

A Year of Biblical Womanhood  
*the discussion guide*

< Rachel Held Evans >

## From the Author

People often ask me what on earth was going through my mind when I decided to try a year of biblical womanhood. My answer is always the same: I wanted to start a conversation—about faith, about womanhood, about how those of us who love and esteem the Bible are to interpret and apply it to our lives.

This conversation is best had among friends, in living rooms and coffee shops, over homemade meals and shared bottles of wine, during the Sunday school hour or in those precious few moments of fellowship squeezed between meetings, play dates and appointments.

So it is a joy for me to imagine readers using *A Year of Biblical Womanhood* in their book clubs and group studies. I hope it generates laughter, questions, discussion, encouragement, and maybe even a few friendly debates.

This guide is intended to help nurture conversation and includes questions for discussion and ideas for action corresponding with each chapter, as well as a list of resources for those wishing to learn more about the topic (perhaps from people who don't conduct their research from the rooftops of their homes).

Special thanks to Katie Strandlund for putting this guide together, and for the many readers who offered suggestions based on their own group experiences.

It is a humbling honor to be invited into the lives of my readers by way of my books. I hope this strange story of mine gives you much to talk about.

-Rachel Held EVANS

July 2013

# introduction

Growing up, how were you taught to see the role of women? Did a church upbringing affect that perspective?

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< How would you define “biblical womanhood” today? >

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What was your first reaction upon learning about Rachel’s year of biblical womanhood?

# chapter 1

## October: Gentleness

How have you always understood the “gentle & quiet spirit”? Has that understanding changed after reading this chapter?

Try centering prayer.

When is your gentle & quiet spirit most challenged?

Try Lectio Divina in your group using Psalm 131 or Matthew 5:1-12.

How do you fight the urge to gossip?

Start a Jar of Contention.

Have you ever felt like you had to change your personality to fit into the mold of “biblical womanhood”?

## chapter 2

### November: Domesticity

Do you / Have you looked down on women who are full-time homemakers?

Try a new recipe.

Do you identify more with Mary or Martha?

Choose a special prayer—perhaps from Brother Lawrence—on which to meditate while you do housework.

Confession time: As you read the quotes from Dorothy Patterson & Debi Pearl about women working outside the home, what feelings did they stir up in you?

From a reader: put your domestic skills to the test & throw a cookout for your neighborhood or a local group in need.

How are you finding God in your current vocation, whatever that may be?

## Chapter 3

### December: Obedience

What parts of Scripture do you find troubling or confusing as they relate to women?

Light a candle for a biblical character or saint you connect with and remember him/her throughout the day.

What is your response to the Bible's "texts of terror"?

How do you see selective literalism today in your church/life & the lives of those around you?

## Chapter 4

### January: Valor

If you grew up in the Church, was the Proverbs 31 wife emphasized?

Challenge yourself to keep the “Everyday” list for one week. Can you do it?

How does reading Proverbs 31 make you feel?

Challenge yourself to compliment valor in others at least once a day.

How are you a woman of valor in your own way?

Take this time to talk about how & why other people in your discussion group are people of valor.

## Chapter 5

### February: Beauty

Do you feel pressure to be beautiful?

From a reader: *We decided to celebrate beauty by having a henna party. Some friends from India helped us.*

Growing up, how were you taught to view sexuality?

Reread Song of Songs. What jumps out at you this time?

Has the Church ever made you feel like a sex object as a woman?



# Chapter 6

## March: Modesty

How would you define the word *modesty*?

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< Do you look down on women who dress more conservatively than you? >

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What does modesty mean for you personally?

## Chapter 7

### April: Purity

What is your response to the Levitical Purity Codes concerning menstruation?  
Were you familiar with these laws?  
How do you think Christians are to interpret and apply biblical passages like these?

Read *The Red Tent* by Anita Diamat.

Have you ever participated in a Passover Seder?  
What was it like?

