

Participant Guide

**A
WOMAN'S
PLACE
KATELYN
BEATY**

**A Bible Study Exploring
Every Woman's Call to Work**

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Participant Guide
by Maria Mayo

Abingdon Press / Nashville

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This book is printed on elemental chlorine-free paper.
978-1-5018-4900-8

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17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 — 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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INTRODUCTION

When it comes to women and work, there is often an “us-versus-them” mentality, dividing women according to the choices they make. Yet, all women have a shared calling to work in a way that glorifies God—whether it be in the office, home, ministry, or beyond. This study gives you the opportunity to gather in conversation around the topic as you explore God’s call to work in all its various forms.

How much does the Bible say about women and work? Would you be surprised to know that the answer is *a lot*? In *A Woman’s Place*, Katelyn Beaty explores the meaning and value of work for women—work as a way to glorify God—both inside and outside the home. In this study based on Katelyn’s book, we ask questions about what the Bible says about women and work and find that the answers may be as beautiful as they are unexpected.

We begin with the contention that women—just like men—are made to reign. We learn that work is holy and good, and that God is the supreme worker in whose image we are all created. God did not make an accident when he made us female, and in Christ we may look forward to a time when gender differences hold no power. We learn about the tangled relationship between work and motherhood, and the integration of work and family. If women are called to work, how can they overcome so many obstacles? Even a single life can bear fruit and a family tree can grow in the new family that Jesus ordains. Finally, we learn that ambition can also be holy, and the “cross-shaped ambition” of Jesus may be what we are all called to emulate.

We engage Scripture to take a deeper dive into these issues. The call to rule in Psalm 8 echoes the Creation story in Genesis 1 and demonstrates how men and women are both—equally—created to work. The words of Paul describe our spiritual gifts and the importance of honoring different gifts. The woman of Proverbs 31 is a model of work and accomplishment. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector serves as a potent reminder for women not to judge one another's parenting choices as they decide whether to work outside the home and rather approach each other with humility and grace. Isaiah's verses celebrating barren and single women join Jesus' new definition of family to affirm single women and ensure them a place in the Kingdom. And Katelyn boldly claims that Jesus was the most ambitious person ever to walk the earth. Work is meaningful, and necessary, for all women. Work is one way to glorify God and make meaning out of our lives. According to the Creation story in Genesis 1, it is the very first way.

For each week of our study there are three readings and two sets of questions. Each chapter of the study includes the following elements:

<i>Explore the Message</i>	<i>A summary of the chapter in the A Woman's Place book.</i>
<i>Read the Scripture</i>	<i>Selected Scripture passages for the week.</i>
<i>Ask the Questions</i>	<i>Questions relating to the Scripture and chapter summary.</i>
<i>Apply God's Word</i>	<i>An exploration of the Scripture through the lens of the chapter.</i>
<i>Think It Through</i>	<i>Questions to help you think further about the interpretation of Scripture and apply it to your life.</i>
<i>Bring It Home</i>	<i>A prompt to think about how the issues affect you personally.</i>

Write It Down *An excerpt from A Woman's Place and prompts for journaling.*

Pray About It *A sample prayer to guide you into a personal time of prayer.*

When you plan your study, be sure to allow time to read the corresponding chapter in *A Woman's Place*. This will help you more deeply understand and reflect on the material in this participant guide.

Once a week, you will gather with your group to watch a video in which Katelyn shares additional insights into the material, along with personal stories about her own experience as a working woman. This will also be an opportunity to discuss what you're learning and share how God is working in your life.

As you begin this exploration of women and work, keep your mind and heart open to all the ways Scripture and culture create opportunities for meaningful work for women. All human beings are created to work, and women must not be excluded from that story. Follow Katelyn as she journeys through history and Scripture to discover how women and men alike are called to work that glorifies God.



Session 1

**MADE
TO REIGN**

Session 1

MADE TO REIGN

Explore the Message

“Every human being is made to work,” Katelyn Beaty writes in her opening lines. “And since women are human beings, every woman is made to work.” We all work, but exactly why is work such an important part of being human? Katelyn looks to Psalm 8 for the answer. The bottom line? We are made to reign over God’s creation. Human beings work in order to live into that purpose and bear the image of God on earth. Our God is a God who works, and work is how men and women both properly bear the image of God. What that work looks like runs the full spectrum of human experience, from closing deals in the corner office to making discoveries in the laboratory to caring for children in the home. There are so many possibilities for our work and so many ways we can bear the image of God as we are productive in the world.

The division between men’s work and the work that women do has long been prevalent in our culture. Who hasn’t heard the saying, “A woman’s place is in the home”? But when God created maleness and femaleness, he declared that they were good, and he instructed both of them to rule over creation (Genesis 1:27-31). And this is *why* women are called to work: men can’t rule over creation alone. Just for a second,

imagine a world in which *only* men did any kind of work. What an incomplete creation! This is not what God intended when he designed men and women. Indeed, “God blessed *them* and said to *them*, ‘Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it’” (Genesis 1:28, *emphasis added*). Reigning over all creation is definitely a job for two people.

But what happens when your church tells you that you shouldn't work? Or that your work in the home isn't really work at all? The sad thing is that many Christian communities aren't talking about work at all, much less the work that women do. And some of them are talking about it in ways that are destructive and unbiblical, because it is clear throughout Scripture that women are called to work. Others lack the understanding and resources to engage women who work outside the home, and there are even some that do not adequately affirm those who choose to stay home to raise children and pursue domestic work. As a result, women often find themselves alienated from the very church communities where they should be able to turn for support.

