

Women + The Church

There is a great deal of evidence of women's participation in the early church and the role they played in early Christianity.

Walking With God

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

"He has told you, O human, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." | Micah 6:8 NAS 1977

Knowing And Being Known

At the heart of us all is a deep desire to be known; to be so intimately connected with another person that it's as if we are no longer two people but one – *'a single soul dwelling in two bodies.'* There are many of us who are lucky enough to experience that kind of affinity with another person; sharing empathy, support and kinship in a close human relationship like no other. Our experience of marriage, that of committing to another person and them to us, is one of the most intimate and fulfilling relationships we will have in this life.

Yet nothing will compare to knowing and being known by the One who has breathed life into us, animating our flesh and bone and *'in whom we have our very being.'*

God intended that humanity would seek Him, reach out for him

and desire to be close to Him in relationship. He is not far from each one of us, as near as the tongue in our mouth, as close as the heart in our chest. (Acts 17:28, Romans 10:8)

In moments of quiet worship, in stirring songs of devotion, in times of disappointment, heartache and despair, the emotions that overwhelm our hearts all serve to propel us towards seeking and loving the One who rings our hearts like a bell. (Abraham Heschel)

Our days are numbered, yet we were made to walk with God. Perhaps we all feel that pull and longing, in the secret places of our hearts, to return to the place in the beginning, to the cool shade of the garden, where God once walked with us.

A Perfect Eden

In that garden, in the beginning, Adam and Eve were in close relationship with their Creator. The world that existed at that time was 'very good', a perfect Eden where God's glory shone softly between the tall, slim trees and Heaven and Earth were as one. In the middle of the garden, grew two trees; the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. From one tree Adam and Eve could freely eat, but the other was forbidden to them, prohibited from being eaten and not even to be touched. Life, and life abundantly, flowed from one and certain death would be the result of eating from the other.

It was such a small thing, only one bite, and yet the result of their disobedience was catastrophic. The evil of sin entered God's good world, and would eventually spread like a dark, cancerous mass across the surface of the earth.

A [sentence of death](#) was passed, not just to Adam and Eve, but to all who would come after them. The way to the garden – to the place where God had once walked with them – was barred. The oneness with God that had existed before sin entered the

world had been broken and a great chasm now lay between the Creator and His children.

A Communion Of The Heart

This expression, *“walking with God”* is used often in the Bible and means, *‘not merely God’s knowledge of a person, but also a person’s response to God. Practical obedience, along with a communion of heart and will, are described as “walking with” or “before God.”* (Genesis 5:22; Genesis 6:9; Genesis 17:1; Psalm 56:13; Psalm 116:9)’ (Elliot’s Commentary)

The first person that we’re told *‘walked with God’* after the catastrophe that unfolded in the garden was a man named Enoch (Genesis 5:21-24). Chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, a famous chapter cataloguing many faithful individuals, tells us that Enoch was taken from this life and didn’t experience death. The commendation of him was of *“one who pleased God”* (Hebrews 11:5). The word used for walk in the commentary on Enoch’s life in Genesis means, in Hebrew *‘to come, go, walk’*. It carries the idea of coming and going *with God* – that is, that Enoch was in complete union with God and agreement about where they were going together. He walked alongside God on a daily basis, going here and there in life but always at God’s side.

This idea of *‘being at God’s side or being near to God’* being related to faith is recognised by Paul the Apostle in his thoughts about Enoch (Hebrews 11:6). He verbalises what is surely a connection between the two ideas: *“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him”* (Hebrews 11:5-6, ESV). Walking with God, Paul seems to be making clear, is synonymous with a *‘faith that pleases God’*.

