



## Toxic Beliefs about Women

We have inaccurate perceptions about what a woman is and should be. They come from religion, society, parents, relationships, and media. When we receive these messages, our self-image is damaged because we are not seeing ourselves as we truly are. In addition, stereotypes limit us and especially cause harm if you don't fit the stereotype and as a result limit yourself by making choices you otherwise wouldn't make due to the shame, rejection, criticism, or guilt.

We know God created men and women to be different. There are many physical, emotional, and psychological differences. *Feminine* means “belonging to the female sex; having qualities or characteristics traditionally ascribed to women.” *Masculine* means “belonging to the male sex; having qualities or characteristics traditionally ascribed to men.”

It is reasonable to admit these differences, but it is damaging to people when they don't fit the male or female mold and we shame or label them as inadequate, wrong, or weird. It is important that each of us is able to embrace and become all God has created us to be. We can only do that when we are free to discover who we are in an environment that lets us be free to be ourselves. Here are the toxic or inaccurate messages given about women with the truth written in italics:

- A strong and capable woman isn't feminine. *God made us all with different personalities. In addition, life experiences change us and make us who we are today. There are many strong women in the Bible. The Proverbs 31 woman was strong, capable, independent, opinionated, and confident; she wasn't a doormat in her marriage and she engaged in business activities outside the home.*
- If a woman dresses provocatively, it is her fault if she is sexually harassed or assaulted. *Women should dress modestly because men are sexually stimulated visually; however, a man is still responsible for his actions and has no excuse to not exercise self-control.*
- Married women shouldn't take over the finances or any other leadership in the home. *This is a rigid role description for both men and women that does not allow for flexibility and maximization of skills for the benefit of the marriage. A relationship is a partnership that two people agree on that can be worked out in any way they are both comfortable with.*
- Women have to obey their husbands. *Submission works like it should when a man loves his wife. When submission is viewed as obedience, rather than a cooperative partnership where a woman retains her right to be a person, she is open to being abused and mistreated because she operates under the belief that she has to obey and cannot say no.*
- A woman has to be physically beautiful for men to desire her. *This is a lie that has been reinforced through the media with unreasonable standards of beauty.*

- Christian women can't say no to their husbands' sexual needs. *While the Bible does say husbands and wives should not deprive each other of their bodies, except for prayer, women still can say no when sex is uncomfortable, demeaning, too frequent, or for other reasons. Women are not the sex slaves of their husbands. They can exercise their right to be loved by saying no when they really do not want sex and exercise their willingness to love by making a commitment to be their husbands' sexual partner, even if it is more than they would want.*
- Women don't really like sex; they just need to meet their husbands' sexual needs because it is their duty. *This belief is often stated by women who are struggling with their own sexuality or husband's mistreatment. Women can enjoy sex as much as men and should insist on a sexually fulfilling relationship.*
- If a husband seeks sex outside the marriage, it is because his wife hasn't fulfilled his needs. *While recognizing that men who don't get sex may be tempted more to have sex outside the marriage, it is still their responsibility to be faithful to their marriage vows. This is also true of a man who looks at pornography; it isn't the wife's fault.*
- All men look at pornography. It's normal and shouldn't bother you if your husband does. *Most women are extremely bothered by pornography use and even feel betrayed. Many men do look at pornography, but not all men do. Sexual addiction is on the increase due to the availability of porn on the Internet. Sexual addiction is destructive to the man and the marriage.*
- Women can't ask for what they want from a man. They should not initiate in relationships. *This is another rigid role that unnecessarily limits both the man and the woman. It is healthy for a woman to be able to communicate her needs and wants directly.*
- All women are sluts. *This often is communicated from a male that has little respect for women. There is no basis for this over-generalization.*
- Sexuality is dirty and disgusting. Nice girls aren't sexual. You can even take it further and say, "Nice Christian girls aren't sexual." *God created women to enjoy sex. God says sexuality is functional for procreation and marital intimacy. Sexuality has been made to be dirty by some who misuse it. A woman who believes this has either been taught it or has been abused and misused sexually.*
- A woman's place is in the home. *Women are by nature nurturers and men providers. Women give birth to the children and are usually best suited to be the primary caretaker. Many women want to be at home to raise the children and realize that when they combine career and children that it is difficult to do both. However, if a woman wants a career, needs a career, or has a career, it is not good for her to believe she is doing something wrong. The Proverbs 31 woman had a business outside the home.*
- Something is wrong with a woman if she doesn't want to be a mother. *God does not require us to get married; in fact, the Apostle Paul stated that it is better to stay single and serve God with all one's energy and time. If a couple decides they do not want children, for whatever reason, it is fine, as it is a personal choice.*

- A woman shouldn't be over a man in anything. *This comes from a few Scriptures in the New Testament that some still apply in certain circumstances but not others. In the culture we live in today, it would be extremely rigid, unworkable, and a limitation that would hurt both men and women.*
- A woman should be quiet-spoken and soft. *God created women with various personalities. Some are natural leaders, some outgoing, and some quiet. All are acceptable.*
- A girl who is athletic, strong, and physically active as a child is a "tom-boy." *This is a label society has given to a girl who doesn't fit the "girly girl" mold. With the exceptional women athletes we have in all sports today, it is less logical to even consider a girl who excels in sports any less a woman than any other female.*
- A woman should defer to her husband and not be too assertive. *This goes along with the stereotype of a woman being the quiet weak one in the relationship. It suggests that she keep her opinions, needs and wants to herself. While it is Scriptural for a man to lead and leading makes a man feel needed and appreciated, it doesn't mean a woman can't be who she is and be an active part of the marriage and family in every way.*
- A woman gets what she deserves from a man. It is her fault if she is abused. *This is absolutely not true. A woman who is abused is typically told it is her fault, but that doesn't make it true. When she does believe this, it keeps her accepting the abuse.*
- A woman who has been sexually loose at any time in her life is dirty and unworthy. *There is forgiveness for everything. Any woman who feels she has made sexual mistakes can be made completely clean through the Lord.*
- Any attention from a man means you are desirable--even if it is insulting or demeaning. *Women believe this when they have low self-esteem, have been treated like sex objects, or are young and immature. A woman who values herself understands that a man can give you attention for many reasons and that insulting and demeaning attention isn't right.*
- A woman isn't a woman without a man. *God created us to be male and female. Most women desire to be married; however, when it doesn't work out, the belief that they cannot have a full, rewarding, and enjoyable life without a man is then toxic and limiting.*