

When I was a kid, there were so many things that just happened. I didn't have to do anything and poof, yesterday's empty milk jug was suddenly full. Saltine and peanut butter sandwiches materialized out of thin air. Birthdays arrived with cake and other kids. Dishes in the sink magically transported to the cabinets, muddy boot tracks dissolved into the ether, and the dog always seemed to be fed. Now, I did my share around the house. My sisters and I lined up to report for duty, and mom doled out tasks. I knew a thing or two about driving a broom. And I knew that sweeping was more exercise than it had any business being. And I knew my sisters worked just as hard on their own chores. But their chores happened invisibly. Rather, they happened in places I wasn't supposed to go. I mean it wasn't forbidden, but it was made abundantly clear that there were things I should do and things that my sisters and mom should do. For a while, I just thought that was how the division of labor fell. We all had work to do, so of course we'd have different jobs.

Looking closer, it's amazing how many of their jobs landed in the kitchen or bathrooms or even closets while my jobs took me outside to mow the lawn, pick up rocks, or cut up firewood. Those weren't cushy chores. Once, I cut a half a rick of firewood only to discover the logs were just barely too long for the fireplace. My hands calloused and bled from sifting rocks out of clumpy soil. I wore long sleeves in the July heat to keep mosquitoes at bay while mowing the lawn, but they bit through anyway. It was hard work, no question. But it took me outside, and I kinda enjoyed the critters and sounds and smells toiling under the sun. Also, I had a crush on someone that lived up the street, and sometimes she'd walk by while I was out there, so I got the chance to show off my twiggy arms and wink. Unsuccessful romantic gambits aside, it was kinda nice being out there. Actually, that's how the whole family shook out. My uncle pattered around his farm doing farm things while my aunt made dinner and tidied up. My dad spent most of his time in the barn doing barn things. My grandpa rarely left his lazy boy chair, but when an engine needed tinkering his coveralled self miraculously walked again while a woman paid to care for him got the gatorade, ham sandwich, and bandaids ready.

There's a woman I know who was incredibly vibrant back in the day. She'd been married once before, and it didn't work out all that great. So, when she married again, everyone thought this would be the fairy tale, and maybe it was for a time. But things changed. He spent more and more of his days hunting, riding his four wheeler, and pouting when things didn't go his way. She passed her days cooking for a family that'd just doubled in size, caring for a newborn on her own, and washing outdoor-stained clothes. He built them a house on the outskirts of town. It's a beautiful place, don't get me wrong, but it sits at the end of a dirt road with acres of land between it and the next closest neighbors...who happen to be his mother in one house and his sister in another. To put it mildly, it was isolating. Not only did her world shift from the city limits to a county road, her chores barely took her outside. Her world shrank, and the walls of her home grew closer. It's not that she never went outside, and it's not that she never left the compound. But more and more of her time came under that roof and less and less showed her blue skies or stars at night. Her world wasn't just at home, it was all about the home, and she was the homemaker. Her husband spent his days working hard, no question, but enjoying the expansiveness of the outdoors. His imagination and his excitement grew to fill the space he occupied, or tried to. Outside's kinda limitless, ya know? But her imagination and her excitement filled her space, too, albeit a significantly smaller container. Those thick beamed walls kept her hemmed in, and her once vibrant soul got smaller and smaller until her presence in a room barely registered. But she kept doing her work and kept making the place homey so when he got back from his new adventures, he could sit and relax.

I know for most of us, this doesn't sound unusual. And I know some think this is exactly how it should be. So let me come at this differently. Simon the fisherman just dropped his nets to follow the Messiah. Now we

have the advantage of thousands of years of hindsight, so we tend to think this is a good thing. He took a leap of faith and became the cornerstone of Christ's church, trusting that someone would provide for his needs. Meanwhile, Simon's mother-in-law is sick enough to be bedridden. For what it's worth, there's no mention of Simon's wife who presumably was busy with her own homemaking chores. Anyway, Jesus hears the mother-in-law is sick so he heals her. And what happens next? She gets up and makes them lunch. Then the whole city hears about the miracle, shows up, and Jesus heals with abandon. But y'all, while I'm sure she's grateful, can you imagine being that mother-in-law? You're sick in bed when your good for nothing son-in-law comes home early with a bunch of vagrants and announces he's quit his job. One of 'em heals you, which is great, so you make a bunch of sandwiches. Maybe you're overcome with gratitude and feeding people is your love language. Or maybe you're socialized to feed visitors and feel guilty enough to drag yourself out of convalescence and into the kitchen. And then the whole entire city shows up at your house unannounced. At best, it's a weird day. It gets better: the next morning, she's almost certainly up early and toiling away at breakfast when Jesus, the guy that convinced her son-in-law to quit his job and brought all those people around, gets up and goes out for a morning stroll so he can pray in peace. Then Simon and the rest of the crew leave without so much as a thank you.

Now, I'm not trying to paint Jesus and his disciples in a bad light, I just want to show how old this problem is. It didn't start with them. In much of our history, men and women both work hard. But men work hard doing whatever it is they do while women work hard facilitating men's lives. With a handful of very notable exceptions, women throughout scripture serve men, while men get to serve God. Men ran the show, men made the rules, and men reaped the benefits. Women prepared them beds, fed them, even washed their feet. When Jesus bent to wash feet instead, the room erupted in protest. Men were so much the focus that Paul got obsessed with circumcision and entire households converted just because the patriarch decided he wanted to go to a new church. Even the classic Martha-Mary story highlights the disconnect: Jesus says Mary's pause to make time for him is right while Martha's trying to feed a houseful of people only there because Jesus is there. Most men don't think about how things like lunch happen. Like my childhood saltines and peanut butter, they just appear. Dishes get done, food gets made, floors get mopped. And then we wonder why women get so tired.

I wonder just how often we do this sort of thing. I suspect if asked, most men would say we're pretty good at sharing the work these days, and most women would laugh. We just can't help but see the world through our own lenses. If half the population has the freedom to step away and pray, surely everyone does, right? Fellas, I suspect some of you are wondering why this matters so much. Well we're not just talking about whose week it is to take out the trash. We're talking about making space for everyone to find peace and connect with God. And we're talking about recognizing what everyday barriers still stand that keep some people isolated and invisible. This isn't just a gender issue. We could tell this same story in relation to race, economic status, nationality, languages spoken, and on and on. There are some folks our society has decided are there to serve the rest of us and facilitate our lives. So, I guess I would appreciate this story a whole lot more if only Jesus had come in and done something different. If only he'd healed her, propped a pillow behind her head, and delivered chicken soup with orange juice on a tray, that would've been great. If only he'd set his new-found disciples to work frying all that fish they left back at the shore, if only he'd stepped outside to heal the gathered city while the recovering woman rested, if only he'd woken her early the next day so she could go off and pray with him. If only.

I know it's not entirely fair to hold 2000-year old men to 21st Century standards, but we are reading this stuff now, and old as the scriptures are, they're living texts. Maybe there's something to spotting the mote in those fellas' eyes to show us the beams in our own. I also wonder if there's something to training ourselves to see these shortcomings wherever they appear. Like, if we can see 'em here in ancient texts, maybe we'll get

better at seeing them in our lives. And if we see them, we can't ignore them. And if we can't ignore them, we can start to fix 'em. And when we fix 'em, we make space for everyone to find God.