“Can two walk together without agreeing where to go?” | Amos 3:3, BSB

“Will, then, God walk with a person, guiding, shielding, strengthening him, if that person is not in harmony with Him? He (Amos) illustrates the truths that all effects have causes, and that from the cause you can infer the effect. The “two” (here) are God’s judgment and the prophet’s word. These do not coincide by mere chance, no more than two persons pursue in company the same end without previous agreement. The prophet announces God’s judgment because God has commissioned him; the prophet is of one mind with God, therefore the Lord is with him, and confirms his words.” (Elliot’s Commentary)

An Invitation To Deeper Relationship

Abraham, called the friend of God (James 2:23), was summoned deeper into relationship by the invitation of God to ‘walk with Him’

“I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless.” | Genesis 17:1, NIV

Abraham is known not only as the *friend of God* but also as the *father of faith*, demonstrating the reality that ‘walking with God’ and the action of faith in our Christian lives is one and the same thing.

Faith is what brings us to that place of being ‘put right with God’ but it’s [faith, meshed with action](#), that really brings us into a full relationship with Him. The all-encompassing meaning of belief is intrinsically linked with the actions that back it up – seamless believing and doing. It’s not the doing that makes us right, but it’s impossible to show our faith, without the doing.

The apostle James, in his letter to the believers, tells them that separating belief from action is like separating a body from the life force or spirit within – all that’s left is a corpse. (James 2:18-26). As Eugene Peterson so aptly puts it, *“Wisdom is not primarily knowing the truth, although it*

certainly includes that; it is skill in living. For, what good is a truth if we don't know how to live it? What good is an intention if we can't sustain it?"

It's faith, coupled with action – *believing and doing* – that elevated Abraham from being not just a *father of faith* but also the *friend of God* – participant in a close and intimate relationship of knowing and being known.

The Psalmist also spoke of the comfort of knowing and being known – that God's presence was always at his side.

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." | Psalm 23:4, NIV

'Walking with God' means simply that we are [God's people](#). We are intimately known by Him and He is known by us. This is a relationship where God's presence is truly living with us and we are walking alongside Him, each and every day of our lives.

A Promise Of Reconciliation

This has always been the comforting promise from God to His people (Leviticus 26:12, Deuteronomy 10:12, 1 John 1:7), firstly to the nation of Israel and then flowing and expanding outward from Israel to include all of humanity in the [new covenant](#):

"I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be My people." | Leviticus 26:12, NLT

"I will make my home among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people." | Ezekiel 37:27, NLT

"For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their

God, and they will be my people.” | 2 Corinthians 6:16, ESV

Jesus was the exact representation of God and the very imprint of His nature (Hebrews 1:3, John 14:10-11), the Word-made-flesh who took up residence amongst us (John 1:1-14).

By knowing him, we could truly know God and the promise of reconciliation could be seen clearly for the first time; so close we could reach out and touch it. The morning of that resurrection, it was as if all the world waited, in breathless anticipation, for the moment when restored relationship became a reality and we could once again walk with God.

Through the blood of Jesus, the painful separation between us and the One who loves us best, has been healed. The ravine of sin has been bridged and we who were once far off from God, are brought close again, in perfect, harmonious relationship.

A Life Alongside God

Walking with God is sometimes equated to simply ‘*living a moral life*’, but I believe this misses the point.

Firstly, there’s nothing simple about living a perfect, moral life. And while the Christian life is certainly about *trying* to do the right thing, we will actually never achieve a morally acceptable life. Only Jesus achieved that and it’s only through his victory that we are conquerors, but certainly not through our own efforts. *Walking with God* isn’t about achieving perfection, not at the core of it all.

Walking with God is about a life spent *alongside God* and, as a result of that choice, producing the kind of faith that is real and pleasing to God. It’s about relationship; a decision of the heart to choose the way that God is walking, not our own, and to pursue that path with Him.

This is a faith that isn’t just a thought or a hope or a list

of unemotive 'do's' or 'don'ts' but forward motion in real communion with God, as a Father and as a Friend. "Walking with God' is deeply connected to the idea of having *living faith* – that is, faith expressed through action, not merely subscribing to a set of beliefs. It's living in the delicately balanced tension between faith and works and ensuring that the things we're convicted of find real demonstration in our conduct.

Corinthians confirms that walking with God is by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7) but this is faith demonstrated not just in *saying* what we believe but *doing* what we say we believe.

