

WE NEED A SEXUAL REFORMATION IN THE CHURCH: INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR AIMEE BYRD

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of FlyingFreeNow.com, and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 179 of the Flying Free Podcast! Today, we have with us Aimee Byrd. She is the author of several books, and we're going to be talking about and referring to two of them in this episode: "Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood," which I think is such a genius title, and we're going to talk about why, for anyone who doesn't know why I find that to be genius, and then her newest book, which just came out in March, I think. Was it in March?

AIMEE: Yeah.

NATALIE: And it's called "The Sexual Reformation." I think that's kind of a play off the idea of the sexual revolution, am I right? You're really good at writing titles. Anyway, welcome, Aimee!

AIMEE: Thank you! Those weren't first-choice titles, but, you know. Talking marketing and all those things, that's what we came up with.

NATALIE: Oh, that's funny. I love them — I love those titles.

AIMEE: Thank you.

NATALIE: Okay, so I thought that I would start by just connecting my listeners to you through my own connection to you, which you might not even be aware of. I first found out about you by listening to the "Mortification of Spin" podcast back before you got the boot from them, which I would love for you to tell us about in just a bit here.

AIMEE: Okay!

NATALIE: But I remember you and some other women... I was following Rachel Miller and Valerie Hobbs and their writings, and they started writing about this thing called "the eternal subordination of the Son," which sounds really lofty and theological. And so those of you who are listening, you might be tempted to just space out right here, but this is super relevant to abuse survivors and to everything that we're seeing going on the church right now, and here's why: Christian women who are marinating in these

kinds of religious spaces that believe that women are supposed to be subordinate to men are far more likely to find themselves in abusive marriages than women who go to churches that are not misogynistic and that value women, okay?

And when I say “value women,” I don't mean just in word, because I feel like misogynistic churches definitely pay all the lip service to valuing women. They use all these words, and it's really gaslighting. It's making you think, “Oh, they really value women — they really care about us.” But when they hold to these power-over structures of hierarchy as far as men powering over women and then they slap some Bible verses on that ugly puppy, that is not what it means to value women. And that is where this idea of the eternal subordination of the Son comes into play. So can you tell listeners why this idea is kind of the new pet doctrine for men who wish to keep women subordinate to them?

AIMEE: Yes, and I'm so glad you mentioned Rachel Miller and Valerie Hobbs. I think that Rachel was really writing about it first, and she wasn't getting much attention. I think she was getting blown off for it. Rachel, homeschool mom, she's now an author; she has been running a blog for a pretty long time, and she's in a very conservative, complementarian, reformed denomination. So she was very concerned at what she was finding, because this teaching, which does sound really theological and kind of like, “Why do we really need to study the deep, inner workings of the Trinity? Is that really important for our lives, and can we have some different views about that?” What she was finding is that this teaching, which wasn't in line with historical teaching, what we confess since the Nicene Creed as a church about who God is, this teaching, that in His being, the Son is subordinate to the Father's authority, and in all of His roles He will be subordinate to the Father's authority.

Now, I'm not talking about... Obviously there are scripture references that talk about Jesus submitting to the Father's will, but that was as our representative, as a human, as a mediator between us and God. That's not in His essence. Because He shares the same will as the Father. So we don't want to even imply that there is more than one will than the Godhead. But this is what was being implied in this teaching.

But the crazy part is, and this is why it's so important for all of us to look into more, is that this teaching was being used to then say, “Therefore, even though men and women are equal just like Jesus the Son and the Father are equal, we have functional roles.” And they connect those roles to our very being, like it's who we are. In our roles, which they make this permanent thing, women are subordinate to men. That's how we're made. And so this bad teaching about the Trinity is now being used to teach bad teaching about men and women. So there's so many wrong things that just happened

there, right?

NATALIE: Yes.

