

Foreword

MY FATHER LIKED ADVENTURES. While I think he would have preferred more sons and fewer daughters (he got three daughters before getting his son), it meant we girls were drawn into his adventuring.

I'd like to think I was the most adventurous of us all.

Some of us climbed mountains with Dad, and I climbed the tree just beside the front porch and scrambled up on the rooftop to look at stars with him. We hiked together, and he tried to teach all of us how to properly catch and throw a football. Some of us kids tended wounded birds with him, and when it was his turn to preach, he took all of us to the Gospel Rescue Mission to eat dinner with the homeless people after the sermon.

This is not to ignore my mother's role in shaping me. It was less adventurous, but equally important. I joined her in the kitchen and acquired a love of baking and cooking, an altogether underappreciated way of being creative and offering a deeply nourishing kind of love. She taught me to knit, and tried to teach me to sew, and let me run off to play in the desert with my brother when I couldn't stand to sit another moment.

My parents made a strong woman out of me, teaching me it was okay to "buck the system," to go against the flow, to stand firm like Noah in an unfriendly, ungodly world. I did not appreciate a lot of this at the time. Especially not when Dad would compare our family to Noah's when he was denying yet another request to do something every other girl I knew was doing.

My father may have regretted imparting all that confidence and courage in later years. I told him once that the strength he thought I had taken too far (getting a PhD, pursuing a career that had me teaching men) came from the courage and fortitude he instilled when I was an impressionable daughter growing up in his home.

I count myself blessed, even though not completely untarnished by what was also a very strict and conservative upbringing. Not all girls grow up with parents that affirm them as capable, intelligent, creative beings with something worthwhile to contribute to the world. You'll discover that Amy Davis Abdallah, like I, has taught a good number of women who are unsure what it is supposed to mean to "be a woman." They lack the confidence that enables them to give and receive love from God, to accept and love themselves, to accept and love others, and to engage God's good creation in responsible and creative ways—all relationships that Amy dives into in this field guide exploration of the identity of women.

Even the most confident young women stumble. We live in a wonderfully diverse culture, and while there are many upsides to that, one downside is that it is full of mixed messages about what it means to be a woman, or a man for that matter. Except for a driver's license at sixteen and the right to drink at twenty-one, we don't have markers that help girls and boys transition from childhood to young adulthood to adulthood. Even with the stability of my childhood home I stumbled around a bit once I deviated from the path my parents expected me to tread.

I looked around for role models and too many of the strong women I saw at the time seemed either angry and/or overly focused on the privileges still denied them. I wanted to forge a way that empowered me, and later my daughters and female students, to transition into adulthood as women called by God to walk humbly in the light of God's love, partnering with men and other women in the pursuit of justice and mercy.

Amy has crafted an experience that attempts to do just that. *Woman* is a rite of passage of sorts that brings a group together to explore their identity as women and how that is fleshed out in various relationships. How much clearer such a journey is when some kind of shared rite of passage is woven into a culture's fabric! How much richer the experience is when shared with other sojourners, and applauded by onlookers who are invested in seeing the participants succeed!

I'd researched and written some about rites of passages, which later connected me to Amy. I learned of her interest in creating a rite of passage for women when she asked me to be on her dissertation committee, the dissertation itself an exploration of rites of passage. She took theological truths, historical traditions, and theoretical ideas, and applied them, creating a rite of passage for women at Nyack College, an experience that would strengthen their identity as women loved and gifted by God.

The book you hold in your hands is based on the findings from that dissertation and Amy's subsequent work writing about, developing, and implementing *Woman*. Amy developed a rite that fits our twenty-first-century Western evangelical culture, addressing the questions of our day, which in many ways are similar to questions of the past, but in significant ways are also different. Wisely, Amy doesn't prepare and send women off on solo journeys into the woods to hunt and kill a beast, and so to establish themselves as worthy and ready for womanhood. Rather she walks them through a course of study that builds on humanity's four classic relationships: with God, with ourselves, with others, and with creation. In those properly aligned relationships our identity as women grows stronger, as does our capacity to live well, to contribute wisely to the world, and to participate with God in making the world a light- and love-filled place.

Amy has been leading groups through the rite of passage at Nyack College for about four years now, though participants have not only been college-age women. While historically a rite of passage was linked to a particular time in an individual's life, this book is designed to come alongside women at any point from young adulthood onward, fostering a stronger sense of what it means to be women made in the image of God.

Enter the journey with enthusiasm—and with at least a friend or two—and enjoy the challenge of exploring the opportunities and responsibilities of being a woman loved by God, and called to love, and to pursue mercy and justice.

Lisa Graham McMinn, PhD
Professor of Sociology
George Fox University
Author of *Growing Strong Daughters*