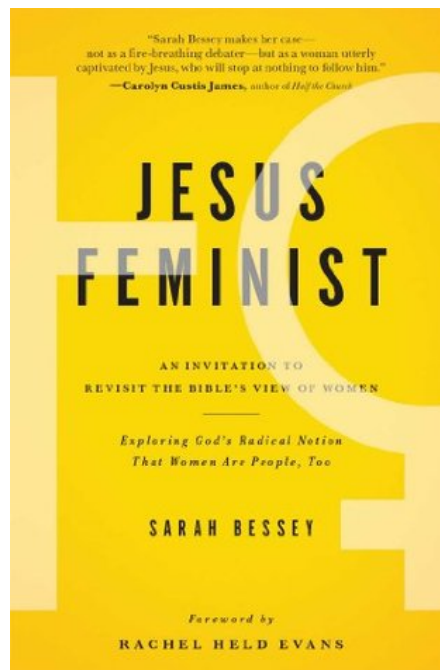




Jesus Feminist: An Invitation to Revisit the Bible's View of Women

Sarah Bessey , Rachel Held Evans (Foreword)

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Gender roles have been debated for centuries, and now Sarah Bessey offers a clarion freedom call for all who want to realize their giftedness and potential in the kingdom of God. Through a thoughtful review of biblical teaching and church practices, Bessey shares how following Jesus made a feminist out of her.

Jesus Feminist: An Invitation to Revisit the Bible's View of Women Details

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From Reader Review Jesus Feminist: An Invitation to Revisit the Bible's View of Women for online ebook

Martha says

I know, I know. The title is going to be off-putting to many people, but try to see past that and read this incredible book of freedom in Christ for both men and women.

I don't often read a book where I set it down and think, "I need to buy this book." when I have gotten it from the library. I also don't read a ton of books that bring me to tears multiple times. This one hit both of those. I wanted to buy it so I can quote from it. There were lines that were just so powerful in here. I loved when she said someone asked her what kind of feminist she was, and she said, "I am a Jesus Feminist." While I may not agree with everything 100% in this book, as it always is in most books, this is one that was a breath of fresh air of freedom in Christ.

It is not anti-men or any of the stereotypes you think of, but lives up merely to the definition of what feminism is. I loved the biblical viewpoints throughout, but also the Church Ladies chapter was my favorite. Think outside the box and read this book, even if you think you will hate it.

Rachel McAllister says

This book was a HUGE disappointment for me. If you've read anything at all about being a feminist as a Christian or women's issues in Christianity then you should definitely skip this book. I have no doubt you already know more than this book will offer you through a tiny bit of online research. I didn't realize that so much of the book would be about the author. That in itself is not an awful thing, but the purple prose this writer uses to discuss her relationship with Christianity is just terrible writing. Only now, reading the reviews written by other people who were less impressed with this book, am I learning she's a blogger... Her voice MIGHT work in a blog, but that's because she has the kind of writing style you can only take in short doses.

What I thought this book would do is tell me a little about what it means to be a feminist and a Christian, the implications of those things together, understanding your faith in the face of a sexism that often dominates your religion, the issues you grapple with (and ways to understand them), and the explanations/conversations you have with other people who just don't get it. It didn't do any of that. Just based on the title, I thought it would be researched and thought provoking. That it would examine the way the Bible views and treats women. But any time it even came close to doing that it was through the words of some other person. That's fine, but if you have nothing to add to the critical conversation on christian feminism then perhaps you shouldn't write a book about it?

Luke Harms says

Right out of the gate, let me say that I think what Sarah is doing here is really important. By putting the word "Jesus" in lights right next to "feminist," she's forcing a certain conversation that some folks would rather not have right now (or ever). Feminism has been recast in the past few decades as anathema to Christianity in many ways. Simply suggesting that one can hold to both concepts and implying that being a "Jesus Feminist" is possible in a way that will not, in fact, result in a sort of universe-destroying cataclysm, is a radical statement in itself, it would seem.

Starting with the introduction and all the way through to her hopeful commission in the final chapter, Sarah's primary mode of interaction with the reader is one of disarming. She sets the tone early on saying,

"We have often treated our communities like a minefield, acted like theology is a war, and we are the wounded and we are the wounding."