AIMEE: But Rachel starts uncovering it. I mean, it's in the best selling "Systematic Theology" that's out there — Wayne Grudem's "Systematic Theology," who's a major leader of this teaching. The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood — teaching it like crazy on their website, at their conferences, and then in many, many books that their authors are pumping out. Big names — big, trusted names that people love. It's in their book — that teaching is in their book: "Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood." So it's very connected to our "proper understanding" of men and women, is this understanding of the Trinity.

NATALIE: Yep.

AIMEE: You know, this is troubling me. I'm noticing it in women's resources, children's resources. So it's in our women's ministry, our children's ministries, it's in the study bibles. Talk about marinating. It's everywhere. So I started talking with some men about this problem, because it doesn't seem like... People in CBE, Council for Biblical Equality, they were writing about this, but they were being dismissed. "Oh, they're just liberals. Don't listen to them." So I talked to a pastor/kind of scholar, academic, and was sharing some of these resources with him, including a new book that the president, then, of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood was releasing — just saturated with this bad teaching. And he was very concerned as a pastor.

So I talked him into writing a guest post for my blog, which was, at the time, I wrote "The Mortification of Spin," and wow. I got a notable man to write about it, and it was just like the whole ceiling came down. There were tons of responses. You can Google "Trinity Debate" and see how far this has come. It was in 2016 in the summer, but conferences happened, books were written, and the patristic scholars, people who studied the church fathers and these creeds came forward and said, "Yeah, this is not orthodox teaching. This is not in line with our Christian creeds." So there was shuffling around, you know. The president stepped down and another one was put in, and that's Danny Burk. He's the new president of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. And he said, "Oh, nothing to see here. We have a wide umbrella about what people can say about this issue of the Trinity as long as we all align through the great Danvers Statement about basically the same thing — keeping women subordinate."

NATALIE: Yes, yes.

AIMEE: And that's the most important thing.

NATALIE: That's it. That's just it. That's the most important thing.

AIMEE: Right, not the Trinity.

NATALIE: Exactly. I really see it as just a propaganda tactic to infiltrate everyone's brains with this idea, which sets them up to just kind of buying into this idea that of course women need to be subordinate to men.

AIMEE: Yes. And so it's just so saturated in all of their resources. And I think one really hard part of it... And this is where you do have to start getting a little more technical. Because we use vocabulary, and we think we're using these words to mean what we think they mean. But they can use the same exact word and it means something else. And so even something like the word "role" — that's not a bad word. We do have different roles in life. But they use it for fixed power structures.

NATALIE: Yes.

AIMEE: That's not the definition of a role. You know, the word comes from the theater. It means "to play a part." So it's not a fixed structure in the essence of who you are permanently.

NATALIE: Right.

AIMEE: So things like that, you have to do some work and really say, "Oh, what do they mean when they say this," and you see exactly how they define it, and then you're like, "Oh," and I think that's how we can start marinating in it without realizing it. And then it flavors everything else.

NATALIE: Yes. So all of this drama — 2016, did you say?

AIMEE: Yeah.

NATALIE: Yeah. So that was when, at that time, I was wrapping up a twenty-five year long marriage and getting excommunicated from my church, which happened to be John Piper's church.

AIMEE: Busy getting excommunicated.

NATALIE: Yeah. So I was kind of embroiled and occupied with all that drama, and I kind of lost track of what happened then with the whole “subordination of the Son” thing, but I did hear that you got kicked off the podcast. Can you tell us why that happened? What happened there?

AIMEE: Yeah, so, the Trinity debate, I think I got... In some ways I got some credit, even though it was really the men who were entering the conversation, which, I was fine to take a step back in a lot of ways, because I’m not an academic. You know, like, “Let the academics talk about this,” women and men, but it turned out to be mainly men. But I think that there was some fracturing happening there, right? Because these were really big names. John Piper as you know — big name. He was pretty silent on this issue, but he is a founder of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. He’s the co-editor of their book with Wayne Grudem, who was the main teacher of eternal subordination. And Wayne Grudem — another big name. These are connected to big church organizations and to seminaries and to all these things.

NATALIE: Yes.

