

My heart sang as I read this book: I found myself wanting to read more and more of it! It brings a much-needed, compassionate but uncompromising focus to what is a vital topic in these troubled times. Sharon James' handling of the material is intelligent, honest and winsome: the breadth of her research builds upon biblical integrity and invites women into a Christ-centric freedom. She avoids the pitfalls of gender-stereotyping and also holds out the gospel to those who have been wounded in this fallen world. In highlighting all that God intends women to be, her close attention to the biblical text allows for neither smugness nor the need to apologise to society at large, which is both refreshing and liberating. I would whole-heartedly recommend this book for women everywhere who want to confidently walk with Jesus in their God-given identity.

**Genevieve T Jennings, Pastoral Worker,
Eden Baptist Church, Cambridge**

With a historical scope that encompasses the classical era up to the #MeToo movement, Sharon James has mined the Scripture that has proclaimed Christ in every generation and found harmony and beauty in truth. This is a rare, wise and essential text to be read by men and women.

Ben Virgo, Christian Heritage London

A timely re-write, taking us from Creation, through history, to the perplexing times we inhabit now. Sharon helpfully traces the feminist movement showing how thinking has changed so rapidly and fundamentally, leading to a rejection of biblical truth where Christians are now viewed as hateful and intolerant. Our challenge is to 'have confidence to live out, and tell out, what God says about sexuality, and about how to live a truly happy and fulfilled life'. This book will equip women of all ages to do so, and will also give confidence to Christian men to live out their God-given calling, in right relationship to women.

**Julia Jones, Director of Women's courses at London Seminary,
and missionary support worker with Grace Baptist Mission**

Insightful, instructive and inspiring, this is a book which brings a refreshingly calm, warm and intelligent voice to the present debate on the identity and role of women. Sharon James' breadth and depth of reading are impressive and the clarity with which the Biblical view of womanhood is presented is elevating and attractive. There is no avoiding any of the 'hard questions' which are dealt with fairly and judiciously. Without doubt this is one of the most readable and helpful books on the subject: a must for both men and women. Highly commended.

Melvin Tinker, Vicar of St John Newland, Hull

How are women to navigate the challenges of society, community, church, singleness, marriage and motherhood, in a positive and Biblical way? Sharon provides careful, comprehensive answers which inspire action; she doesn't dodge the hard questions and is able to critique masterfully how we arrived where we are in the 21st century. Her historical and current examples show what women living out God's design have contributed to society and the church in the UK and overseas. This book is eminently readable but not lightweight. It will leave you with questions to ponder that will impact the day to day as well as

the bigger life decisions you make. Sharon is committed to women in ministry from a complementarian perspective and, refreshingly, wants to see that worked through well in church life. This book will inspire you to fulfil the God given design for women, individually and collectively; to remove the idols of our time and to shine like stars in this generation which so needs women of all ages and backgrounds to live, work and serve courageously, compassionately and sacrificially to the praise and glory of our Saviour. This book is much needed and shouldn't sit on your shelf, but be read, discussed and applied.

**Elinor Magowan, FIEC Women's Ministry Coordinator
and Pastor's wife, Carey Baptist Church, Reading**

Sharon James has given us a biblically faithful and pastorally sensitive affirmation of God's clear design for women. In this updated version she engages with many of the contemporary debates. At a time of great confusion, she helps us to think in a positive and balanced way about this vital subject. This book is highly recommended.

Paul Mallard, Pastor, Widcombe Baptist Church Bath

I cannot commend this book highly enough. It is Biblically based, theologically robust and easily accessible to readers of all levels. Through insightful exposition and practical application it makes a vital contribution to our understanding of the debate and is so relevant to christian women living in the 21st century.