She's acknowledging up front the firepower we often bring to discussions like these, and suggests that, instead of trying to kill each other, maybe we could just try to hear each other instead. As you read on, you start to understand that this is no empty gesture. Sarah is consistently disarming in her grace, her candor, and her willingness to let us into the most intimate, most painful experiences of her life. Some people bring knives to gunfights. All Sarah brought was her story, and the result is that we cannot help but lower our weapons and listen to her tell it. So as you settle in past the introduction and into the meat of the book itself, the feeling is far more coffee (or tea!) on a Saturday afternoon than it is a sermon on Sunday or a lecture on Monday.

There are two primary arcs that Sarah weaves artfully through the book, and I'll try to do them justice here. The first is the refusal to meet the old arguments for patriarchy on their own terms. She kindly-yet-thoroughly dismantles much of the traditional case for the marginalization of women and girls in and by the church, and presents a positive, Jesus-centric ideal for the radical inclusion of women in the ongoing redemptive work of God in the world. She says,

"Instead, in Christ and because of Christ, we are invited to participate in the Kingdom of God through redemptive movement-for both men and women-toward equality and freedom. We can choose to move with God, further into justice and wholeness, or we can choose to prop up the world's dead systems, baptizing injustice and power in sacred language."

She's essentially refusing to allow patriarchy exclusive claim to the language of the divine, and it works quite well. The line about "baptizing injustice and power in sacred language" is still ringing in my ears.

In speaking of Jesus healing the woman with the crippled hand in the synagogue, she highlights the phrase Jesus used, "daughter of Abraham." This has always struck me as a really pivotal, even if often overlooked, piece of the story. With a single word, Jesus upsets generations of religions dogma and sociocultural programming. Some might ask, "to what end?" But that's the thing, we know the end, and we start to see where Sarah is taking us. The trajectory of Christ's life was always singular in its focus of reconciling creation back into shalom with its creator. Every word that he spoke was a waypoint one that journey, and this one was no different. In deconstructing the rigid gender hierarchies of His day, He was giving us a model (and I'd argue a directive) to do the same thing in ours.

In dealing with the household codes, she says they "are not universal standards without context or purpose." And I might add, "no matter how much we would like them to be." In contextualizing, she says,

"It's helpful for me, in discerning the meaning of these passages, to turn to the rest of the writer's work. In a letter to the church in Galatia, Paul wrote, 'There is no longer Jew or gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.'"

Again, she gracefully refuses to allow patriarchal voices to violate the text in order to continue to oppress women and girls. She brings the point squarely home with this:

"When women are restricted from the service of God in any capacity, the church is mistakenly allowing an imperfect, male-dominated ancient culture to drive our understanding and practice of Christ's redeeming work..."

Indeed. Here we catch a glimpse again of where she's taking us in that she's showing the utter irrelevance

irrelevance of this mode of thinking. She's leading us by the hand toward something bigger, gently and lovingly telling us to just leave all of that behind for good and step into something greater.

Where Sarah really starts to sing is when she starts talking about the Kingdom of God. This second arc is the real telos underlying much of her work, and it shows. Now, it's not that the rest of the book isn't wonderful, but she really hits her stride here, especially in the latter half of the book, and you can tell it's where she's most at home. She's part preacher, part prophet, and part political revolutionary as she says of the work women (and men) are doing all over to advance the Kingdom of God,

"Can't you see? It's all an act of protest, a snatching back from the darkness, a proclamation of freedom, a revolution of love. And isn't it a miracle!"

She paints a picture with her words of the Kingdom of God that's so beautiful, so radically inclusive and so affirming of its constituents that it's hard to not want to be a part of it. She leaves no question about whether or not patriarchy is something that could be a part of this new Kingdom. She doesn't beg readers to take her word for any of this, but rather she invites them to walk in the fullness of what she already knows to be the truth. It is a testament to both her grace and her authenticity, I think, that she can so plainly lay out a critique of the social system that awards me privilege at her expense, and instead of feeling rebuffed, I feel encouraged that there's something better out there for me to step into as well. "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand," Jesus said. I think what that means is finally starting to sink in. She writes,

"If we only had eyes to see and ears to hear and wits to understand, we would know that the kingdom of God in the sense of holiness, goodness, beauty is as close as breathing and is crying out to be born both within ourselves and within the world; we would know that Kingdom of God is what all of us hunger for above all other things, even when we don't know its name or realize that it's what we're starving to death for."