AIMEE: So I think that that started a fracture with anything that I’m writing, because the women can’t say these things. The women get blamed more than the men do. But anyway, I end up writing “Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood,” and what I really wanted to do there was to offer another way of looking at scripture. Another resource, I should say, aside from all this biblical manhood and womanhood framework, you know. You don’t have to put that on before you read scripture. When we look at the uses of the male voice and the woman’s voice in scripture, what do we see, and how does that make us think about discipleship? What is discipleship? What are our great honor and responsibilities as brothers and sisters in the church together?

And so that’s what I wanted to write about, but as I’m talking to my editor and planning this book, she’s like, “You know, you really have to directly address the problem of what we’re swimming in here — biblical manhood and womanhood. What is it and what’s wrong about it, and why do we need to look at it this way?” So it is a direct critique of the movement, and I think the title itself, I’m just trying to say, “This is a movement. Just because you put the word ‘biblical’ in front of it doesn’t make it so. It’s not an adjective.”

NATALIE: Yes. I’m so glad you said that.

AIMEE: It’s a movement that started in the late 80s, and there’s some good things that have come out of it, but as with every movement, we have to look at it critically, and we have to look back at scripture and what the church has been historically confessing all

this time. So the book is focused on discipleship. You know, what our great honor and responsibility is as men and women disciples. However, the book caused a lot of outrage on some ends, because I think people saw it as threatening to, "Oh, we might be giving women too much here." Like, "Aimee is on this trajectory to be a feminist," and "Aimee wants to ordain women now" or something like that. And really, the book wasn't looking at that question. It was looking at our discipleship. So I found that very revealing how threatening women having agency as disciples alongside their brothers is. But as soon as that book came out, one of the editors over where I blogged for the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, which is what "Mortification of Spin" was under, posted this article with nine questions proposed for me by this kind of anonymous group of concerned men.

NATALIE: An anonymous group?

AIMEE: Well, it's like, "These concerned people"

NATALIE: Oh my gosh!

AIMEE: Nobody's named, and there's nine questions that I'm supposed to answer. Some of the questions are answered in the book already, you know, if you would read it. Some of them are about things that I'm not writing about, like ordination and marriage. It's not a book about marriage, you know?

NATALIE: Yeah.

AIMEE: They want me to answer the 1 Timothy 2 question and all these kinds of things. And then some of the questions actually misrepresent my writing in what they're saying.

NATALIE: Of course. They just want to question you or interrogate you before they burn you at the stake.

AIMEE: Yes! So I thought, "How strange is this?" because I worked for them for seven years.

NATALIE: Oh my gosh.

AIMEE: And so I thought, "Why wouldn't they just interview me? If there are actually concerns, I would be happy to do an interview." Plus, you know, nothing I wrote in the book was against any of the confessions that that organization subscribed to. And

that's the whole point — Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, the point of the ministry. So I did ask some people that I trusted, people who had had experience with this organization, leaders in my denomination, and I just said, "I'm being asked to answer these questions. What do you think?" And the very first question was very revealing, and I did answer the first one, and it was about natural theology and male authority. And I just thought, "That is so revealing. This whole thing is about male authority."

NATALIE: Yeah.

AIMEE: So I answered that first one, but after talking and getting advice, you know, pretty much I was told, "Why should you ever have to answer questions by an anonymous group of people? You shouldn't have to do that. Has anyone else ever had to do that in the organization? If they want to post a critical review of the book, post a critical review of the book." I felt like a gun was being pointed at my feet and saying, "Dance, Aimee, dance."

NATALIE: Yes.

AIMEE: And so then I got an email from the board, the chairman of the board of the alliance, saying that, "You do need to answer these questions for us, for the board's eyes, and then we'll decide what to do." And I thought, "No, no I don't." In a friendly way I said, "Love for you to read my book." I said what I was advised to say, and that's when they let me go, and it was the weirdest email. It was kind of like how disappointed they are that I couldn't do something so simple as answer those questions. That they will offer me grace during my exit.