**Gail Curry, Director of Baptist Women,
Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland**

Praise for previous editions:

'written in a compelling, compassionate, down-to-earth style that is immensely readable'

Grace Magazine

'If you are going to read one book on biblical womanhood this should be it. Sharon James' book is clearly written out of years of study as well as years of experience in a pastoral context'

**Themelios, International Journal for Theological
and Religious Studies Students)**

'essential reading for both women and men in our churches'

Evangelicals Now

'A must for the woman who has young teenagers coming up and maybe going off to university with all the pressures that are coming their way'

Christian Woman

'a very readable yet scholarly book, which shows what a joy and privilege it is to be made a woman'

Equal But Different

'A word in season to give us courage to strive to be what God meant us to be'

Helen Roseveare, Missionary Doctor and Author, 1925–2016

God's Design for Women in an age of Gender Confusion

Revised and updated

Sharon James

EP BOOKS (Evangelical Press) Registered Office: 140 Coniscliffe Road, Darlington, Co Durham DL3 7RT

www.epbooks.org
admin@epbooks.org

EP Books are distributed in the USA by:
JPL Books, 3883 Linden Ave. S.E.,
Wyoming, MI 49548

www.jplbooks.com
orders@jplbooks.com

© Sharon James 2019. All rights reserved.

First edition of *God's Design for Women*, 2002

Revised edition, 2007.

This edition, *God's Design for Women in an Age of Gender Confusion*, 2019

First written in 2002, and revised in 2007, *God's Design for Women* has been reprinted several times and has also been translated into French, Russian and Italian. In 2008, Clear Cut Media released a 6-part DVD and study guide based on the book. *God's Design for Women in an Age of Gender Confusion* has been rewritten to take account of current cultural trends, including the ever-increasing confusion about gender 'identity'.

Print ISBN 978-1-78397-263-0

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Dedicated, with love and gratitude, to

Christine

Jenny

Rebekah

Eliza

*One generation shall commend your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts. (Psalm 145:4)*

Contents

Introduction.....	I I
-------------------	-----

Part I

I Christianity: Good News for Women?.....	I 5
(i) <i>The Ministry of Christ</i>	I 5
(ii) <i>The Teaching of Paul</i>	I 7
(iii) <i>The Expansion of Christianity</i>	I 8
(iv) <i>Revival and Mission</i>	2 I
(v) <i>Christianity Today</i>	2 4
(vi) <i>Protecting the Dignity of all Humanity</i>	2 5

Part II Feminism: Liberation or Betrayal?

2 The Demand for Liberation: Four waves of feminism	3 I
(i) <i>Fight for Fairness:</i> <i>First wave equity feminism (late 19C–early 20C)</i>	3 3
(ii) <i>Fight for Freedom:</i> <i>Second wave gender feminism (1960–1990)</i>	3 5
(iii) <i>Freedom to behave badly:</i> <i>Third wave feminism (1990–2010)</i>	4 6

6 GOD'S DESIGN FOR WOMEN IN AN AGE OF GENDER CONFUSION

	(iv) <i>#MeToo:</i> <i>Fourth wave feminism (2010–present)</i>	48
3	The Fight for Liberation: Three Strategies in the Battle of Ideas	51
	(i) <i>The New Morality</i>	52
	(ii) <i>The New Spirituality</i>	54
	(iii) <i>The New Ideology</i>	61
4	The Bitterness of Betrayal: Seven Ways Feminism Failed Us All	65
	(i) <i>Sexual 'liberation' betrayed women</i>	65
	(ii) <i>'Liberation' from the married family betrayed women</i>	68
	(iii) <i>Removing the option for mothers to stay at home</i> <i>betrayed women</i>	71
	(iv) <i>Victimising women demeans them</i>	72
	(v) <i>Demonising men harms us all</i>	73
	(vi) <i>Children are betrayed by the insistence on adult 'rights'</i>	74
	(vii) <i>Rejecting God betrays us all</i>	79

Part III God's Good Design

5	God's Design: Equality and Complementarity	83
	(i) <i>Equal Dignity</i>	83
	(ii) <i>Complementary Difference</i>	86
6	God's Design: Ruined, Revealed and Restored	97
	(i) <i>God's Good Design: Ruined</i>	97
	(ii) <i>God's Good Design: Revealed and Restored</i>	102