By the end of the book, when her song about the Kingdom of God reaches its crescendo in an exhortation and an invitation to stand up and take part in this new Kingdom, you can't help but want to get on board. And through it all, she reminds us that there is another way, that clenched fists aren't necessarily the only way we can react to the sort of systemic injustice she's combatting here. Instead, she shows us an alternative paradigm of open arms. Clenched fists are worthless but for striking out, but open arms grieve with those who grieve and comfort those who need comforting. You can slide one of those open arms around the waist of a brother or sister who's falling down and hold them up or you can lock arms in solidarity with your sisters (and brothers) across the world or right there in your hometown. Clenched fists connote condemnation, but open arms on the other hand, that's the stuff of redemption.

"You and me," she says near the end, "we are Kingdom people, an outpost of redemption, engaged in God's mission of reconciliation.

May it be so.

Ariel ? says

I summed up my thoughts pretty well in the updates I made while reading this:
<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Emily says

In *Jesus Feminist*, Sarah Bessey speaks with courage and conviction on a topic near and dear to my heart. Many Christians, and many conservatives, have a knee-jerk revulsion when they hear the dreaded "f-word" feminist, but early on in her book, Bessey declares, "Most of what has passed for a description of feminism is fearmongering misinformation" (something which can also be said, ironically, of Mormonism). She continues to clarify: "It's not necessary to subscribe to all the diverse--and contrary--opinions within feminism to call oneself a feminist." Like, Bessey, I identify as a feminist "precisely because of my life-long commitment to Jesus and his Way."

As Rachel Held Evans does in her book *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*, Ms. Bessey points out that the cultural and societal environment the various writers of the Bible were surrounded by inevitably influenced their writings. For example, there is not a single verse in the Bible that explicitly denounces slavery. Slavery was simply a given during biblical times. However, many of those who wrote about slavery, including Paul, introduced a radically different approach to the institution, encouraging slave-owners to treat slaves fairly and kindly and welcome runaway slaves back without punishment. Of course, that doesn't mean that God approves of slavery, a thought which the vast majority of Christians (and people of all faiths) today would find abhorrent, but that the prophets and apostles worked within the imperfect social structures that were present at their time. A similar process is at work today whenever we read and interpret Scripture, as we are all to some extent products of our time and culture: "Whether we admit it or not, as people of faith, we sift our theology through Scripture, Church history and tradition, our reason, and our own experience."

Bessey describes her growing frustration with what she perceived as a distance between what she believed the gospel demanded of her and what "the churches of my context and tradition" were preaching and focusing. Much of what she writes describes my own struggles over the past several years.

"I struggled with the cultural rhetoric against immigrants, homosexuals, artists, welfare recipients, the poor, non-Americans, and anyone who looked different or lived differently than the expectation. Cultural mores were passing as biblical mandates. The give-me-more-more-more prosperity gospel didn't match up with my growing commitment to contentment and simple living...For the first time in my life, I was reading and learning about the church's mandate to care for the poor. I was reading voraciously about global issues such as clean water, community development, war, human trafficking, economics, disaster relief, and AIDS crisis, unjust systemic evils."

To make matters worse for Bessey, she says, "When I turned to the Church for answers, I did not feel my questions were welcome. This may have been my own pride and willful blindness, but there didn't seem to be room for me as a questioning woman within the system." Stuffing all of her questions and cognitive dissonance in the closet simply didn't work and eventually, the "crammed closet of doubts and questions and hurts" burst open and everything fell apart.

To read the rest of this review, visit Build Enough Bookshelves.

April (The Steadfast Reader) says

Full review here: <http://thesteadfastreader.blogspot.co...>

This book has taught in what order my own philosophies lie, I am a feminist over an atheist. I like to think of myself as a humanist first, so this really shouldn't surprise me.