NATALIE: Unbelievable.

AIMEE: That's how they let me go.

NATALIE: Oh my gosh — stop it. Oh my word. You know what this is making me think of? It's like we've got a sandbox, and the little boys are in their sandbox, and they don't want to let the little girls come and play. It's so stupid.

AIMEE: I know! And before I got that email, I just thought, "You know what, I have a feeling," because time had gone by, and I had respectfully not been writing under my blog there. There's tension, you know. They put a pause on recording for the podcast, which was a pretty popular podcast, and they weren't quite saying to everybody why. So I just thought, "You know, I'm going to try to log in with my credentials to make a post just to see if I could get in," and sure enough, my credentials didn't work anymore

before I even got the “offering me grace to let me go” email.

NATALIE: So you had a blog, but it wasn't on something that you owned. They had it?

AIMEE: So originally I had my own blog, and when I started doing the podcast, they asked if I'd come and join with them, take my work over with them and their organization.

NATALIE: Oh my gosh. You gotta be kidding me. So you couldn't get back in, so what about all of the things that you had written?

AIMEE: So all my work, I asked them, you know, “Are you going to give me my work?” Because it's years of writing. “Oh, yes, yes, you can have your work, it's your work.” So I'm waiting. I'm thinking, “Oh, they'll just send me a software or something to download it all.” I am very technologically a moron. I need “Blogging for Idiots.” But anyway, basically they end up telling me after I ask, weeks later... Because they said that they were going to make an announcement — they never did. I'm like, “I would like to move on. Could I have my work, and when are you going to do this announcement?” because they said they were going to run it by me first. And then they just said, “You know what, I don't think we need to do an announcement of your departure.” And basically they said that my work was so intertwined with all the other stuff that basically I had to cut and paste everything that I wanted to keep.

NATALIE: What? So do they still have your stuff on their website? Is that even legal?

AIMEE: I don't know. I guess, because...

NATALIE: I bet you money it's not legal. I bet you money you could pursue that.

AIMEE: Yeah.

NATALIE: They can't just keep your work.

AIMEE: If you go to their website now... I haven't in a very long time, but I don't think it's available to see that way. But when I do searches for an article of mine, it'll show up on my blog now and on their old blog.

NATALIE; See, that's not right. I would look into that.

AIMEE: Yeah.

NATALIE: I would definitely look into that, because that's not right. What they're doing — I don't think it's legal.

AIMEE: There's a lot of questions I've had about a lot of that.

NATALIE; That's also bad for SEO. People, if they're searching...

AIMEE: Yeah! It's bad for SEO.

NATALIE: It's bad for SEO. They're basically stealing your intellectual property. They have to give it back to you. If they're not going to share their blog with you, share that space, they have to give that back to you. That is wrong. Now I'm really mad.

AIMEE: Yeah. So that's the story of leaving there, and then I started aimeebyrd.com and took what I wanted, cut and paste. It was a long labor.

NATALIE: Oh my word. You gotta be joking. That just makes me so mad.

AIMEE: That's where I blog now. And I'm no longer a part of the "Mortification of Spin" podcast.

NATALIE: Okay, well, that's why I don't listen to that anymore. So, I wanna bring up... At the very beginning of your new book, which is called "The Sexual Reformation," one of my favorite quotes at the very beginning is, "The woman's role boils down to puffing up the man." I just think that perfectly encapsulates what they think the woman's role is. And all of this that you just said is just evidence. It's just evidence. If it wasn't true, this would not have played out the way it did.

AIMEE: I know. As long as you know your lane, you do alright in there.

NATALIE: Exactly, exactly. As women, we don't really want to know. Deep down inside we sort of feel that, but we don't really want to test the waters, because we really don't want to know that that's really... "Really?!"

AIMEE: I know. "It can't be that way."