It isn't an intellectual exercise – *knowing things about God* – but a choice of the heart, intimately *knowing God*, His character, His will, His greatness and majesty, and then choosing humbly to walk alongside Him every moment of our lives. We'll get it wrong more often than we'll get it right, but we have faith that 'the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin' and we have confidence that his sacrifice enables us to draw close to God and choose relationship again with Him. This is where conviction and conduct meet in glorious union and we are truly 'walking with God'.

"We don't believe something by merely saying we believe it, or even when we believe that we believe it. We believe something when we act as if it were true." | Dallas Willard (1935 – 2013)

"It's possible for a man to spend so much mental energy in discussing and rediscussing the simple element of truth that he never puts what has learned into practical effect, and this is probably why some people have drawn a fictitious distinction between matters of morality and what have been called 'mere questions of doctrine'. Sound doctrine is the foundation of sound morality and right action is simply right doctrine in practice. By putting on the whole armour of God,

we must have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Our shoes are in use every step of the way. We are not always using the sword of the Spirit to the throwing down of fleshly strongholds; but we are always walking, whether in war or peace, whether surrounded by the wicked and assailed by fiery darts, or in the assembly of the saints and hearing words of cheer. Our 'walk in life' covers all this experience." | Islip Collyer, Conviction and Conduct (page 97, 106)

On Earth As In Heaven

Awareness of and responding to the love of God is at the heart of our Christian lives. We are who we are, first and foremost, because of God revealed in Christ. Because of Jesus, sin has been defeated and death no longer has the final word. "There's nothing more to separate us from the promise, the words of a living hope." (This, My Soul | The Gray Havens)

The truth is that *'walking with God'*, that beautiful, expansive, all-enveloping phrase, is what draws us back into the light, where we can stand naked and unashamed in the glow of God's glory. Choosing to walk with God, in a repaired relationship through Jesus, returns us to that garden, to the place where everything was *'very good'* and where every heartbeat of our life echos to the will and glory of our Creator.

"How great the chasm that lay between us, how high the mountain I could not climb. In desperation, I turned to heaven and spoke Your name into the night. Then through the darkness, Your loving-kindness tore through the shadows of my soul. The work is finished, the end is written, Jesus Christ, my living hope." | Jesus Christ, My Living Hope, Bethel Music

Two worship songs, in particular, were the inspiration behind this article. The first, 'Your Glory' by All Sons & Daughters, is a beautiful reminder of the purpose for which we were created and to which we're all called. The second, 'This My Soul' by The Gray Havens is a compelling retelling of the story in the beginning: the perfect peace of Eden, disrupted by sin, but promised rescue, redemption, and restoration, at great personal cost, by the Creator Himself.

The Story's Not Over Yet...

"Walking, stumbling, on these shadow feet; toward home, a land that I've never seen. I am changing: less and less asleep, made of different stuff than when I began and I have sensed it all along, fast approaching is the day." | Brooke Fraser

These lyrics are from a song by Brooke Fraser, which I think really speak to our hearts as Christians. When I listen to this song, I feel as if I catch a glimpse of the real world beyond the veil, the world that exists beyond these shadowlands. For a brief moment, it seems as if I catch sight of the home that I know to be an unseen reality, that one day I'll see, in all its fullness, for myself.

God's Story

I want to share a few thoughts about God's Story, the story we see laid out in poetry, prose, prophecy and parable in the book we call the Bible.

We might be inclined to describe the Bible as merely 'the

story of the drama of human history' – but, in truth, it's not history yet. History, defined as *“something that happened or ended a long time ago and is not important now, or a person who is not important now, although they were in the past”*, does not accurately describe the reality that is the Word of God.

The Story of God, of which the Bible contains many important aspects, won't become history until the arrival of *“the new heavens and the new earth, the passing away of the first earth and the moment a loud voice proclaims “behold, the dwelling place of our God is with humanity and God is all in all”* (Revelation 21: 1-3, ESV)

It would also be too simplistic to state that the Bible is merely a catalogue of continuous human drama. The Bible isn't just a collection of stories about characters and events that happened in the past, nor merely information about cultures or civilisations that have now ceased to exist. Neither is it simply a compilation of recommended principles by which to live an honest and upright life (although it does contain these things and other helpful advice besides!).