I think that this is a fantastic book for Christian women. It's written, oddly, by an evangelical Christian, who I *believe* is also a literalist. I didn't find the book to be that outrageous or 'outside the box', but evidently it is. Bessey asserts that she is a feminist and defines a feminist exactly as I would, someone who believes that men and women should share the same legal, political, social, and economic rights.

Gloria Steinem — 'A feminist is anyone who recognizes the equality and full humanity of women and men.'

She asserts that it's as simple as that. And it is! She then takes the framework of her faith and her Bible and put it together with anecdotal evidence on how Jesus made her a feminist. I'll take it! She asks Christian women to leave behind arguing apologetics and feeling angry and upset that there's no 'place at The Table' for them and instead instructs them to love, teach, care, and yes, preach. She is pro-life, I grow tired of seeing feminist on feminist arguments, so I'm not going to engage in it here - abortion is a separate issue from feminism, for me at least.

I'm not entirely sure of her historical Biblical assertions, but this does not surprise me as it is not my Bible. She interprets Paul's words in 1 Cor. 14:34 - 35 (Women be silent...) as a letter to specific women at a specific church in a specific time in history. She then goes to solidify her argument with examples of other women in scripture doing great things. She attacks the notion of "Biblical Womanhood" (and Biblical Manhood, for that matter). She welcomes working mothers, single mothers, and single women into the church and seems to possess an understanding that the idealized version of a Biblical woman that many (not all) Christian evangelicals may possess is not only inaccurate, but unattainable. She calls out the church for doing exactly what secular society is doing to women, that is, setting standards that are unattainable and then beating up women when they fall short. (Writing this, maybe I do see how this book could be considered 'radical'.)

Like I said, if this book will help lead more Christian women towards empowerment in their own way, if it will lead to greater understanding and love between women, if it leads us to understand that OUR WAY of being a woman, wife, and mother is not the ONLY way to do it, I will take it.

The book is written informally and seems to have deeply personal moments in it. Though it wasn't for me, (I knew it wasn't when I picked it up) I do think (hope!) that it has the possibility to open up a lot of minds about what it is to be a feminist.

This review is based on an advance review copy supplied through NetGalley by the publisher

Sarah Hyatt says

There is a lot to like about this book, which made some of my disappointments all the more frustrating.

The good: Sarah Bessey is delivering an important and affirming message. This is a great starting point and readable overview of the importance of women in the church, one which challenges the (often destructive) limiting roles women are usually given.

The disappointing: I've greatly enjoyed following Sarah Bessey's blog over the past year and maybe that's where most of my disappointment stems from. So much of this felt like something I had read before, in particulars, not just in tone. It was a lot of recycled material, and the strongest parts were those I'd already

read on the blog. The tone, too, also became distracting to me - it's a bloggish tone works well online, but in the book gets a bit tiring - addressing the reader directly, referring to children as "tinies", and the generally personal-journallish tone of the book are things that work well in blog form but don't translate as well or as sincerely to print. Often it felt like I was reading an extended blog entry, or, rather, a series of them smooshed together. There was so much going on in the book that it felt disjointed - theology! memoir! blog!

Another small frustration consisted of a couple of uses of "Narnia" imagery without explanation. As someone who has read the books, and read plenty of other Christian books, I get it. And it's possible that I only noticed this as a result of an event that occurred earlier on the day I began reading this book. But for some reason, these unexplained references (specifically, one to Jesus as "Aslan") jumped out at me. Someone unfamiliar with the Narnia books (not to speak of unfamiliar with Christian culture) would have no idea what this meant, and it would have been so easy to add a quick explanation or to explain the reference.

Deb Martin says

The book *Jesus Feminist*, by Sarah Bessey, is sure to grab one's attention. A Canadian mother of 3 with a heart for following Jesus, Sarah Bessey is eager and enthusiastic to tell others what it looks like to be a woman of God. The book begins with a welcoming foreword from blogger Rachel Held Evans followed by a poem entitled "Let Us Be Women Who Love." The content of each subsequent chapter is unified by a proclamation of evangelical egalitarian views followed by stirring romantic prose delivered with a consistent invitation away from mundane prattle into authentic conversation about what it means to be a woman of faith.

