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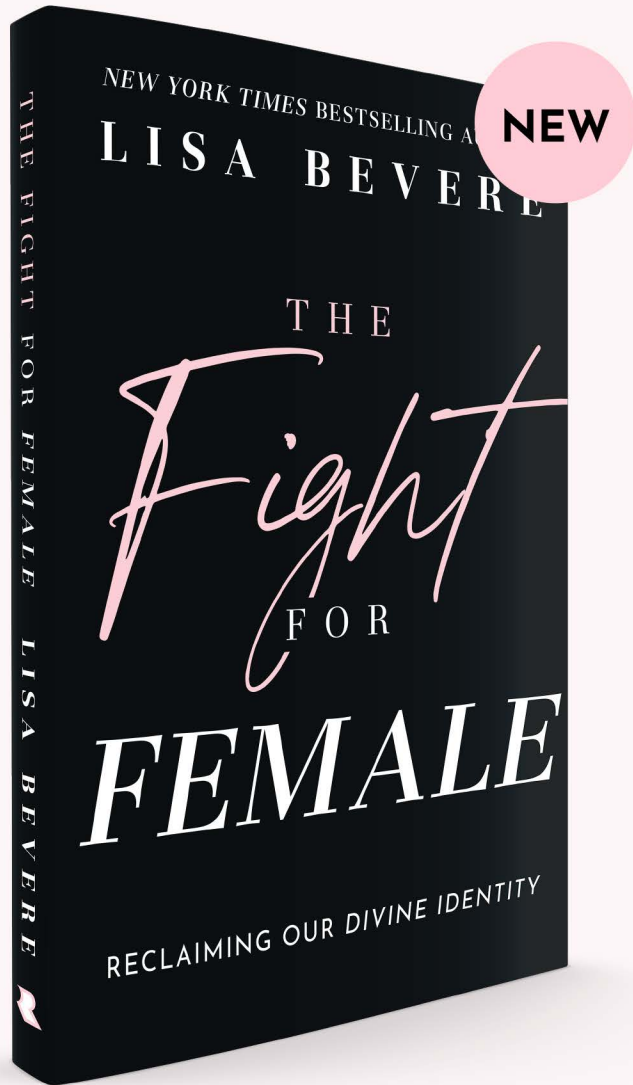
FEMALE

RECLAIMING OUR DIVINE IDENTITY

*She will be called “woman,”
because she was taken from “man.”*

Genesis 2:23 NLT

Beautiful daughter, though female
was created last, she is not the least.
You began in God’s image
and were reborn His daughter.
Yet I fear your divine identity and its
authority in your life are under assault.
An ancient foe hopes to strip you
of this designation—don’t let him.
Each day presents us with the choice
of courage or cowardice.
Choose wisely.
Wake up and be the answer
God created you to be.



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THE
Fight
FOR
FEMALE

RECLAIMING OUR DIVINE IDENTITY

LISA BEVERE



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Lisa Bevere, *The Fight for Female*

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CHAPTER 1

Dreams, Dragons, and Daughters

*For God speaks again and again,
though people do not recognize it.
He speaks in dreams, in visions of the night,
when deep sleep falls on people
as they lie in their beds.
He whispers in their ears
and terrifies them with warnings.*

Job 33:14–16 NLT

God has spoken and God speaks. His words echo throughout the earth with divine weight and eternal purpose. The question is: *Are we listening?*

It is my urgent prayer that within my words and through the Scriptures you'll discover His voice. There is not a minute to lose. A fierce and furious dragon is loose, and he is bent on the destruction of our daughters. In the wake of our current chaos

and confusion, he hopes we will forget who we are and the purpose of our womanhood.

Dreams often serve as divine messengers. They visit us in the night when the din of distraction is silenced and flee from our thoughts as we enter our day. It is only later, when something is said or seen, that we remember and think, *Why does this feel familiar? Have I been here before?*

Dreams counsel us as we sleep. Who hasn't gone to bed in one frame of mind only to wake with a completely different outlook? Then there are other dreams . . . dreams that linger until we listen. I believe that, in this day, God is whispering warnings by way of dreams.

God spoke to Joseph, the son of Jacob, through a dream that later meant provision for the children of Israel in a time of famine. God appeared to Solomon and imparted the gift of wisdom in a dream. In a dream, Joseph was told by an angel to take Mary as his wife. Another dream instructed him to flee to Egypt in order to escape a murderous king, and then another dream told him it was safe to return to Israel after Herod's death. Paul's Macedonian call came by way of a dream.

We all dream, but some dreams are nightmares. I've learned to pay attention to those as well. Especially when the nightmare is recurring. But have you ever dreamed of dragons?

I have. Nearly a decade ago.

At the time I was unsure what the dream was showing me. But I have come to believe it was a message for now. In this dream, I entered a room filled with women of all ages speaking freely with one another. These were well-educated, well-connected, and well-dressed women whose lives overflowed with feminine strength and promise. It felt as though they were known to me, yet I don't remember anyone specific. I watched from the doorway until someone turned and invited me in. But I hesitated because something was terribly amiss.

Each woman cradled a baby dragon in her arms.

These dragons were jewel-toned and outfitted in a ridiculous array of children's clothing. Ruffles and ornaments adorned their serpentine necks. I couldn't help noticing their razor-sharp teeth hovered dangerously close to the women's unprotected necks. Aghast and confused by their familiarity with the dragons, I questioned the women. "Why are you carrying a dragon? Do you understand how dangerous dragons are?"

Woman after woman smiled at my confusion. They exchanged knowing looks and shook their heads at my alarm. They drew their dragons closer as though shielding them from the foolishness of my words. They assured me these dragons were the gentle, wise variety.

But I knew different.

These dragons were not gentle or wise; they were cruel and cunning. They were predators, not pets. The dragons despised the women, but they were content to play along and lie in wait as their power grew in reach and measure.

These serpents knew I thought they were evil; they side-eyed me and I was aware of their underlying aggression. They restrained themselves because it wouldn't serve their purpose to attack or bite me. One woman encouraged me, "Pet it here where the skin is smooth."