Part IV God's Good Design: Family, Community and Church

7	Singleness: Reflection of God's Expansive Love.....	109
	(i) <i>Kingdom Priorities.....</i>	111
	(ii) <i>The Myth of the 'Gift of Singleness'.....</i>	112
	(iii) <i>Christian Contentment.....</i>	114
	(iv) <i>Suddenly Single.....</i>	116
	(v) <i>God's Family.....</i>	119
	(vi) <i>Opportunity to Reflect God's Expansive Love.....</i>	121
8	Marriage: Reflection of God's Faithful Love.....	125
	(i) <i>Just a personal relationship?.....</i>	125
	(ii) <i>Marriage: A Creation Institution.....</i>	126
	(iii) <i>Marriage: An illustration of Christ and the Church.....</i>	129
9	Motherhood: Reflection of God's Fruitful love.....	141
	(i) <i>Children: Enemy or Blessing?.....</i>	141
	(ii) <i>Motherhood: Reflection of God's Fruitful Love.....</i>	144
	(iii) <i>Spiritual mothering.....</i>	146
	(iv) <i>Portrait of a Young Mother.....</i>	149
10	Work: Reflection of God's Creative love.....	157
	(i) <i>God's Creative Love.....</i>	157
	(ii) <i>Working for God's Glory.....</i>	160
	(iii) <i>The Idol of Work.....</i>	161
	(iv) <i>Women and Work.....</i>	163
	(v) <i>Working for the Lord.....</i>	165

II	The Church: God's Household	171
	(i) <i>The Church as God's Household</i>	172
	(ii) <i>Evangelical Feminism: No Role Distinctions</i>	175
	(iii) <i>Repressive Conservatives: No Ministries for Women</i>	185
	(iv) <i>Respecting Equal Dignity and Significant Difference</i> ...	189
I2	Biblical Women's Ministries	193
	(i) <i>Worshipping Together</i>	193
	(ii) <i>Teaching Ministries</i>	194
	(iii) <i>Evangelism</i>	195
	(iv) <i>Diaconal and Mercy Ministries</i>	198
	(v) <i>Cross-Cultural Mission</i>	204
	(vi) <i>Prayer Ministries</i>	206
I3	The Ministry of Comfort:	
	Reflecting God's Restoring love	211
	(i) <i>From Brokenness to Ministry</i>	211
	(ii) <i>Counselling Ministries</i>	221

Part V How Should We Then Live?

I4	The Love that Never Dies:	
	Purity amid Permissiveness	229
	(i) <i>The Idol of Sex</i>	229
	(ii) <i>The Love that Lasts</i>	231
	(iii) <i>God's Transforming Power</i>	236
I5	The Beauty that Never Fades	241
	(i) <i>The Idol of External Beauty</i>	241

	(ii) <i>Lasting Beauty</i>	248
16	The Life that Never Ends	253
	(i) <i>The Way We Live Now: Living by Sight</i>	253
	(ii) <i>How Should We then Live? Living by Faith</i>	255
	For Further Reading	259
	Guide for Group Study	267
	Endnotes	281
	Acknowledgements	301
	About the Author	302
	Indices	303

Introduction

Is there anything unique about being a woman? What does God's Word say to women today?

Two themes run in parallel through Scripture. Equal dignity. Significant difference. Women are badly served when their essential dignity as human beings is disrespected. But they are also badly served when 'equality' is assumed to mean 'sameness'. That is probably why, when a survey of women in the UK was conducted in 2018, the majority of those surveyed *affirmed* female equality, but refused to identify as feminist.¹ Similar results were found in other European countries, and also the US. All too often feminism has cheered for equality, but failed to take sufficient account of difference.

I first wrote *God's Design for Women* in 2002. I have rewritten the book to take account of current cultural trends, including the ever-increasing confusion about gender 'identity'. I have also extended the scope to include what is happening beyond my own country.

The book includes sections on the following topics. Each section is self-contained. You can dip in and out, choosing the chapters most relevant to you.

* *The positive impact Christianity has had on women through history*

- * *The various waves of feminism right up to the #MeToo movement*
- * *The Bible's teaching about equality and complementarity*
- * *A survey of different views on women's ministry*
- * *An overview of ministries of women in the church*
- * *Chapters on work, singleness, marriage and motherhood*
- * *A list of helpful resources*
- * *A study guide, either for individuals or groups*

We can be confident in the goodness of God's creation design. Yes, it has been distorted and spoiled by sin. But Jesus Christ not only restores and redeems, he reveals why God designed us as male and female. That revelation takes us to the heart of the Gospel: Christ's self-giving sacrifice to rescue his people. We have a great message to share. Christianity is good news for women.

Sharon James,
London, 2019.