Bessey insists her intention in writing this book is to move from heated debate over women's roles in marriage and ministry to a conversation grounded in a simple radical truth: that Jesus values women. The practical purpose of *Jesus Feminist* however, is to engage the most commonly held differences between egalitarians and complementarians through the lens of Bessey's strongly held opinions, with each chapter focusing on a specific aspect of the gender debate. For example, she gives specific attention to women as image bearers and ezer warriors, she provides personal testimony to her role as life-giver, and offers evidence of how her marriage exemplifies mutual submission. She celebrates biblical heroines like Deborah, Priscilla, Lydia, and Junia as examples of women using their God-given gifts in leadership roles. Her hermeneutic is admittedly trajectory, reaching beyond the biblical text to a spirit of "redemptive movement." She is careful to consider the key biblical texts which are controversial in the gender debate, (1 Tim 2 and 1 Cor 14), and she reiterates the egalitarian view that historical context (along with Gal 3:28) disqualifies these passages as normative for today. With a permeating theme of social injustice, the book offers a consistent message: women, in following Jesus, can help release the world from the oppressive hierarchy that resulted from the Fall.

Although Bessey presents these familiar egalitarian views, this is not just another typical book on the topic of women's roles; it provides a unique passion in the delivery of the material that attempts to bring readers beyond the controversy. Her poetic style and strong language leap off the page; the reader can almost hear the rising of Bessey's voice as she reaches the climactic end of each chapter. She makes compelling statements; those who already agree with her views will be moved and inspired.

It is the last chapter, which is the most impressive, in which Bessey challenges her female readers with a great commission. She is on a quest, and wants all of female humanity to join with her. The delivery of her words is powerfully influential.

Yet this book is not for everyone. Those who disagree with Bessey's egalitarian views may be offended by

the (not so) subtle criticism of those outside her camp. It is not always clear who the book is condemning. Is it academic types (those "sitting at the Table"), old-fashioned ministry women (who do crafts and bake), or any woman in general who doesn't "get" Jesus? A serious discussion on the critical concept of authority is notably missing outside the author's denunciation of societal power structures. Also absent is any discussion of the Trinity. For those who can ignore the (not so) carefully disguised angst toward those who according to Bessey "miss the point," there remains minimal intellectual discussion. Readers longing for a fresh, refined, more textually supported voice in this conversation will be quite disappointed.

In addition, there are several inaccuracies in the book which can be easily glossed over by the reader. The implication that eliminating social injustice provides a means for eternal salvation is contrary to the gospel, and the suggestion that no one will be lost goes against the teaching of Scripture. Strikingly, the inference that male and female can only collectively bear the image of God is taken from a blog which portrays Jesus as having breasts. Also faulty is the suggestion that the meaning of 1 Tim 2:11-15 is too obscure to be understood and that there are no scholars who can offer a meaningful interpretation. Some elementary research on this would have proven beneficial.

Most significantly - and most disheartening- is the book's failure to clearly state the gospel even once. Such a definitive and passionate view on how Jesus considers women surely deserves clarification of the nature of the relationship between a woman and her Savior. Yet, as with many writings by post-modern Christians, the book focuses much on God's love, and less on His holiness. There is no mention that women (just like men) are sinners hopelessly alienated from their Creator and without any means of reconciliation except through the atoning blood, suffering, death and resurrection of the God-man Jesus Christ (Rom 3:23-26). For example, chapter ten emphatically pronounces woman as equal, lovely, called, chosen, gifted, valued and worthy. It's disappointing the word redeemed didn't make the list.

Jesus Feminist, with its bright yellow cover and controversial title, will accomplish what it was set out to do, i.e. catch one's attention and begin a conversation about women and Jesus. Readers will meet Sarah Bessey by the bonfire and will ponder the stories she tells; many will be moved, touched, and energized. However the reader must proceed with caution and discernment since the strength of Jesus Feminist lies in its passionate delivery of one woman's experience and feelings, not in its ability to seriously consider deep biblical truth and doctrinal and exegetical issues. This reader was left dissatisfied.