She demonstrated how by running her finger down the curve of its neck. "See how gentle it is? Don't be afraid."

But I wasn't afraid. I was angry. Even as she spoke, I heard the dragon's reasoning in my mind. *Where would be the harm?* its silken voice goaded. *After all, petting a dragon is not the same as having one of your own.*

But I knew petting a dragon would mean partnering with its lie. Any pretense of agreement would contradict what I knew to be true. I shook my head and turned away, only to be confronted by another woman who invited me to take her dragon dressed in ruffles.

"Isn't it cute?" she cooed. "Here, hold it."

She extended her pet toward me, but rather than hold it, I reached out and snapped the dragon's neck.

The violence of my nightmare woke me.

Gone was the elegant room filled with beautiful women carrying rainbow-colored dragons. I was alone in a dark hotel room, flat on my back, arms in motion with my fists grasping at air. As a peaceful side sleeper, I felt completely disoriented by this dream that had become physical. I typed out the imagery and interactions of my dream on my iPad and lay awake until morning dawned, wondering what had just happened and what the dream meant.

There were a few things that were immediately clear, and other things that became apparent later.

First, calling dragons safe does not make them so. The things you refuse to confront when they are small have the potential to grow into something extremely threatening later. The dream was a warning. Lies are the most vulnerable to the light of truth in their inception. Partnering with lies and dragons will always prove dangerous. Adam and Eve discovered this when they agreed with the lies of a serpent. How much greater our peril if we agree with those of a dragon!

Evil is not our friend. Don't protect it, don't make excuses for it, don't partner with it, and don't hold it close. Evil has no love for humankind. Evil hates and distorts all that the Creator has fashioned. There can be no alliance between light and dark or good and evil. They are opposing forces. Do not be deceived. We were warned long ago that the dragon and his minions can masquerade as angels of light.

For even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (2 Cor. 11:14)

The nature of evil does not change because it is clothed in garments of innocence. And to this end, each of us should be careful what we "dress up" or make excuses for. Dragons do not belong in children's clothing.

Dragons gain power by way of theft and deception. They are agents of chaos and consumption. The only things dragons produce are more dragons. They do not create or construct anything that is useful; they use their strength solely to satisfy their appetite for devastation and destruction.

But you may be asking, *How can this be since dragons aren't real?*

There are many things that are not factual, yet they are true. Dragons are woven into the history of mankind. A very real enemy has emerged from the shadows.

He has several names: Lucifer, Satan, the father of lies, the adversary, the devil, the prince of demons, the evil one, Apollyon, Beelzebub, the deceiver, the enemy, the tempter, the prince of the power of the air, the accuser, the god of this age, the *great dragon*.

He is bent on your destruction and the annihilation of your children. He is behind every brutal act against women. He is the author of the evil that leads to sexual assault and debasement, from kidnapping to sex trafficking. This enemy will not be placated, and if you yield an inch, he won't stop at a mile. There is no hope of a peace treaty or the option of negotiations. He is committed to stripping women of our God-given authority and distorting our feminine beauty and purpose. And yet there is hope.

“Fairy tales are more than true; not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.”

NEIL GAIMAN

Fairy tales are more than true; not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.

Neil Gaiman¹

I wondered why there were no men in the room in my dream. There could be a number of reasons for this. First, I am a woman

and for the most part minister to women. But even more than this, I believe that because Jesus is coming back for a bride, women and all things related to female are being specifically and strategically targeted by the enemy. He is committed to redefining and deconstructing the concept of a bride.

“Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. (Rev. 19:7–8)

If we are honest, there is no escaping the fact that the church looks very unlike the bride described in the book of Revelation. Tragically, we often hear of the impure and unrighteous deeds of the saints rather than the pure and righteous ones. And yet no matter how filthy we become, our Bridegroom forgives us when we repent and believes better things of us in the future.

Another curious question from the dream: How had these dragons tricked the women into believing they were pets? Snakes are rarely friends with women. One answer may be the blinding power of offense. Whenever sin is rampant in both the church and culture, an atmosphere of deception abounds (see Matt. 24). It is in this climate that men and women begin to view one another as enemies rather than as allies.

If you're even slightly paying attention, you know there is both rage at women and rage in women. With each passing day the hostility without and within becomes increasingly apparent. There is no missing that some shadowed, twisted force is seriously upset with women. There are many unholy forms that this fury adopts:

hate	distortion
rape	mutilation
abuse	pedophilia
ageism	perversion
control	accusation
cutting	gendercide
suicide	dysmorphia
poverty	minimization
racism	pornography
tension	sex trafficking
divorce	displacement
slander	cancel culture
violence	homosexuality
abortion	marginalization
silencing	sexualization of women
prejudice	misogyny (hatred of women)
eating disorders	misandry (hatred of men)

All the above and more can be summed up as the attempt to manipulate, confuse, sexualize, and erase women. But now we are aware of who is behind these attacks. Revelation 12:17 gives us a window into why:

Then the dragon became furious with the woman.

Both Scripture and Western culture view dragons as agents of death and chaos. Currently, the dragon's handiwork has destabilized our culture, and we are suffering the upheaval of divisive politics, unhealthy patriarchy, raging feminism, Marxist agenda, racism, heresy, confused gender ideologies, increased witchcraft, satanism, greed, wars, violence of all kinds, cancel and celebrity cultures, abortion, and abusive forms of religion.

These ideologies and more are used to unleash his fury. What we wrestle with is the unhuman and inhumane. His malice is woven with an evil darker than we can define.

This dragon has a systematic plan to unmake the divine imagery of male and female. He is driven by an ancient rage known as enmity, a hatred so profound that the longer it exists, the greater it grows in reach and malice. This concept of enmity is first introduced in Genesis when God addresses the serpent.

The LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.
I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.” (Gen. 3:14–15)

It is important to note that God is the one who put enmity between the serpent and the woman. At the beginning of time, He positioned the woman and her seed as part of His redemptive plan and cursed the serpent and its offspring. Two legacies were forever set at odds with one another. You’ve heard of the term *irreconcilable differences*. It describes the parting of ways between those who were once together but cannot find a way forward. The phrase is used in divorce cases, to dissolve political affiliations, or to divide corporate entities. The parties involved agree to disagree.

Enmity is different. Enmity is irreconcilable hostility. There never was an alignment, therefore there can never be any future

agreement. The only possible way for us to align is if we are deceived into mistaking our mortal enemy for a wise friend.

I believe the serpent's hope was that mankind's fall in Eden would cause us to be forever at odds with our Creator. But on the cross, Jesus closed the breach by taking our sin upon Himself. When Jesus took our place, the dragon was displaced. Now he pursues a different course.

And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. (Rev. 12:13)

What began in the garden continues to this day. He detests all that our womanhood represents. Perhaps that is the reason the ancient myths included stories of maidens sacrificed to appease dragons and abate their rage. But the dragon that threatens us will not be appeased with the lives of a few maidens.

In researching for this book, I came across a thought-provoking article, "Rescuing Our Maidens from the Culture of Death." Joseph Pearce says,

Dragons have a preference for the virgin flesh of maidens because they are not merely hungry but wicked. They desire the defilement of the pure and undefiled, the destruction of the virgin. Their devouring is a deflowering. Parallels with human "dragons" in our own world are not difficult to discern. The war against the dragon is not, therefore, a war against a physical monster . . . but a battle against the wickedness we see around us in our everyday lives. We all face our daily dragons, and we must all defend ourselves from them and hopefully slay them, which is only possible with the assistance of God's grace. The sobering reality is that we must either fight the dragons that we encounter in life or become dragons ourselves. There is no middle path. No neutrality in this fight to the death is possible. We either fight the dragon or we become the dragon.²

This article was authored in 2016, the same year of my dream. Pearce also addressed the spike in suicide, sexual and physical abuse, and pornography use since 2014. If the plight of our daughters was tenuous then, it is horrific now.

Virtue is mocked as vice.

New words and prefixes are created.

Existing words are stripped of their original meaning.

Biology is subjective, and feelings are given precedence.

Marriages are contracts rather than holy covenants.

Pornography attempts online home invasions.

Preborn children are stripped of their right to life.

Gender ideologies are manipulating our children.

Women's locker rooms, bathrooms, and prisons are contested spaces.

Parents are intimidated into affirming their child's gender identity.

There's a push for pedophiles to be called "minor-attracted people."³

Perversion and fetishes are being normalized at an alarming rate.

And yet in some ways the spiritual battle has never been more obvious. It is not a battle *with* the souls of men and women, but a battle *for* the souls of men and women. Paul makes this distinction in Ephesians 2:1–3.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, **the spirit that is now at work in the sons [and daughters] of disobedience**—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (emphasis added)

We either follow the God Most High or the dragon who is “the prince of the power of the air.” The dragon’s spirit first ensnares, then works through, the children of disobedience.

The dragon’s attack doesn’t stop with us; it reaches beyond us to consume our children. When men falter, women become the last line of defense for the children. As women, we will always feel the attack on our children more intimately.

Look again at God’s words to the serpent in Genesis 3:15:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.

Most Bible scholars agree that the phrase “he shall bruise your head” refers to Jesus’s triumph through the cross and the phrase “you shall bruise his heel” refers to the enemy’s relentless attack on the body of Christ. We see this conflict again in Revelation 12:17:

Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

“The woman” in this passage has plurality of meaning. She is collectively Israel, then specifically Mary; collectively the church and more exclusively the bride. What the dragon hates in its entirety he hates individually. We know the interpretation of “the woman” cannot be limited to Israel because they (literal Israel) do not currently hold to the testimony of Jesus.

This fight for female is not a fight for women’s rights—it is a battle to rescue and recover our divine birthright. What one generation forfeits, the next fights to recover. There are battles for the men to fight and there are battles only women can win. This is

our fight and it will require repentance, redemption, and rescue. I believe we are poised for the restoration and recovery of what

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has been misplaced, displaced, and stolen from our feminine identity for decades.

For too long we've battled one another, blinded to our true enemy. We've exhausted ourselves fighting the wrong battles and wrestling allies. It is time to speak words of hope and life rather than words of death and despair. It is not too late for us to remember who we truly are. We are the dragon's enemy.

Heavenly Father,

I come to You in the name of Jesus. I believe I was born for this moment that is at once terrifying and wondrous. Thank You for entrusting me with the honor of being a female. Show me how You see the wonder and the beauty of this fight to recover what has been lost.

CHAPTER 2

The Fight for Divine Identity

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

Genesis 1:27

More than two decades ago, I realized I was not who I said I was. When I got married more than forty years ago, I neglected to legally change my name. I was under the mistaken impression that when I surrendered my Indiana driver's license with my maiden name on it and put Bevere on my new Texas license, everything was taken care of. From that day forward, Bevere was the only name I used. Every check I signed, every paycheck I received, any book I authored was under my new surname. When we moved to Florida, I turned in my Texas license

under the same assumption. Everything was fine until I went to the DMV for my Colorado license.

After an excessively long wait, my name was called. But when I got to the counter, they refused to issue a license because, according to their records, Lisa Bevere didn't exist. A trip to the DMV is challenging on the best of days, but this became the worst. I showed them my passport that had my maiden and married names hyphenated. I assured them there was a mistake. But as far as the DMV was concerned, I didn't exist under either name. Frantic, I explained I'd written books, paid taxes, and been employed under that very name. I handed the woman my Florida license with Bevere as my surname. But to no avail because, according to their records, neither name belonged to me.

I stepped aside and burst into tears.

Moved with compassion, the clerk volunteered, "If you can prove that's your maiden name, we will give you a license."

How would I do that? I exited the DMV, took a deep breath, and called the registrar's office at the university I'd attended. They were kind enough to fax me documents that proved my identity.

