abortion when they were fourteen.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:10

Mm. Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 40:10

Mm.

Justin Holcomb 40:11

Or because they're dirty, or they're--the one that kills me is, "Well, this is probably happening because I'm a selfish wife and not really that good of a mother."

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:20

Right.

Eric Schumacher 40:21

[sighs]

Justin Holcomb 40:21

So the reason they're staying is because they think God's getting them back. And then you have some idiot pastor who's looking at that woman saying, "You know, God hates divorce." And I heard one

pastor--and drove me crazy--he said, "Well, Jesus's wounds healed the fracture in his relationship with us, maybe your wounds will heal the fracture of your marriage."

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:39
What?

Justin Holcomb 40:39
And so basically turning her into the crucified Christ. Going, what in the world are you doing? You're supposed to be a shepherd, not a butcher of the sheep. Like, what--what's going on here? So that's why women stay longer is because they're trapped, because they love their children--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:56
Mm.

Justin Holcomb 40:56
--because they also love that man who's been abusing them--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:59
Right.

Justin Holcomb 40:59
--and it's a really weird relationship, going from, "I chose him. I love him. Sometimes he hurts me. Which one's real?" And so there's so much confusion there. And then you put the whole Bible stuff on it, like--most women don't leave. And most women at that point--and then when it gets that intense, they're choosing not just between leaving and homelessness, they're choosing being leaving and death.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 41:24
Right.

Eric Schumacher 41:24
Mm.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 41:25
And you know, I know that as I've talked to women who are in that situation, a lot of them--you know, they hear that over and over again: "You're not being submissive enough. You're..." You know, "God hates divorce." And eventually... I have known women who've just basically walked away from the faith. They just say, "Look it, I obviously can't cut it. God obviously doesn't love me because he's not ever protected me. So I'm out. And I'll just live my life as a non-Christian."

Justin Holcomb 41:55
Mm-hm. Yep, yep. I don't blame 'em. And most people, most children, who have been abused in a Christian environment--like, it's an overwhelming majority--never step foot back in church.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 42:07
Right.

Justin Holcomb 42:08

Many of them have a vibrant faith in Christ, but they're not gonna go back to church, which is really confusing for some people, too. But yeah, when you are that trapped, and something has to give--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 42:19
Right.

Justin Holcomb 42:20
--and that's what gives sometimes, is, "Well, fine. I can't--I can't do this. I'm out."

Elyse Fitzpatrick 42:25
Right.

Eric Schumacher 42:25
And you know, I want to say, what you just said about God hating divorce and hating violence is so important.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 42:34
So important.

Eric Schumacher 42:35
And when I hear that about divorce, I always want to mention, you know, you look in Jeremiah 3, and the Lord says that he sent Israel away with a decree of divorce.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 42:47
Right.

Eric Schumacher 42:48
He divorced Israel for faithlessness. And one of the things he was condemning in his people were their violence and their mistreatment of other people. And--this is too big of a subject to get into at the end of a podcast--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 43:04
[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 43:05
--but we have a divorced God, in some sense.

Justin Holcomb 43:08
Yeah.

Eric Schumacher 43:08
I'll probably get in trouble for saying that, but we do. And when a man is abusing his wife physically, he has broken the marriage covenant.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 43:20
Right.

Eric Schumacher 43:20

And I want to say, as a pastor, she is not bound to remain with him. *He* has broken the covenant, *he* has been unfaithful, and she is not required to stay in that situation at all.

Justin Holcomb 43:33

A woman leaving a situation of abuse, abandonment, and adultery--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 43:40

Uh huh.

Justin Holcomb 43:40

--all she's doing is making public *his* covenant breaking. And he--the abusive, abandoning, or adulterous husband-- has forfeited his right to claim the covenant as a bond at that point.

Eric Schumacher 43:54

Yeah.

Justin Holcomb 43:54

She may say, she may feel called to stay. And I know women who have and it's really powerful. She may feel called to leave--

Eric Schumacher 44:04

Yes.

Justin Holcomb 44:04

--and that's equally powerful. But yeah, the woman--all she's done is made public the covenant breaking that has not been seen by the church. And when the church then swings back around and rallies to defend their brother, assuming the benefit of the doubt--I mean, that's just the playing out of male privilege all over again.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 44:04

Right.

Justin Holcomb 44:04

Of, you know--

Eric Schumacher 44:04

Yes.

Justin Holcomb 44:04

--the bro parties, you know, hooking up their guy and assuming he's right, and, "Oh yeah, we know women can be crazy sometimes." You know, "What did she do to trigger you?" And that whole toxic, misogynistic, chauvinistic male privilege played out--that's from Satan.

Eric Schumacher 44:43

Yes.

Justin Holcomb 44:43

And to do that is to dabble with the enemy who is trying to disrupt her identity, his identity, in the purity of the church, and we're just--we're unreflective. What I want is more reflection on, "Wait a second, how am I more American than I am Christian?"