I consider this book well written but the arguments poorly substantiated. As one who holds to a grammatical-historical hermeneutic, and who embraces the biblical concepts of authority, headship, and submission, I encourage like-minded ministry leaders to give careful consideration to the views presented by Sarah Bessey so they can address the potential influence this book may have on the women to whom they minister.

Bethany says

I received an ARC from NetGalley for the purposes of this review.

I am pretty much the target audience for this book in every category: I love Jesus, I am a feminist, and I read Sarah Bessey's blog religiously (ahem). Basically I was headed into the book prepared to love it and give it to all of my Jesus-loving girlfriends.

I think Bessey is a fantastic writer. I enjoy her style and her voice, and particularly appreciate her thoughtfulness and graciousness in approaching difficult subjects. That being said, it was very apparent to me that Jesus Feminist was her first time out in the book world. I felt like it was a collection of blog entries rather than a work with an overarching theme. It seemed disjointed to me.

I was also expecting more talk of feminism because of the title. After reading it, it seems like the title refers to Bessey herself as an adjective rather than to something the reader should be looking to become/learn more about. It was a little misleading but at the same time I understand her choice, particularly from a marketing standpoint.

When I arrived at the final chapter, I had already made up my mind to give this 3 stars on Goodreads. I liked it and found it thought-provoking but felt Bessey's editor could have done a better job of pulling things together. But then I finished the book. And I was weeping. The final chapter is lovely and inspirational and challenging and true and hard. I desperately hope readers of this read all the way to the end because if they fail to finish it, they have done themselves a great disservice. Sarah Bessey's words of commission alone are worth way more than five stars. I tempered my rating for this one because of Bessey's inexperience as a book author, but cannot WAIT to read her next book (whenever that may be) because I have great faith in what she has to say and in her ability to say it well. And I'll keep reading the blog as often as she posts.

So all my Jesus-loving girlfriends will get copies, with Kleenexes tucked in as bookmarks for when they get to the end.

Lauren says

Everyone should read this book. Not because she has anything radically new to add to the conversation (though it may be wonderfully new to the reader) but because of how she says it. With humility and love, she invites the reader to reconsider things we might have never seriously thought about.

Side note: I really wish this book had footnotes instead of endnotes, since they add much to her discussion. As annoying as it is to flip back and forth, it's worth it!

Kari says

Because it seems pertinent: I'm a feminist! Yay!

I would like to tell you that I am a feminist because of Jesus. It's probably true in some ways, but I prefer to say that I became a feminist because of my mother and my aunts and my grandmothers and the way they were Jesus to me. I could also say I am a feminist for my son's future. Because the church where I grew up taught the girls how to put on makeup while the boys were mentored by our pastors. Because my students still insult each other with the phrase "like a girl." Because of income inequality and maternity leave (or lack thereof). I see the world through my experiences as a woman and a Christian and a librarian and all of those things have made me a feminist. There were lots of small things that shaped my realization that Christianity and feminism aren't really at odds, but the thing that finally made me unafraid to claim the title was an essay on Tomato Nation called "Yes, You Are." I am a feminist! You might be, too! And that's a good thing!

So, of course, as a lady who is a Christian and a feminist, a book titled Jesus Feminist intrigued me. I read Sarah Bessey's blog from time to time and on her "about" page she defines herself as "one of those happy-clappy Jesus followers." If you know me at all, you know that I have never been happy-clappy about much of anything, and that her breathless "prophetic" style is a little bit emotionally intense for straightforward old me (not to mention the part where she talks about loving her Vineyard past in all its speaking-in-tongues glory and I get a little panicky). But I knew all of that going in to the book, and I wanted to give it a try anyway.

Jesus Feminist is a little bit about Sarah Bessey's spiritual journey and a little bit about girl power and a little bit about women in the Bible. It's a lot about love – God's love, the love of a mother for her children, and the love of women for each other. And it's a call for women to pursue justice for other women throughout the world. If you are a woman who questions her place in the church, if you need a reminder that you are beloved as a child of God, then Jesus Feminist is a book that will speak to you.