The Bible's overarching story can't be relegated to simply ancient history or human drama alone.

“For the Word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” | Hebrews 4:12, NIV

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” | 2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV

The Bible is the living, Spirit-breathed [Word of God](#), the

written revelation of what God has been doing in the past and what He is still doing right now. It's a record of how and when God communicated His intent and purpose with humanity in the past and how He has communicated to us today.

Far from being just black text on white pages alone; this book unveils the purpose, intentionality and creative action of the Eternal One; breathed out, captured by way of quill and scroll by the faithful scribes who heard 'the voice of God', and recorded the Story of God for all to read. The words on these pages capture the historical reality of God's powerful, creative activities throughout the history of humanity.

When Jesus was sent into the world, the story of what the Creator was doing was demonstrated literally, in Jesus himself, who was the Word-Made-Flesh. Jesus showed to humanity all the fullness and glory of God and His purpose, [embodied in flesh and bone](#) and tabernacling amongst us.

Powerful. Authoritative. Prince of Peace. Emmanuel (*God With Us*).

"On many past occasions and in many different ways, God spoke to our fathers through the prophets. But in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe... His Word, made flesh and who dwelt among us" | Hebrews 1:1, John 1:1, ESV

By communicating through vision, in person, [through prophets](#) and finally, through His Son, we are challenged to move from simply thinking of the Bible as a book of facts or information and to instead see it as a visual recounting of what God has and is still communicating with us – the Story of God's rule and reign and the redemption of humanity demonstrated in His Son's life and death and resurrection.

This Story of God, of which the Bible contains many important

details, is still being written, all around us every day. The Bible is simply the paper record of a living transformative event, of the real and ongoing story. It provides the relevant information for us to know and understand this centuries-long event, as participants in that story and as recipients of the invitation to the Kingdom of Heaven. It contains the details we're supposed to be paying attention to so we can not just understand the story being told but choose which kind of character we'll be in that story.

The promise – that God will dwell with humanity again – is the great thread of the Bible and it's the **real story** that's being written every day, all around us in a thousand different ways.

God's kingdom in the preaching of Jesus refers not to postmortem destiny, not to our escape from this world into another one, but God's sovereign rule coming 'on earth as it is in heaven.' . . . Heaven, in the Bible, is not a future destiny but the other, hidden dimension of ordinary life – God's dimension, if you like. God made heaven and earth; at the last, He will remake both and join them together forever. The end times are not the end of the world – they are the beginning of the real world – in biblical understanding.” | N T Wright

The Story Begins...

The Bible opens with an account about the beginning of all things:

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the [Spirit of God](#) was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every

creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created humans in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." | Genesis 1:1-2, 26, NIV

We can tend to read this account as if it's a completed narrative. As if the statement '*Let us create humanity in our image*' was a single event that occurred in the past, one which we perhaps give little real thought to today. Yet, if we view it from a different perspective, stretching our minds a little higher, a little farther, we realise that God is still *creating humans in His image*. This is not history, this is the present reality we are living in and surrounded by.

God is doing magic, right under our noses, every single day!

[God's Spirit](#) is still hovering and continues to move in new and astonishing ways. His Word – His living Word, which brought all of the natural world into being, is continuing its creative work through redemption and regeneration in Jesus Christ, the Word-Made-Flesh. Light is still entering darkness, new life is being ignited and men and women are being reborn in God's image, to become His representatives and perfect image-bearers on this earth.

The Bible is, therefore, the only book in the world which contains snippets and segments of a real-life story that hasn't finished being told. We know what the ending will be, but we're still in it, right now, living and breathing it, every moment of our lives.

The [stories we read about in the Bible](#) then take on new significance. They're supposed to engage all our senses and connect us in very real ways to the people and situations we read about, to help us understand our place in the story that

is not just theirs, but ours too. And we know that every story, every moment, has been recorded with intentionality, to enable the reader to participate, but we also know there's plenty more, left untold, that time and space couldn't allow for:

"What else can I say? There isn't enough time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets." Hebrews 11:32, CEV

"And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if they were written one by one, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written." | John 21:25, HCSB

The Bible Is Our Own Personal Origin Story

Everyone's probably familiar with the idea of origin stories. An origin story is an account or back-story revealing how a character or group of people become a protagonist or antagonist in the main story. It adds complexity to a narrative, often giving reasons for the characters' intentions and choices.