As stressful as my trip to the DMV turned out to be, it could have been worse. What if I'd forgotten who I was? What if I believed them when they said neither name belonged to me? I would have accepted the loss of my name. But I knew who I was, so that was never going to happen. It didn't matter that they didn't know who I was because I never doubted my identity.

I couldn't prove who I was by what I had done or with the license I carried. They wanted to know my name of origin. They wanted me to prove I was my father's child. Life without an innate awareness of who we really are could be likened to navigating the uncharted wild without a compass. And yet we are living in a time when the female identity is being brought into question.

Before I even shared my dragon dream, you probably knew something was amiss. It may be the very reason you are hearing my words. At first the dragon's shadow was an undercurrent, a

few additions to our language, a slight alteration to what we've known as women. Then it became more than words and various ideologies; it has grown into a war on females with the meaning of womanhood under siege.

Perhaps you feel it is too extreme to label it a war. That my terminology is too harsh or fatalistic. If so, I understand. But while we have hesitated and carefully measured our words, the dragon has escalated his assault against our children.

This book has easily been the most difficult I've written . . . ever. I've wrestled with words until I'm exhausted. I have never experienced so much spiritual warfare or so many physical challenges. I have found myself pulled between anger and heartbreak. I've written on identity before, but never has the message been more urgent. It is not enough to know *who* you are; it's essential you know *why* before it is too late.

I'm watching as the image and meaning of *female* and *woman* are being systematically downgraded or reduced. The enemy wants to pervert the image of female because female was created in the image of God.

We desecrate the image of God at our own peril.

Perhaps we've been careless because we haven't understood what it means to bear His image. The word *image* is first used in Genesis 1:26:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

The word *image* here expresses an idea, vision, reflection, or concept in the imagination—as well as a divine representation—of your Creator. This means you are God's idea.

Both male and female are uniquely created to reflect His image. Just because woman was the last to be created, do not imagine this makes her the least. Female was always part of God's divine vision. The very concept of woman illustrates our Creator's profound care and response to our longings. Both the feminine and

masculine are captured in the term *imago Dei*. This in and of itself is an incomparable entrustment.

In light of this, Genesis 1:27 should challenge our self-perception. Rather than bowing to the limits of self, or how we see ourselves, the *image of God* is a revelation of how God sees us. *Female* has always had divine identity and purpose. But the dragon wants to strip humanity of any divine connection by encouraging us to worship what is less. Romans 1:21 tells us,

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

When God is not honored as God, our minds are overrun with futility and our hearts are blackened by foolishness. Our history from Eden to the cross is a litany of failures after the fall: there was a flood, a tower, idolatry in the desert, then idolatry in the promised land, all of which led to wars and exiles. When God's image bearers weren't sinning by worshiping the lesser, we were busy twisting worship into a collection of relentless religious rules. Each desecration distorted our semblance of His divine imagery. Humanity had lost its way; we became lifeless, hopeless, as we struggled in an oppressive, desperate world torn by division. Because we lost our way, we behaved in cruel and inhumane ways.

God heard our anguish and responded with a divine rescue. Rather than reject and push us away after millennia of rebellion, God drew closer and ransomed His wayward image bearers with the life of His only begotten Son. Why? Because of His love for us. He knew we'd all need the love of a Father and a family to call our own. In Christ, He adopted us and called us sons and daughters.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. (1 John 3:1)

The depth of this gift is evidenced by what He calls us, His children. All humanity was created to reflect the image of God, but only children reflect their Father's nature. Everyone is an image bearer, but not everyone is a child of God. We have become His. The passage in 1 John continues,

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (vv. 2–3)

In Scripture, there is both the promise of *now* and the promise of *what will be*; we are children who reflect God's heart and nature. Our hope is in Him, and as we pursue God, He reveals, refines, restores, and transforms us.

When we come to faith there is a great exchange. Jesus Christ purchased our complete freedom so that we could be completely His. We are invited to surrender our broken, sin-filled, self-focused, sensual nothingness for His glorious everything. We exchange our dead temporal life for His eternal life, our self-will is surrendered for His divine will, our brokenness is replaced with His healing love, and our thoughts and ways are first surrendered then raised to His. He loved us long before we knew Him and chose us long before we knew we had a choice. Under the lordship of Jesus, the domination of sin and darkness is over. We no longer follow the dictates of self—we follow the lead of our Savior King, and the Holy Spirit is our Counselor and Guide. God is your Father, and you are a daughter of the God Most High.

Daughter

You are divinely sealed by the One who identified you as His own.

Your identity is daughter.

My identity is daughter.

Your heavenly Father is more committed to you than you can imagine.

You were adopted long before you were abandoned.

You were rescued long before you were lost.

You were foreknown and predestined to be His.

The designation of *daughter* . . .

Is far more intimate than girl or woman.

Brings more wholeness than marriage.

Is the embrace of family.

Declares *wanted* and *welcome*.

Tells the world *you belong*.

Acknowledges that you are *fathered*.

Whispers *mothered*.

Daughter is a declaration of protection and provision.

Daughters are loved. This is true regardless of how your life began, and it is true no matter how difficult or confusing your life may now be. Know this: you were always wanted.

I've had the honor of holding many roles in my life: wife, mother, grandmother, mother-in-law, author, and minister. Each is an aspect of my life, but they are not me. Our world or culture identifies us by our achievements and responsibilities, but these are functions or roles, they are not our identity. Roles and résumés describe what we do; our identity tells the story of who we are and who we are related to. What I have, what I wear, where I live, what I drive are possessions. At any given time, all of these can change or be lost. If it can be taken from you, then it is peripheral to your identity. Which is why no one should ever allow their possessions to define them. Only God has the right of bestowing identity. You are not what you do; you are what was done for you.

We need the grounding of our divine identity in days fraught with chaos and confusion. You were first fashioned to reflect the

image of God and then redeemed to be His daughter. The Creator of all that is, seen and unseen, created you. He sees you, loves you, and I would go as far as to say needs you to believe that you were woven on purpose for a divine purpose.