As a casual reader of Bessey's work, I was surprised that so much of the book was already familiar to me. I had read several of the chapters in blog form, so if you are a hard-core fan, I am not sure how much new material you will find in Jesus Feminist. This is important to note because I doubt very seriously that anyone who is strongly opposed to the idea of feminism would pick up a book called Jesus Feminist, and yet a lot of the material seemed to be both from her blog and preaching to the choir.

I had two main problems with Jesus Feminist. First, I would suggest that the book might have worked better as a memoir with her journey to being a "Jesus feminist" woven throughout. It felt disjointed and could have used a stronger framework on which to hold the story.

My second problem with it was that Jesus Feminist didn't match its title. This is not aiming to be a scholarly work, and barely talks about feminism at all except in a women are equal, doncha know kind of way. Bessey's qualifications appear to be that she really loves Jesus and she grew up in churches where men and women are equal. Her husband went to seminary and she read his books and edited his papers but she points to no serious study of women's issues or women's history. Instead, the book is positioned as an impassioned plea to let women use their gifts. In the second half of the book, it does explore Biblical issues regarding women, but my guess is that she would have already lost anyone she was hoping to convince by focusing entirely on her feelings and God's love for everybody at the beginning. While I think there are some interesting points in here about women in the church, I think the book deserved a different title, one that better represented the story inside. Jesus Feminist seems to be a title that intends to shock, and that doesn't pair with the warm tone of Bessey's writing. A better title might have been Abba's Daughter, as Bessey returns again and again to the idea of an Abba Father who loves and gifts all of his children.

Despite Bessey's style being a little bit much for me, I do think that there is an audience for Jesus Feminist. It's not a book for a person who is interested in deeply studying the subject of women in the church, but it would be a good introduction to the topic, especially for women who feel marginalized by the church. I wish I could give it to 16-year-old me, who would have liked to know that she wasn't so alone. There is a place for us, I would say, and this might help you find it.

Crystal Starr Light says

Bullet Review:

The title is HUGELY misleading. This isn't an in-depth scriptural analysis of Jesus and how he was a feminist. There are a few clobber verses trotted out and explained but that is only a couple of chapters.

By far, most of the book is frothy, overly-emotional mumbo-jumbo hoopla about how women pursue social causes (duh), how awesome that is (double duh), and the author's personal history. This is great and all, but this isn't about how Jesus was a feminist; in fact, I have NO CLUE what being a feminist even MEANS to Bessey.

Also, I found it odd how many times Bessey referenced Rachel Held Evans, fellow Christian feminist and author who ALSO happens to provide the foreword in this book. Back scratching???

Also, it's CHILDREN NOT TINIES. It's NOT EFFING CUTE, it's STUPID.

Very disappointing, as it was not what I expected at all. I'm not a fluffy, touchy-feely emotional girl, I want FACTS and FIGURES. I'm sure others needing a morale boost or a pick-me-up will live it, but not this girl.

Full Review:

What do you want when you read "Jesus Feminist"? Do you want a scholarly discourse about feminism, biblical theory, and gender roles? Or would you like to read emotional "pick me up" stories about how awesome women are doing awesome things?

Personally, I prefer the former. I know that many people think women are overly emotional beings, addicted to soap operas, Chicken Soup for the Soul, being emotional around their periods, and Lifetime movies, but I am proof positive that women aren't all the same (basically things that this book touches on, but doesn't really delve deep into). When I read a nonfiction book titled "Jesus Feminist" with "Through a thoughtful review of biblical teaching and church practices" as a descriptor, I thought I was getting this:

Instead I got this:

I fear I must say something really quick, or people might get offended or get the wrong impression. There is NOTHING WRONG with a personal memoir about how awesome Jesus is, how awesome women are and the wonderful things that many women do. And there are LOADS of women out there that want/need to read books like this, whether to get them motivated or to affirm what they already believe.

I am not that woman. When I saw "Jesus Feminist", I wanted to read about how the modern evangelical interpretation was too stringent and to examine how it was meant to read for the intended audience. And, admittedly, Bessey does do this for a couple of the common "clobber" verses - the ones about wives being silent in church and wives submitting to husbands.