Read the Scripture

¹O LORD, *our Lord,*
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory
above the heavens.

²*From the lips of children and infants*
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

³*When I consider your heavens,*
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,

⁴*what is man that you are mindful of him,*
the son of man that you care for him?

⁵*You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings*
and crowned him with glory and honor.

⁶You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:

⁷all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,

⁸the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

⁹O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Psalm 8 (NIV 1984)

Ask the Questions

1. Read Psalm 8 out loud. Following Beaty's example, in verses 3-6, substitute your own name for "him" or "his." How does it feel? Can you imagine yourself as the object of God's particular attention and care? What do you rule over in your daily life?
2. Do you find it difficult to read the psalm as directed at both men and women? If so, why?
3. Summarize what the psalmist is saying in verse 4. How do these words make you feel about your role in God's creation?

Apply God's Word

"O LORD, our Lord, / how majestic is your name in all the earth!" What a triumphant beginning to the very first song of praise that appears in the Book of Psalms. The psalm is unique in that it addresses God directly: "You have set your glory above the heavens," and "You put everything under his feet." The words of this song of celebration raise up both God's power over the world and the important role and work of human beings. Just think of the job God gave us, to rule over *everything!* "Psalm 8 is first and foremost about God," writes Katelyn. "But it is also about humankind: *their* majesty, glory, and power, a reflection of the God whose image they bear." We are created in the image of the amazing God described in Psalm 8. What a cause for thanks and praise!

But what does this psalm have to do with work? Take a look at Genesis 1:26-28:

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth."

*²⁷God created humanity in God's own image,
in the divine image God created them,
male and female God created them.*

²⁸God blessed them and said to them, "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground."

(Genesis 1:26-28)

Sound familiar? Psalm 8 repeats the Genesis themes: "You made him ruler over the works of your hands; / you put everything under his feet," all the birds and animals and fish in the sea. We were made to rule. And, more importantly, we were made to *work*.

Throughout Scripture, God is described as working. Bear with me for some quick Hebrew so we can look more closely at that idea. When you see the noun "work" in the Genesis account of creation, the Hebrew word is *melakah*. This word means work, business, or occupation. Genesis 2:2 describes, "On the sixth day, God completed all the work [*melakah*] that he had done." God worked to make all of creation, and on the seventh day, he rested. This is just as we are instructed to do in the Ten Commandments: "Six days you may work and do all your tasks [*melakah*], but the seventh day is a Sabbath" (Exodus 20:9-10). The psalm reminds us of this God who works and how we are created in his image, also to work. Katelyn writes, "Psalm 8 helps us to remember a bedrock truth about *why* we work. We work in order to live into God's purposes for all of us: to reign over all of creation as his image bearers and representatives on earth."

Remember that in Genesis 1, both men and women are created to rule over God's creation. Don't be fooled by the "him" language in the psalm; this term, along with "Son of Man," is meant to refer to all of humanity, men and women together. And just as "him" refers to all of



We can realize that we are not isolated in our work dreams, that we are not alone in our deepest desires to make our professions live again and be true to their deepest moral and spiritual potentials. The word *community*, after all, means “to work on a common task together.”¹

1. Matthew Fox, *The Reinvention of Work: A New Vision of Livelihood for Our Time* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 135.

us, it also refers to each of us. No doubt, to be created in the image of God is to be overflowing with glory and honor. The psalm's celebration of our humanity speaks to all of us about the work we are invited to do for the glory of God.

Reading this psalm alongside the Genesis account paints a graceful picture of how we live out our call as God's image bearers and how work is an integral part of that. It is clear that men's work and the work of women are equally created and equally valued in God's creation. He created all of us together, and we work to reflect his image. When Christian communities neglect the fullness of the Psalm 8 celebration, creation fails to flourish. God created a world that was complete only when women and men worked side by side to care for it. The psalm remembers and celebrates this. Women, like men, are only slightly less than divine (v. 5). With everything under our feet (v. 6), we are made to work and made to reign.

Think It Through

1. Read Genesis 1:26-28 above. How does the voice of Genesis come through in Psalm 8? In what ways is the Creation story affirmed and celebrated?
2. Consider the idea that all women are called to work. What does that mean for your life?
3. Katelyn makes the point that work is a crucial part of bearing the image of God. Name several ways that this is true in your experience.
4. Do you feel that your church community is supportive of the work you do? Why or why not?
5. Think about your own work. In what ways does it reflect the image of God?

Bring It Home

Write down a list of some of the women you know. Beside each of their names, list the ways that they work—at home, at church, in the wider world. Do you find that your community values the various kinds of work they do? If so, how does that manifest?

Write It Down

Read the following excerpt from *A Woman's Place*. Choose one (or both) of the questions and write a response in a journal or notebook.

“For women to live on mission, we Christians need to massively rethink how we think and talk about work. In both subtle and not so subtle ways, Christian women are being discouraged from thinking of work as a good, direct way of bearing the image of God and living on mission for him.”

1. What do you think it means “to live on mission”? In what ways do you live on mission for God in your life? What keeps you from doing so?
2. What does work mean to you? How is your work related to your faith? Do you feel called to the work you do?

Pray About It

Oh God, let me be a true bearer of your image on the earth. Let the work of my hands please you and delight you. Inspire me in my work and make me fruitful and productive. Grant me the wisdom to make sound choices and care for your creation as I move through my day. I thank you for the gifts you have given me and the world you have placed under my feet. Amen.