You are more than what you do and more than what you've done.

You are more than what you own and more than who you know.

You are more than what you see and what you choose to show others.

You are more known than you could possibly understand.

More loved than you can imagine.

Your identity is a divine gift.

Your divine identity includes your body, but it is not limited to your body, because you are obviously more than your body.

Your divine identity includes your soul, but it is more than your soul, because you are also body and spirit.

Your divine identity includes your spirit, but it is not limited to your spirit, because we are triune beings that include body, soul, and spirit.

Our body is our framework, the soul is our mind, will, and emotions, and our spirit is the breath of God. These three are intimately intertwined, and sacred. As Ecclesiastes reminds us, "A threefold cord is not quickly broken" (4:12).

You may not feel that every part of you is sacred. You may feel that scarred, flawed, and imperfect would be a more accurate description. Your Creator sees more than brokenness in your framework. You may describe your soul as dysfunctional, triggered, frightened, or even angry. God sees your soul clothed in His righteousness. You may believe your spirit was made new when you were born again but still imagine *sacred* to be a stretch. It is the very reason why God gave us His holiness rather than

our own—and invites us into a lifelong journey of transformation in Him.

What We Reflect

Even though our vision is currently limited, shadowed, and separated by time and space, a day is coming when we will be fully alive and know God fully. Paul reminds us,

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Cor. 13:12)

We may be dim-sighted now, but I assure you that our heavenly Father is not. Right now, you are fully known and fully loved. And each of us has a desperate human longing for both. We live in a day of almost limitless access to one another, and yet never has there been a time when so many have felt misunderstood, desperately unknown, and unseen. Even when there is a spark or moment of popularity, a few minutes of “fame,” we cannot help but wonder if we were seen or if it was a facade we projected in the hope that we’d be loved and accepted.

When you look in a mirror, what do you see?

Do you see a soul wracked by failures and disappointments?

Do you see a body that is disappointing, or worse—a mistake?

Do you see a life powered by the Spirit or one ruled by the limits of self-consciousness? A reflected image cannot reveal more than it is shown. And like a mirror, it cannot show what it does not see.

God wants to be the image we behold, then the image we reflect. When we do this, He invites us into a life of divine appointments. As Psalm 34:5 reminds us, “Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.”

In preparation for this book, I’ve drawn on science, history, literature, and Scripture. I’ve listened to podcasts, newscasts, and

arguments. I started and stopped writing so many times that each chapter felt like yet another puzzle piece needing to be flipped to discover its placement. My hope is that together we can find the borders and reassemble the beautiful imagery of female for our sake—and the sake of our sons and daughters.

Earlier I spoke of the threefold cord that makes up your divine identity: body, soul, and spirit. I want you to see these facets of your life as divinely woven cords that are interdependent and intimately connected with one another. I like to think of these strands as unity, strength, and faith. If this is accurate, we have unity in the spirit, strength in our body, and the gift of faith for our soul.

These are activated when we have a Christ-consciousness that overrides the messages of self-consciousness that limit us with insecurity, comparison, and pride. Self-rule will inevitably steer us in the direction of being self-centered, self-confident, self-conscious, self-motivated, self-identified, self-serving, self-righteous, and self-sabotaging, and eventually toward living a selfish life. Self-image is tied to our appearance, conversations, achievements, education, relationships, and possessions. If we become too busy curating a projected image, we lose touch with our truest identity of daughters created in the image of God.

Time and distance have a way of eroding an awareness of our divine origin. And yet when we pause, we sense something is amiss. In the silence, we hear a whisper, an invitation: *You were created for more.* A glorious hope. An eternal mindset. God wired us with an innate knowing that there is more than this life. More than things. More than our bodies. More than our achievements. This longing invites us to lift our gaze. Colossians 3:2 admonishes us,

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

We wrestle when we have the wrong mindset. We struggle when we look in the wrong places for this divine “more.” Rather

than search the heavens for the imprint of our Creator, we settle for lowering our gaze to the realm of self. We settle for less when we are disappointed in people, disappointed in government and organizations, disappointed with religion, and disappointed in ourselves. But no matter how we try to reorient ourselves, actualize ourselves, or simply conform to the limits of self, the weight of divine gravity is upon us.

As a female, you are *uniquely empowered* by God to carry out His purposes. Image bearer was your beginning; daughter of God is your destiny. It's time to fight for your divine identity.



At the ends of chapters 2–12, I've included questions to help you think about what this fight for female might look like in your life. I hope you'll take time to think, pray, and write your ideas.

How have you been referring to or identifying yourself? Do you find yourself saying, "I'm just _____"?

What comes to mind when you hear "daughter of God"?

What is one area where you are self-ruled or self-reliant that you could surrender or exchange for Christ reliance?

CHAPTER 3

The Fight for Your Sacred Space

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:15

Have you ever wondered if Jesus understands the discomfort of being female? Or maybe your question runs deeper. Does Jesus understand how uncomfortable you are as a woman?

As I sought to understand the struggle and even the pain of those who are incredibly uncomfortable in their bodies, I turned to the Scriptures and discovered my answers.

First, Jesus may have been more uncomfortable in His human form than any of us have the capacity to realize. Philipians tells us,

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (2:5-7)

He gets us because He became us.

Imagine this if you can: Jesus laid aside His divine privileges and form and limited Himself to the confines and constraints of our human flesh. He chose to be uncomfortable so that in Him we would find comfort.

And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. (Mark 3:25)

I know this verse addresses spiritual kingdoms, but division diminishes the strength of things that were once united. How many women live as divided houses when it comes to our feminine form? We criticize and curse our bodies rather than celebrate and bless them. Instead of enjoying the individual uniqueness and abilities of our bodies, we have a love-hate relationship with our shapes. Before long we find ourselves inhabiting divided spaces or we feel imprisoned in despised houses. And what we say to ourselves has the power to affect our bodies all the way down to the cellular level. Science is proving that “death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21). In their book *Words Can Change Your Brain*, Dr. Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman write, “A single word has the power to influence the expression of genes that regulate physical and emotional stress.”¹

I remember the day my soul and body fractured and I became a divided house. I walked in from school and discovered that my father was home early and both my mother and brother were out. My father was an intimidating figure of a man. I greeted him and headed directly to my room to do homework, but he called me back to our family room. I sensed something different

in his tone. Was it disappointment? My mind raced. Had I done something wrong?