NATALIE: But it is. You said something along the lines of, "They have this belief that the husband is supposed to rule over his wife, while the woman is always going to be trying to control and usurp him. So his job is to make sure that she does not succeed, and they take their job as five-year-old boys: very, very seriously." So what does Jesus say,

though, about ruling over people?

AIMEE: Right! We learned in Matthew... He says that — and I'm totally paraphrasing here because I don't have it in front of me, but — "We're not like the world. That's the way the world views power and authority, and that's not it." He's washing feet. "The first should be last." Your authority is an authorization from God, and what is that to do? It's an authority given to you to love, to give of yourself. It's to give power to, not to exercise power over. Obviously we need order and government and all of these things, but I think that the way that we view authority has been very skewed. In the church, it's just mimicking the world, when Jesus tells us, "It's not that way."

NATALIE: Yep.

AIMEE: And I think Jesus, as a man and as the bridegroom shows us, I think that the first responsibility as man is to be the first to give, the first sacrifice, and the first to love.

NATALIE: Yes. Well, and as Christ-followers, that should be all of our motivation and drive and push to want to do that if we want to be like Christ was.

AIMEE: Yes. It's a reciprocal thing.

NATALIE: Exactly. So, it's not always just men, though, who buy into this theology. There's a lot of women and a lot of women leaders who are very... They're mouthpieces for this. I know you mentioned Rachel Jankovic, who is the daughter of Doug Wilson, who's a pastor, and anyway, she said, and I'm paraphrasing this, "Rather than meeting to study the Bible together and taking notes in the margins of the Bible, we should love the Bible so much that we are writing notes in the margins of our cookbooks."

AIMEE: Yeah. Look at that false dichotomy.

NATALIE: Yes! So I just wanted to bring that up, because so many of my listeners, you may be thinking that it's just men... You have to be careful what voices that you're listening to. Because it's not just men teaching this — we've all been... I mean, I used to be a mouthpiece for that kind of teaching too.

AIMEE: Same with me.

NATALIE: So we have to just be careful what we're listening to and filter it... I think if we put on a different set of glasses, we'll be able to see little things very differently. Alright,

I want to kind of segue now into talking about your brand-new book, which is “The Sexual Reformation.” Why did you decide to write this book? It’s a different book. I know you tie all of this stuff into it, but you’re focusing on the Song of Songs in the Bible.

AIMEE: I am.

NATALIE: And tell us about why you’re so fascinated by that book.

AIMEE: Yeah. You know, that has a personal story to it as well, because what happened after writing “Recovering,” there was a group of officers in my own denomination who put together this group, this private group on Facebook, but it ended up being up to like, 1,100 people on it. And a lot of them were church officers in my denomination, but in the PCA, in the Baptist churches, in the nondenominational. And not all of them were church officers, but a lot of the main voices were. It wasn’t merely me they were targeting, but I became a major target for them for harassment. They were calling ahead of my speaking engagements and warning churches to guard their families and their churches from “Jezebel” who was coming. They were plotting to sabotage my Amazon page with bad reviews and not buy the book and just share one book between all of them. They were coming after me on social media like crazy, often using anonymous accounts and changing the cover of my book to be vulgar and saying different things. Someone shared screenshots with me, and these were coming in morning to night, with hundreds of comments on these threads about me and other women — they were very misogynistic, and even kind of owning that. It had a lot of that red pill community language. I don’t know if you are familiar with that, but it’s very misogynistic language.

So what disturbed me in ways that I never could have predicted how it physiologically affected me was that these aren’t just jerks on the internet. These are leaders in our churches that we submit to, so this was spiritual abuse. And the worst part was someone in that group was an elder at my church. So I had to confront this. I went through two years of all I can say is hell and trying to get help in my own denomination. My elders did see how wrong it was and wanted to do the right thing, but I think, you know, what you say that we’re marinating in, it takes so long to see all of that. And so there was no training given to my elders or my pastor on how to handle this stuff, and they thought, “Here’s a good guy who made a mistake” who I “needed to confront one-on-one Matthew 18 style” at first, and then from there it just, it was awful.

