

AUDIO Review

Different by Design by Claire Smith

Review by Caroline Hart (Caz) and Caroline Laforest (Carrie)



Different by Design produced by Matthias Media encompasses 6 talks by Claire Smith on the role of women in the church and in relationships. These talks are based on 6 important but controversial bible passages: 1 Timothy 2, 1 Corinthians 11, 1 Corinthians 14, 1 Peter 3, Ephesians 5 and Genesis 1-3. We met to discuss the talks over a period of weeks, and found it to be an enriching experience for our relationship with God, with each other and with the local coffee shop.

Caz: To preface my reaction to listening and discussing these talks I should say that, I returned to regularly attending church five years ago after a prolonged absence. In that absence, due to the commitment of a small number of friends, Christian issues and living were discussed regularly. But there was one particular topic that used to really get my blood boiling: the role of women in the church and Christian society. I championed what to my mind were the down trodden female masses sitting hunched quietly in churches around the country oppressed by the quite obviously outdated and libellous writings of a misogynist.

I thank God for the patience and tenacity of those friends. Over the last five years I have had to come to terms with a series of uncomfortable and counter cultural truths about what it means to live a Christian life as a Godly woman in a sinful world. A world in which looking out for oneself is seen as the smart and right way to live.

Carrie and I decided to do these talks to familiarise ourselves with these controversial passages and to try to come to grips with the implications for our lives and our relationships. Claire's presentation of these passages is clear, thorough and patient. The presentation of the talks as a package is well rounded and I was so encouraged by the final talk on Genesis after weeks of grappling with what it means to learn in quietness and submission. These talks provide a great framework for understanding and discussing our role as women, created by God and precious to him, condemned by our sin, but also saved by God's love through his Son. Meeting together with Carrie gave me accountability and doubled what I learnt as she raised issues and implications that I hadn't even considered as we formed our arguments for and against each other's positions.

I was reminded of how important our Christian community is and that God is consistent and faithful: he requests obedience from all of us, male and female. I also had to face questions that I thought I had dealt with: do I believe in the authority of Scripture? What are the implications of living for or against Gods will? What does decency, propriety, silence and submission look like day to day? Who am I living my life for? If my life and trust is rightly placed with Christ then what am I railing against if he asks obedience of me for the good order of his church and our relationships? It isn't easy but I can now with confidence know what I believe the role of women is...biblically.

Carrie: I guess I have thought about the issue of women in ministry and in relationships at various points over my 10 year history as a Christian, but really only in a random and isolated way when passages come up at church or in discussions. What I found really helpful in these talks was that I could actually address the issues in a more complete and satisfactory way. Listening to 6 passages over several weeks and gaining an understanding of how each of these impact the beliefs and understandings that we have, allowed a much fuller, holistic, biblical view to come forth. I now feel I am familiar with the Bible passages that speak about women and could discuss them helpfully with others. Claire Smith gives clear teaching, working hard to understand the Bible for what it says (not what our culture wants it to say!), and very helpfully shares the alternative points of view so that we can understand the topical debates and controversies in our own backyards. For me, being able to start this process with Caz was a wonderful start to this journey for me, and this friendship for us. As we debated and disagreed and laughed and listened and reconsidered, we kept each other accountable to finishing the talks and thinking about them in a deeper way.

There were many things I've learnt, but I'll only mention 2 here. Firstly, I learnt that the relationships between men and women reflect the relationships in the Trinity – amazing! As we see in the Trinity, God and Jesus are equal (both fully God), but there is an order and hierarchy in their relationship (Jesus submits to the Father). So too men and women are equal (both fully human and valuable in God's sight) and yet there is order (wives submit to husbands). This was a beautiful concept to me. How can any woman complain about her position in church or married life when we are paralleled to Christ in His relationship with God??? I think this is an amazing privilege and not something to be scoffed at or complained about as unfair. Secondly, as we read through these passages, a strong theme emerged about the overarching concept of how women should think, behave and dress. Their demeanour should be gentle, respectful and God honouring. It was really nice to see this concept played out again and again through the Bible. Something to keep working on! Let's keep talking to each other as women and encourage each other to do this.

I guess there are still some things I struggle with or don't understand, but I look forward to God teaching me more and more over the years.

Before our final coffee, Caz said, "Wow, we've nearly finished these talks. We're going to have to start basing these catch-ups on friendship". Well, Caz I look forward to this!

So our encouragement to you is to buy the talks and listen to them and then meet with another woman to talk, as this will not only mean you do actually listen to them, but it gives you a framework to start discussions about important issues. We learnt that God has been so kind to us in so many ways, let's be thankful for that. We were encouraged to work hard at and resolve the bits we find hard in the Bible rather than seeing it as a massive injustice. We found it made us more aware of the issues and was a good opportunity to chat to our female minister when we were unsure, and so grow in that relationship as well. So do it – and learn more about how we can honour God!!! How could you refuse such an offer???

The talks are available in CD or MP3 format from www.matthias.media.com.au or phone 02 9663 1478.