“Come here,” he grumbled.

I approached the black leather chair where my father sat smoking.

“Turn around.” He motioned, cigarette in hand.

I obliged with an awkward 360.

He let out an audible sigh and shook his head. “Lisa, how much do you weigh? Your butt is huge!”

I froze. I had absolutely no idea. I hadn’t been weighed since summer camp. I volunteered my camp weight.

My father countered, “Well, you’re not at camp anymore. Go weigh yourself and come back here.”

Weigh myself? Was that a thing?

Until that day, I’d only been weighed for physicals. I trekked down the hall to my parents’ master bathroom. I flipped on the lights and hesitantly stepped on their scale. I stepped off to confirm it was zeroed. It was. My dad was right; I’d gained nearly twenty pounds since camp. Ashamed, I slunk back to my father and reported my weight. He folded his paper, laid it aside, transferred his cigarette to the ashtray, and invited me to sit down. I leaned in for what I knew was about to be a serious talk.

“Lisa, that’s too much. You’re fat. No one will want to date you. You need to take care of it.”

I nodded and that was it. He picked up his cigarette and paper and I was dismissed.

As I walked to my room, I wondered, how had I missed this? Did other people think I was fat? Was that why the guy I didn’t even like broke up with me? I locked the door to my room, pulled down the blinds, and quickly stripped down to my bra and underwear. I climbed atop my bed so I could see my body’s reflection in the dresser mirror. I was horrified by what I saw. How had this happened? I hated my headless reflection, scored

with creases about my waist and the impressions of seams up and down my thighs from jeans that had grown too tight. In that moment my body became an enemy. I spoke hateful words and threatened the puffy image in the mirror. I became a house divided.

At dinner, I ate half my normal amount of food under the watchful eye of my father. After dinner, I donned my swim team sweats and ran in the snow until my lungs ached. I began sneaking my mother's fashion magazines into my bedroom. Perhaps these impossibly beautiful women on shiny pages held the answer to my body's dilemma. But rather than provide comfort or counsel, their svelte bodies and flawless faces mocked me. I became their willing disciple, ready to try any fad diet or exercise they presented, and I was rewarded. The weight fell off. My father affirmed my efforts. Suddenly, I was noticed. Guys asked me out. Then I drew some unhealthy parallels:

Thin women are worthy of love and attention.

Thin women are in control of their lives.

Thin women are successful.

I was fifteen.

The breach that began that day widened until my weight controlled my life in college. It was seven years of crazy before I experienced healing at the age of twenty-two. If this was my reaction to a one-time, one-on-one encounter, imagine what our daughters and other young women are fighting now!

The imagery has moved beyond still photos on shiny paper. The images women fight are alive, and there is no escaping them because they are in our hands. Each day, filtered images speak to us, reminding us of what we lack. I am not against using filters; I've used them myself in bad lighting or on partial makeup days. What I am against is the unreal expectations they put on us. I remember when Instagram was a way to keep up with friends

and encourage others. Now it is a realm where we compare ourselves to everyone.

Abigail Shrier's groundbreaking book *Irreversible Damage* exposed the inherent dangers tied to a constant diet of comparison and distorted gender ideologies.

Nearly every novel problem teenagers face traces itself back to 2007 and the introduction of Steve Jobs's iPhone. In fact, the explosion in self-harm can be so precisely pinpointed to the introduction of this one device that researchers have little doubt that it is the cause. . . . The statistical explosion of bullying, cutting, anorexia, depression, and the rise of sudden transgender identification is owed to the self-harm instruction, manipulation, abuse, and relentless harassment supplied by a single smartphone.²

And these problems have only worsened since her book was released. Many of these trends have reached epidemic proportions. And Christian women are far from exempt. They experience the same struggles, often layered with a large side of religious shame. It is unlikely that you will defend or celebrate something you've been told is sinful or carnal. But a woman's body is neither.

Not Second Best

Female is not an afterthought, second choice, or downgrade. Female was creation's finale. Jesus refers to the church as His beloved bride. Men are not more redeemed than women. Galatians 3:28 tells us,

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Jesus has made all things new and healed the breach between male and female by making us all one. But to be clear, *one* does

not mean “the same.” And just as you are not an afterthought, your female body is not an afterthought.

Female is not
an afterthought,
second choice,
or downgrade.
Female was
creation’s finale.

Our female bodies are divinely aligned to glorify God. Yet the enemy of our souls is also the enemy of our bodies. He distorts the imagery of our body’s form because he hates the potential of our body’s function. He loves to simultaneously sexualize and shame the feminine form. And on some level, our silence has allowed this downgrade of our female form by our current culture. In other ways we’ve been participants. If we stopped buying the products, singing the songs, and wearing the clothes that diminish our divine image, things would shift. Perhaps we’ve allowed this to happen because we forgot that our bodies are sacred and imagined seduction was our only option.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well. (Ps. 139:14 NIV)

Have you *really* pondered this revelation? I need you to sit with this one for a while to grasp what it means to know the wonder of your body “full well.” Both the male and female bodies are uniquely woven and holy. In my experience as a mother to four sons and mother-in-law to four daughters, this realization comes easier for men. They rarely question the wonder of their bodies. Women are far more critical of their bodies and find any revelation of wonder more difficult to embrace. Tragically, both cultural confusion and religious distortions have provided women with countless reasons to believe otherwise. It is okay to wrestle with questions if we don’t allow those queries to cause us to question His love.

Let’s explore this concept on a deeper, more personal feminine level. The psalmist had no problem recognizing God’s creative

handiwork reflected within himself. The Message frames David's words in Psalm 139:14 this way:

Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;
you formed me in my mother's womb.
I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking!
Body and soul, I am marvelously made!
I worship in adoration—what a creation!