So anyway, all that to say that I was going through trauma. In that trauma, I found the Song of Songs to minister to me in deep ways. The church fathers called the Song of Songs “the holy of holies” of scripture. And by that, what they meant is, “In all of

scripture, if you want to go to the place where you can experience the most intimate presence of Christ now in His word, go to the Song of Songs.” And so in it, I found words to pray. Because here is the great allegory of Christ’s love for His bride, and He gives us the words. There’s the words of the groom to us, and here we have, in a patriarchal document, really — like, it’s androcentric, male-dominated voice in scripture, we have this book in the middle of scripture where the woman’s voice is dominant. It bookends the Song. It’s over 60% of the song. And she is immodest. She expresses her frustrations, her insecurities, her deep questions — the absence of God. You know, “Where are you right now?” And she’s seeking Him though, right?

And then we get these words to her. Over and over He calls her beautiful, and she’s His dove, you know? Which just symbolizes His Spirit is in her. So in the Song of Songs, I found that all this time... and I still do. I so care about doctrine. I care about our confessions of the faith. I want to get that right. But sometimes you feel like you’re crossing all your “T’s” and dotting all your “I’s,” and you miss the beauty. You miss the imagination that we’re supposed to have of where we’re heading. You miss the actual eroticism in Christ’s love for His bride. You lose your curiosity, and I think you lose Christ in that way. You can have all these propositional statements, but they cannot teach you about love. The Song does.

So what I wanted to do is to recover a historical reading of the Song of Songs, a traditional reading of it, but also love in Christ’s church. And what we find in that too, and this is kind of my subtitle, is it restores the dignity of both manhood and womanhood, because here we see in flesh, man and woman showing us a typology, like, pictures of where we’re headed and what we’re to become. So it’s not about whether you’re complementarian or egalitarian. They have their importance to them, right? But I’m trying to be challenging in both ways to say that it’s not just about what we can do and not do, but it’s about who we are. There is a theology in our bodies. Our bodies tell a story of the spousal, unitive love of Christ, and we get to participate in the Father’s great love for the Son through His Spirit. And that’s where the beauty is. So that’s what brought me to the Song of Songs.

NATALIE: That is a great story. I’m so glad you shared it too, because so many of the women that I talk to that listen to this podcast, even, the Bible has been used as a weapon to control them and to beat them down, that some of them are actually afraid of the Bible now. These are women who formerly fed off of the Bible on a regular basis.

AIMEE: Yeah, right. It’s heartbreaking.

NATALIE: Yeah. So if you’re listening and that’s you, just know that this particular book

of the Bible could be very, very healing for you. And even going through Aimee's book, she uncovers... And she's so enthusiastic in her book. She uncovers all kinds of... The Bible's got layers and layers and layers and layers of things.

AIMEE: So exciting.

NATALIE: I don't think we're ever going to be able to uncover... It's a living, breathing thing.

AIMEE: Yeah.

NATALIE: And so she digs in, she finds some of those golden gems, and then she shares them, and they just kind of blow your brain.

AIMEE: They do, don't they?!

NATALIE: So if you need that, this is a good book for it. Can you tell us how this book of the Bible, the Song of Songs, helps to minister to people like the women who are listening to this podcast, who are hurting because of either abuse in their marriages or abuse in their family of origin or abuse in their church?

AIMEE: So many ways, and I'm just beginning to watch it unfold in the Song myself, and I'm still spending so much time there myself. But the one thing I was telling you, just looking at the voices in the Song and how they're used, it's so different from what we see in the church today. Twice the bridegroom says, "Let me hear your voice." He's beckoning her. And I think, "If you want to talk about what biblical manhood does, it says, "Let me hear your voice." It's evangelical. He's drawing her out. And so that's the last thing he says to her. And what does she do? She responds by calling him to the spice-laden mountains that her very body represents. So it's kind of like a Maranatha, "come Jesus" call, but it's also this evangelical call. What you were saying about the gems — so here we have, like, the Bible begins with a wedding, it ends with a wedding. The prophets, they talk about Yahweh's love for Israel in terms of covenant marriage, and adultery. And then Jesus' first miracle was at a wedding. And then we have Paul saying, "This is the mystery that marriage is trying to give us a picture of, is the spousal love of Christ."