Next time you gather for dinner with a group from church or with your family, practice the traditional Jewish blessing of the bread.  
(<http://www.aish.com/sh/ht/fn/48969636.html>)

Have you ever experienced something that made you feel like an outcast from your religious community, like the bleeding woman of Mark 5?

Imagine you are in *niddah*. Try going an entire day without touching a member of the opposite sex.

## chapter 8

### May: Fertility

We've heard from a lot of women who say they feel "less than" in the church because they are not mothers. Have you witnessed or experienced this?

Conversely, have you ever felt looked down upon because you are a parent or because of your parenting decisions?

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Was motherhood an ideal that you were taught as a child?

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What did/does scare you about becoming a mother?

## Chapter 9

### June: Submission

What were you taught about submission growing up?

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How do you feel about the quotes from Debi Pearl's book (pg. 208) about being created to make your husband complete or be his secretary?

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How have gender roles played out in your relationship/marriage?

## Chapter 10

### July: Justice

Do you think churches today are charity-focused without being justice-focused?

Host a fair trade chocolate and/or coffee tasting party.

What typically comes to mind for you when you think about the empowerment of women?

Pray for women around the world who are persecuted simply because of their gender.

How can you as a book group support the empowerment of women around the world?

Read *Half the Sky* by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn.

## chapter II

### August: Silence

How have you historically understood the Scriptures about women being silent?

Take a silent retreat or try a social media silence retreat.

*“There is a big difference, after all, between being silenced and silencing oneself”*  
(pg. 278).

Take a woman who is a pastor out for coffee to learn more about her life and offer encouragement.

How would silencing oneself foster strength as a woman and actually speak volumes without saying a word?

Does seeing women as prophets vs. preachers give you a sense of freedom to speak up in ways you haven't before?

## Chapter 12

### September: Grace

Various faith traditions are addressed throughout the book: what have you learned about womanhood from these various traditions?

Do you find it easier or harder to have grace with yourself vs. grace with others?

From a reader: make Challah bread.

Make a list of 5-10 resolutions (lifestyle changes) you'd like to make after reading the book.

## Additional Resources

### [RachelHeldEvans.com](#): *Mutuality 2012*

A series of blog posts dedicated to discussing an egalitarian view of gender, including relevant biblical texts and practical applications. The series tackles everything from the New Testament Household Codes, to passages about women speaking and leading in the church, to common misconceptions about egalitarianism, to Who's Who among women leaders of the Bible, to Dan's perspectives on leadership and partnership.  
(<http://rachelheldevans.com/blog/mutuality-2012-posts>)

### [RachelHeldEvans.com](#): *Womanhood Tag*

Keep up to date on Rachel's latest writings about women and the Church.  
(<http://rachelheldevans.com/blog?tag=womanhood>)

### [Christians for Biblical Equality](#)

(<http://www.cbeinternational.org/>)

### [Sarah Bessey](#)

(<http://sarahbessey.com/>)

### [Gifted for Leadership](#)

(<http://www.giftedforleadership.com/>)

### ["Women's Service in the Church: The Biblical Basis"](#) by N.T. Wright

([http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Women\\_Service\\_Church.htm](http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Women_Service_Church.htm))

## BOOKS

*The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* by Scot McKnight

*Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy* edited by Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis

*Finally Feminist: A Pragmatic Christian Understanding of Gender* by John Stackhouse



## Additional Resources continued

*The Gospel According to Ruth* by Carolyn Custis James

*Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women* by Carolyn Custis James

*Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn

*How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals* edited by Alan F. Johnson

*Partners in Marriage and Ministry* by Ron Pierce

*The Resignation of Eve: What if Adam's Rib Is No Longer Willing to Be the Church's Backbone?* by Jim Henderson, George Barna, and Lynne Hybels

*A Woman Called: Piecing Together the Ministry Puzzle* by Sara Gaston Barton

*Women of the Gospels: Friends and Disciples of Jesus (Ancient-Future Bible Study)* by Stephen J. Binz

*Women of the Torah: Matriarchs and Heroes of Israel (Ancient-Future Bible Study)* by Stephen J. Binz

*Women's Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition* by Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ring