Do you believe this? That you were purposefully and intricately shaped by God from the inside out? I hope so. And yet, we most often measure ourselves in the reverse, from the outside in. Hear this: You were loved and wanted when your presence was but a flutter, or a whisper, a mere shadow of what your life is now. You were loved and longed for in the sanctuary of your mother's womb. Yes. Even if your mother didn't want you, your Father was masterfully weaving together your body and soul. Sadly, women disassociate their soul from their body, and wrongly imagine it is only the human soul that God loves. But that is a lie. This lie has contributed to our current state of bodily confusion. This mindset of loving one and despising the other chisels away at the intimate body and soul connection. The enemy loves to exploit this fissure.

Maybe when you've read this psalm in the past, you've mentally pushed it aside. You reason it is a verse meant for men. Or if you dared to believe that this revelation of wonder was for you . . . you saw it as a delayed promise, a one-day, someday thing. One day when you lose weight, exercise regularly, and fit into your pre-pregnancy clothes (feel free to insert your personal disqualifiers here), then you'll embrace these words as your own. But for now, the concept of *full well* escapes your grasp. I dare you to embrace it now—if not for yourself, do it for the sake of your daughters.

I am sad that many women believe God was not intimately involved in their creation. They imagine their frame to be misaligned or a misshapen fit. For some, the pain runs deeper. They

loathe their female body. They do not see wonder; they only see vulnerabilities and limitations. Maybe someone trespassed your frame, and now your body and soul feel fractured. There are many reasons your body might feel like a prison you long to escape. All of which our Lord understands. Please know you are not alone in your struggle, and even though I never wrestled with gender dysphoria, for quite a while I certainly wasn't happy that I'd been born a girl. Even more so after becoming a Christian.

If you escape the snare of sin, the enemy will seek to trap you in the bondage of religion. The dragon wants us jumping from one pit to the other in an attempt to bind us in the very realms Jesus died to set us free from. He wants us mastered by our flesh or our flesh mastered by legalism. He doesn't want us to be free daughters of the Spirit; he wants to entrap us with the passions or shortcomings of our flesh. For many years I cried out in anguish until I experienced the unique, tender expression of love God reserves for His daughters and Jesus's intimate wooing of His bride. Beautiful daughter, be at peace. Your Creator wants to bring you back to a place of freedom and wholeness.

Let's look at ourselves again with fresh eyes. Lay aside all the imagery and voices that stream and scream perpetual comparison. The very ones that always remind you of what you are not. Constantly broadcasting, *Do this, buy that, because you're not thin enough, strong enough, young enough, pretty enough, pursued enough, desirable enough, rich enough, on trend or sexy enough.*

And no, I'm not going to say that you're more than enough, but I am going to say that you are worthy of wonder and worthy of His love. Not because of anything you have done but because of what He has done.

Fearfully and wonderfully made is not about our image or our feelings. It has nothing to do with where we live, what we drive, or what we own. We are fearfully, wonderfully, and uniquely

loved as women. We are without rival because we are fathered by the God Most High, the heirs of the One without equal. We are daughters beyond compare. Your body is His workmanship. I understand that you may not feel this way about yourself on any given day, at any given age, or in any given situation or season of life. Psalm 139 is not about your feelings; it is how your Creator made and feels about you.

You are loved. Here and now loved. Not someday loved, you are now loved. His love is what makes us holy and whole.

You are loved.
Here and now
loved. Not someday
loved, you are now
loved. His love is
what makes us holy
and whole.

Created with Intention

Your body is the wonderful work of an intentional Creator. David reveled in the wonder of *God's* achievement. He lived in a continuous revelation of creation and his Creator's wonder. For most of us, it stops there. We see the wonder in the stars, the mountains, the ocean, and nature. We see wonder in children. You glimpse wonder in your friends. But do you see that wonder in an unfiltered version of you? We, both male and female, were created in the image of God, then became the children of God. Please allow this to sink in. We began as a reflection and now we are His offspring. We were created by Him for Him.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Rom. 12:1)

In the past, I've emphasized the concept of a living sacrifice to the neglect of the reality that in Christ my form is holy and

acceptable. The NIV says “holy and pleasing.” Through the cross, exchanges were made, the unholy became holy, the formerly rejected became the accepted, and those alienated from the life of God became partakers of His divine nature. He died for us so that we might live for Him, not in part but in whole.

His death made us alive. Our obedience allows what Jesus did to gain expression in and through our lives. His sacrifice made us sacred. But if I despise my body, how can it ever be a vehicle of worship? If God calls my body holy and acceptable, who am I to call it wholly unacceptable? Changing how we view our bodies begins by renewing our minds.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.
(Rom. 12:2 NIV)

Renewing our minds means looking at every aspect of our life as God-formed and wonderful. Where there is a lack of wonder, there is an environment of lack. A lack of curiosity, joy, care, strength, and time. My four greatest moments of wonder were when my sons were born. I had never felt more empowered than after I gave birth. I was awed by the wonder of my body and by each little life I held in my arms, and so was my husband. It could possibly be argued that women are even more fearfully and wonderfully made than men. David was a warrior who took thousands of lives, but he never brought forth a life. Women are warriors for life.

Rather than wasting time worrying about what we are not, let’s invite God into every area of our life that now is. N. T. Wright’s commentary on these passages helps us make this connection:

For Paul, the mind and the body are closely interconnected, and must work as a coherent team. Having one’s mind renewed

and offering God one's body (verse 1) are all part of the same complete event. Here Paul uses a vivid, indeed shocking, idea: one's whole self (that's what Paul means by "body") must be laid on the altar like a sacrifice in the Temple. The big difference is that, whereas the sacrifice is there to be killed, the Christian's self-offering is actually all about coming alive with the new life that bursts out in unexpected ways once the evil deeds of the self are put to death.³

Why not let His life within us burst out and touch the lives of others in unexpected ways?