So in the middle of our Bibles, we have the Song of Songs, which tells us... It's like the espresso shot of scripture. It tells us the whole story in this poetic language. And so you can't just take the Song of Songs out and read it by itself. And that's where the gems are. There's all these kinds of inner-textual echoes with the rest of the canon of

scripture, so when you read the Song, reading it cannocially, you find all these little treasures of echoes of other parts of scripture that blow your mind.

And so I tried to show a little bit of that in there. And so the way that I did the chapters in the book is that, you know, I wanted to introduce the Song and why it's so important, and how it shows how our bodies speak. Male and female isn't... You know, we don't want to take the language of the world either and be like, "Well it doesn't matter. We're all equal." There's meaningfulness behind being a woman and there's meaningfulness behind being a man, and it's beautiful, and what is that? So I think the Song really shows us that. And then also, just the way that we use our voices in the church especially. Looking at sexuality as a gift. I think that's huge. It just totally changes the way we view one another. And I kind of build on Pope John Paul II's work there. He's done some really good work, so I think there are some good Roman Catholics who've written on the topic of sexuality. I did a chapter that I thought was a lot of fun called, "Sometimes the Last Man Standing is a Woman."

NATALIE: I love that.

AIMEE: That is what we see at the end of scripture, the bride coming down out of heaven from God. That's our corporate identity. We get it in the story of creation as well. Adam has to sacrifice for the creation of woman, and she's created second. I grew up hearing that she's created second because she was less, you know, because she needed to subordinate herself to man. That's not what's unfolding in that story. The second fills out the first in creation. We see that over and over. The sun and the moon fill out the sky, right? And the waters and the lands fill out the earth. And so what story do we see? We see man having to be put down, we see a picture of the church flowing from Christ's side in the creation of woman. When he beholds woman, he beholds where he is headed, where we are all headed, as the bride of Christ. She is beckoning him in that way, that we are all headed for communion with the triune God and one another for all of eternity.

NATALIE: Yes.

AIMEE: These are just beautiful things. I think this is what heals us, you know? Anybody who's been through trauma knows the importance of beauty in recovery. There's nothing more beautiful than these truths. There's nothing more beautiful than Christ's love for us. Even in the Song you see abuse twice. The woman is neglected. She is beaten and stripped by the gatekeepers. Man, I could really identify with that. She names it, but she keeps her eyes on the One who is notable among 10,000. There are echoes and revelation of how she's describing Christ there. So I just think that's John in

Revelation telling us, "She's talking about Jesus! Keep your eyes on Him." And so I just think you can really identify so much. And this Old Testament scripture also tells the whole story of Israel in it. It's the story of Israel; it's the story of the church; it's the story of the individual soul of each believer. It's just truly amazing.

NATALIE: Yeah, it is. I just finished listening to your book on Audible, but I'm excited to actually go in now and read that book for myself, you know? It's one thing to read someone else's take on it, but then to read it for myself with that new pair of glasses that I'm going to put on.

AIMEE: Absolutely. Right.

NATALIE: So how have you recovered from the abuse that you've experienced?

AIMEE: I'm still recovering. I don't know what the time limit is on those things. You have to be active about that sort of thing, and I think my writing has helped me a lot. I'm actually writing meditations now, going through the Song of Songs, and even that has ministered to me a lot too. But I just think it's so important to create beauty in our relationships too. So seeking good, healthy friendships, you know. Being there to be able to help other people has been very helpful. But you know, and I'm sure you very much know this, this affects your children in ways that don't surface right away. So therapy... You know, a lot of different things.