Eric Schumacher 45:04

Mm.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 45:04

Yeah.

Justin Holcomb 45:04

Where do I act like a consumer? Where do I act like a chauvinist? Where do I act like--or the opposite! Where do I act like a radical socialist or a radical, you know, womanist, you know, agenda. Like, where am I assuming the culture in which I live as the primary animating force besides the Bible and the Christian tradition. I'm guilty of it, too, in other ways.

Eric Schumacher 45:28

Yeah.

Justin Holcomb 45:28

Like, I feel it. I feel the conviction of that. So I want the church to be more reflective and going, "Wait a second, maybe..." Like when you start creating a doctrine of the Trinity based on your view of complementarianism--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 45:41

Right. Right.

Justin Holcomb 45:42

--you're dabbling in a weird land of, like, heresy, I believe.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 45:45

Yeah.

Justin Holcomb 45:46

When you start talking about the eternal subordination of the Son because you like subordination so much between men and women that you then write that back into the Trinity--that's crazy talk to me. And so--you might have to edit that part out, too.

Eric Schumacher 45:59

[laughs]

Elyse Fitzpatrick 45:59

No, we won't. We'll leave it.

Justin Holcomb 46:01

But that's us being American 1950s family presuppositions, and reading--we're creating our theology backwards at that point.

Eric Schumacher 46:11
Yeah.

Justin Holcomb 46:11
That's eisegesis all over again, and we're not calling to do eisegesis. We're called to do exegesis. What does Scripture tell us? Not do we want it to say. And it's a blind spot that we have. I have the blind spots. Other people have these. We all have our blind spots. And so the key is to try to be reflective of those blind spots so we don't keep on saying stupid stuff.

Eric Schumacher 46:31
Yeah. Amen.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 46:33
Right. Wow.

Eric Schumacher 46:33
And just to echo what you said about the woman divorcing her husband for domestic abuse and showing publicly that *he's* broken the covenant and has no claim to it. I just want to follow that up with the word to churches that, you know, when James says that religion that is pure and undefiled in the sight of God our Father is to care for orphans and widows in their distress--a woman whose husband has abused her--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 47:03
Mm-hm.

Eric Schumacher 47:03
--and she's leaving that marriage, she fits that category.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 47:06
Yes, amen.

Eric Schumacher 47:07
And the church needs to be stepping forward--and she should see it beforehand. That church is going to care for her and provide for her in every way to make sure that she's healthy and whole and healed.
Justin, it has been a pleasure.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 47:26
[laughs] Yeah.

Justin Holcomb 47:26
Are we done already?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 47:27
[laughs] I know.

Eric Schumacher 47:27
We are done already.

Justin Holcomb 47:29

[laughs]

Elyse Fitzpatrick 47:29

[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 47:30

Yeah. Tell our listeners how they can find you online.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 47:33

[laughs]

Justin Holcomb 47:34

Um, it's--

Eric Schumacher 47:35

Because that's where we want them to send the letters.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 47:38

[laughs]

Justin Holcomb 47:38

No, yeah, yeah. Justin-dot-holcomb--um, Justin-holcomb-dot-com. That's the website with any material. There's some free chapters on abuse, all that kind of stuff, that's there, and some other articles like that. And then, you know, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, it's all "justinholcomb". You know, @justinholcomb for Twitter and Instagram, same thing on Facebook. I think I've successfully shut down any access of direct messages. So I'll make sure I do that.

Eric Schumacher 48:04

[laughs]

Justin Holcomb 48:04

So, I will forward them to you guys.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 48:07

[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 48:08

Never know what you're gonna get in an email.

Justin Holcomb 48:10

Yeah, we'll see what happens. I won't give you the email address, then.

Eric Schumacher 48:15

[laughs]

Elyse Fitzpatrick 48:15

[laughs] Thank you.

Eric Schumacher 48:16

All right. Well--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 48:17

Justin, thank-you so much. It's such an honor to call you my friend, and God bless you guys. Our kind wishes to Lindsey and to you and to the Stink Faces. [laughs]

Justin Holcomb 48:34

Well, thank-you for your friendship, and for the work you guys have done on *this*. I love having a book that I can give to my wife and my girls and my mom and my dad and my brother-in-law and my fellow ministers. So, I know this isn't--it's not a women's issue book. And I hope it's beyond being a women's issue book. So thank-you for doing this for the church and for the world.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 48:53

Thank you, brother.

Eric Schumacher 48:53

Yeah, well, thanks--thanks for listening to this episode of Worthy. We hope you enjoyed the conversation with Justin. We hope--I can say already that we will have him on again, because there's a lot more to talk about. Be sure to share this podcast with your friends, your family, and perfect strangers on the street.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 49:10

[laughs]

Eric Schumacher 49:10

We'll see you next time.

[Outro song]