He Is the Answer to the Hard Questions

Not long ago, a beautiful woman and friend asked me a heartfelt question, "What would Jesus say to my friend who believes she was born in the wrong body?"

I took a deep breath before answering her. Then I said, "I believe first He would affirm His love for her."

My friend nodded. And I continued, "I also believe He'd tell her, 'You're not a mistake. But I understand your discomfort.' Then He would explain that this world is not her home and that she'd never feel completely comfortable here because she was made for eternity."

We long for more because we were made for more. We fight aging and death because we were made for eternal life. As wondrous as our bodies are, they are merely the seed form of what they one day will be. Paul explained it this way in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44:

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

You might think of it this way: If you'd never seen a tomato or tomato plant, could you imagine either of them simply by looking at a small, oddly shaped, colorless tomato seed? That tiny seed would have no way of telling you what was within it. And yet, given the right environment, that tomato seed will explode with growth in color and flavor. We are the same. In this moment, we are merely seeds waiting for the right environment to reveal what we one day will be. Paul goes on to say,

Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam [Jesus] became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. (vv. 45-47)

For now, we are dust and seeds, born of earth and born again to be reborn in heaven. Why would any of us think our dust-and-seed state would be comfortable when we sense there is so much more waiting within us? We are in a state of agitated containment. We are in the tension of who we are and who we will forever be. The seed of our "more" will not be realized until His appearance.

But the dragon lies and says, *This life is all there will ever be. Be your own god.* The enemy wants a generation of sons and daughters to imagine *their formation was a mistake*. If he can get them to believe this lie, how will they ever trust a mistaken Creator with the weightier measure of their transformation? By twisting the truth, the enemy wants us to doubt the One who is the truth. C. S. Lewis wrote,

A creature revolting against a creator is revolting against the source of his own powers—including even his power to revolt. . . . It is like the scent of a flower trying to destroy the flower.⁴

To understand this Lewis quote in its deepest sense, our role in this statement requires more clarity. We are the creature, not

the Creator, and as such, we fall into the category of those who are empowered rather than the One who is all Power. We are the scent, the fragrant vapor of a blossom, but not the flower.

This comparison captures the disparity between the One who creates magnificence out of nothingness and those He created. Think of it: without His gift of free will, even rebellion would be impossible. And yet we still revolt and find ourselves blinded to reason. The prophet Isaiah described our frailty this way:

A voice says, "Cry!"
And I said, "What shall I cry?"
All flesh is grass,
and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades
when the breath of the LORD blows on it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever. (Isa. 40:6–8)

The breath of God's Word cannot fade. James echoed the brevity of our days with this insight:

What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. (James 4:14)

In light of eternity, we are a fleeting fragrance, a scent that disappears only to reappear in eternity. The words of C. S. Lewis reflect the ancient laments of the prophet Isaiah.

You turn things upside down!
Shall the potter be regarded as the clay,
that the thing made should say of its maker,
"He did not make me";
or the thing formed say of him who formed it,
"He has no understanding"? (Isa. 29:16)

In so many ways and on so many fronts, our worldview has turned the vantage of the sacred upside down. Does clay tell the artisan, “You didn’t make me,” or say to the maker, “You didn’t know what you were doing”? Isaiah is my favorite prophet, but he has taken the gloves off in these verses! Through him, the Lord is exposing the breakdown between the created and the Creator. Paraphrased, it might read, “You are the ones in My hands. I am not in yours.” We are His idea. I fear we’ve embraced this flipped reasoning once again. In Isaiah 45:9 the prophet addresses the issue again:

Woe to him who strives with him who formed him,
a pot among earthen pots!
Does the clay say to him who forms it, “What are you
making?”
or “Your work has no handles”?

The word *woe* should serve as a “whoa” for all of us! It is time to stop and return to reason.

In her excellent book *Love Thy Body*, Nancy Pearcey comments on this same idea:

Why is it considered acceptable to carve up a person’s body to match their inner sense of self but bigoted to help them change their sense of self to match their body? Feelings can change. But the body is an observable fact that does not change. It makes sense to treat it as a reliable marker of sexual identity.⁵

This is an important question for us to answer. Is it not striving with our Maker when we demand that our feelings and our self-perception take precedence over His divine formation? Do we want to further the destruction of division by separating gender from our biological sex? Yes, there are very real challenges to be faced in our highly sexualized, invasive world. Yes, we should

love people no matter what they choose to do to their body. Yes, God loves people no matter what decisions they make. But don't you see the dragon's shadow behind this?

He whispers lies: *Life will be better, you will be safer, you will be loved if you change.* What he does not want

you to know is that life is not easy; it is eternal. You don't have to change to be loved; you are already loved, and you will never be safer than when Christ is your refuge.

He sees us as we one day will be, transformed and completely renewed.

I am a flawed, imperfect mother and grandmother, yet my heart still leaps whenever I see my children or grandchildren. I love them. I want the best for them. I see the best in them. If I feel this way, how much more does our heavenly Father, who is love?

You will never be safer than when Christ is your refuge.

In what ways have you lived as a house divided?

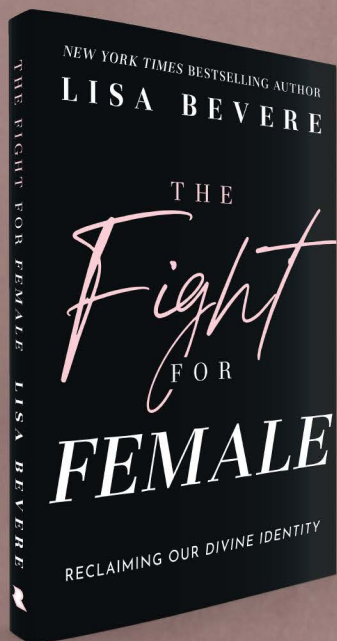
What part of your female frame do you shame?

Can you pinpoint a moment when this division happened?

What is one thing you can do to reconnect with your body, to see it as a sacred space created by God?

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