And thankfully I'm married to an amazing man, so we go through this together. We've left our denomination, we left the OPC. There were a lot of good things in there, but it was definitely... I wrote about that. I think documenting the public parts, you know — the private stuff I've kept private, but the public stuff that has happened, the presbytery meeting was in published stuff... I followed my whole case and documented it. So I think having that agency where I had none in the church itself, you know? You're not in the rooms where you're being talked about; you don't get a voice at these meetings; you don't get a voice, hardly, in trials and all the decisions made about how it's going to be addressed, right?

NATALIE: Yeah. I have an analogy that I will sometimes tell people. It's like your church or your denomination or whatever was like a sandbox. I like to think of a sandbox.

AIMEE: You got that sandbox, yeah.

NATALIE: It's like a sandbox that you were playing in for a long time, and there were certain rules in the sandbox, and you think that if you get kicked out of the sandbox

that that's it. Now you're out of the game. You have no friends. But once you get kicked out, you look around you and you realize, "Oh my word, I'm in the middle of a fantasy park! There's a million other sandboxes; there's a jungle gym; there's bike paths; there's a lake I can go swimming in; there's a million other places to explore. And this was the smallest sandbox in the wonder park. What in the world was I thinking?"

AIMEE: That is a really good picture, actually. And that's what I'm kind of doing. I'm looking to both sides and seeing who I'm shouldering with and serving with, and my family is worshipping at a really small church right now, and we're just trying to heal there right now as we figure out next steps for all of that.

NATALIE: Yeah. Well, good. It's been great to connect with you.

AIMEE: You too!

NATALIE: I've always wanted to talk with you, and it just hasn't happened yet, but today was the day.

AIMEE: Thanks for inviting me.

NATALIE: And thank you so much for sharing. I know your story is personal and it's painful, but the people listening, they're all... There is so much compassion, I'm sure, that's going to be oozing from them towards you. So if they wanted to, they could get your books on Amazon, correct?

AIMEE: Yes.

NATALIE: And did they ever do any of those blitzs, like those Amazon blitzs where they just write terrible reviews? Did that ever happen?

AIMEE: So with "Recovering" they started to put some bad reviews on there, but they got overwhelmed with good reviews. But then what happened, and this is really sad — what happened when "Sexual Reformation" came out... So you know, your publisher sends out review copies to a bunch of people looking for honest reviews on Amazon, and I started hearing back from some people saying that they tried to post a review on Amazon, and they showed me the message they got, and it was like, "Alert" in all red saying that there's been some trouble with the accounts, like, only verified purchases can leave reviews now, because basically people were trying to troll with bad reviews and they caught it.

NATALIE: Okay, well, thank goodness Amazon caught it.

AIMEE: But now I have so many less reviews, which is sad.

NATALIE: Well, I need to go put my review over there. So if you're listening, go get her book. Support Aimee. Go get her book, and you will love the book, and then you can leave a very honest and authentic review as a verified purchaser of her book. The book is called "The Sexual Reformation." I will put a link in the show notes, and also, they can find you on Twitter.

AIMEE: Thank you.

NATALIE: I'll put a link to that and Facebook. Is Facebook your other main place? And then you've got a blog, aimeebyrd.com. And it's "Byrd." I made a comment on something that had you in it, and I spelled your name "Bird." Sorry about that. I corrected it later.

AIMEE: I do some YouTube podcasting with Mike Bird, who's an Australian theologian and author, and he's "Bird," so we call it "Birds of a Feather."

NATALIE: That's awesome. I love that. So you are staying busy, and you're still getting your voice out there.

AIMEE: Oh yeah.

NATALIE: That's awesome. You have to keep doing that, because that's what you're called to do.

AIMEE: Thank you.

NATALIE: That's who you are. Alright, thanks so much, Aimee.

AIMEE: Yes, it was great talking to you.

NATALIE: Yeah. And for those of you guys who are listening, if you enjoyed this podcast, would you consider leaving a rating and review on Apple Podcasts? It just helps other people who are just like you find this podcast. And that's it for today. Thank you so much for listening, and until next time, fly free.