The Bible is therefore our own [personal origin story](#). It tells us where we've come from and where we're going and invites us personally into the main story. The primary character in this story is the King of the Earth, God, revealed in Jesus and the antagonist, the Prince of this World – Sin. There are two kingdoms in this story – one of darkness and one of the Son of God, a Kingdom of Light. We don't get a choice about which kingdom we start out in but we certainly get to decide which kingdom we finish up in

When we read the Bible, we're not just reading **about** a story, we're actually **in** this story and it's unfolding all around us.

This is a story of creative magic, impossible realities, futility, despair and death, rescue and redemption, light, salt, allegiance and exaltation. Most of all, it's a story of hope.

It's the story of the creation of the **real world**, not this shadow world that we live in now. It's the story of how God's Will will be done on earth, as in heaven and how God will once again walk with us in paradise. It is the story of the Creator's divine life flowing into ours if we allow it.

This narrative gives shape and purpose to our human experience and [hope for our future](#).

"If we think that this life is all there is to life, then there is no interpretation of our problems, our pain, not even of our privileges. But everything changes when we open up to the possibility that God's story is really our story too." | Max Lucado

"Your life flows into mine, pure as a garden spring. A well of living water springs up from within you, like a mountain brook flowing into my heart! Then may your awakening breath blow upon my life until I am fully yours. Breathe upon me with your Spirit wind. Stir up the sweet spice of your life within me. Spare nothing as you make me your fruitful garden. Hold nothing back until I release your fragrance. Come walk with me as you once walked in your paradise garden. Come taste the fruits of your life in me. I have come to you, for you are my paradise garden! Come walk with me until I am fully yours. Come taste the fruits of your life in me." | Song of Songs 4:15-16, TPT

Not If, But How?

The question for us all, then, is not **if** we want to be a part of this story, but **how**.

As descendants of Adam and Eve, we're all born into the kingdom of darkness. Their story is our story and we're participants in that reality, whether we're willing or not. But the Master Storyteller hasn't left the world in darkness. He has crafted a narrative of redemption and light and offers a way, through the sacrifice of His Son, for us to be transferred from that dominion of darkness and into [His glorious Kingdom](#).

Jesus came, preaching that kingdom, urging people to choose a better way and to give their allegiance to him. *"Repent, he said, for the kingdom of God is here. I have arrived, proclaiming God's rule and bringing His salvation to humanity."* (Isaiah 52:10, Luke 17: 20-21, Luke 2:30)

"What I love about the Bible is that the story isn't over. There are still prophets in our midst. There are still dragons and beasts. It might not look like it, but the Resistance is winning. The light is breaking through. So listen to the weirdos. Listen to the voices crying from the wilderness. They are pointing us to a new King and a better kingdom." | Rachel Held Evans

If you still belong to the kingdom of darkness, if you haven't yet given your life and allegiance to the King, I repeat the appeal of Paul to you: *"Here we are, then, speaking for Christ, as though God Himself were making His appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf: let God change you from enemies into His friends!"* (2 Corinthians 5:20)

If you have given your life to Jesus through baptism, then Good News: So Glorious! You've been transferred into the Kingdom of Light. **Don't be a passive participant in the Story.**

You are a child of God, a member of the household of faith, a character in God's story whose name is written in the book of life! (Psalm 56:8, Daniel 12:1, Malachi 3:16, Philippians 4:3)

Boldly take hold of your place in the story. Be [strong and courageous](#) and don't fear the enemy who surrounds you. [Jesus, your King](#) reassures you: *"In the world you will have tribulation. But take courage; I have overcome the world!"* (2 Timothy 3:16-17, BSB)

"All of their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and title page: Now, at last, they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before. | C S Lewis, The Last Battle