But Bessey spends a LOT of time talking about her own path to feminism and then branches into the many ways women are doing lots of wonderful things in the world. This is great, don't get me wrong, but it wasn't what I wanted/expected from this book. It wasn't how I interpreted the title.

There were other, little things that bugged me. Things like calling your children "tinies". (It's not cute, it's ridiculous.) Things like using Rachel Held Evans as a reference AND having her write your foreward. (Although the reference section is pretty good, some of it felt a bit off to me.) In fact, much of the tone of the book is hinged on tweaking your emotional sensors - something I definitely dislike in a book. I don't like books that write things just to make you cry, and this is definitely one of those books.

So, back to my first question: what do you want to read when you read "Jesus Feminist"? Do you want a methodical nonfiction book, one that will define what feminism is, the verses, how modern scholars interpret these verses, maybe even look into how Jesus acted like a feminist back in his day? If so, you'll find a few chapters, but most of the book will be a disappointment (like to me) or just boring. But if instead, you want a casual talk about how Christians can be this thing called feminist and be varied and different and influential, then this is right up your alley.

Susan says

I had high hopes for this book. I wanted to like it. Even though I knew up front that there would probably be areas of disagreement, I enjoy reading differing viewpoints, because they challenge me to think.

But Jesus Feminist was a disappointment on several levels.

First--The writing style was off-putting. It felt like a bunch of blog posts squished together, or maybe just one long blog post. Since the author is a blogger, this isn't surprising. But styles that work well for blogs don't always (usually) transfer well to a book. Books require more in-depth analysis, and a flow of thought that you can follow throughout the book. Jesus Feminist felt disjointed, with a chapter on theology, then a chapter on personal experience, then a story about social justice...it just didn't follow a logical thought progression from beginning to end.

Second-- The tone was patronizing. Instead of grappling with the differing opinions about the topics she addressed, she would say things like "The Table [is] where coalitions and councils metaphorically sit in swivel chairs to discuss who is in and who is out, who is right...and who is wrong...I don't worry about the Table much anymore...Someday--I really believe this--we will throw our arms around the people of the Table as they break up the burnished oak. We'll be there to help them heave it out the window, smashing every glass ceiling...and then we'll dance around those old arguments together, laughing. "

So, instead of actually engaging the points made by people who oppose her, she basically says, don't worry about them, someday they'll come around and then we'll all laugh at what they used to believe.

In one sense, she's right. One day, God will make all things clear and we won't fight over petty differences because we'll be in his presence. But until then, it's important that we grapple with the ideas in Scripture, particularly the ones that don't seem to fit our worldview or system. How can Bessey hope to win people to her perspective if she basically tells them their concerns are ridiculous and aren't worth her time?

Even if I did subscribe to her feminist viewpoint, the writing still seems to speak down to the reader. We women aren't just blobs of emotion. We also have brains and we want to engage them. But Bessey's writing was full of emotionalism--it's a style you find on many blogs, but it doesn't work well in a book. The entire last chapter is what Bessey calls a "commissioning." "I commission you," says Bessey, to do whatever you believe you should do with no guilt and with lots of peace. "Now I send you out." Go change the world. But what grounds does the author have for this commissioning? She has no authority over her reader, and Christ has already commissioned us. We don't need anyone else's blessing to be wives and mothers and teachers and whatever else God has called us to be. This chapter, I believe, is meant to eliminate guilt women might be facing for doing things they have previously been told women are not allowed to do--like preaching. Bessey is giving them her stamp of approval. But again, who is Bessey to make such a commission, especially when she has failed to engage the disputed texts in any kind of scholarly way?

Third--Her theology was tenuous. "I've learned to stop caring about the big dustups between complementarians and egalitarians," says Bessey. Instead, she wants her readers to understand that Jesus loves all of us--even women. But it's unfair to paint complementarians as a bunch of arrogant men sitting at a table who won't let women have a say and who think the female sex should be relegated to the kitchen or the craft table. That's simply not true. But it's the picture Bessey paints.

She spends a lot of time talking about all the wonderful things women have done--the charity work, the missions, the rescuing. And I found myself agreeing with her a lot--except where she talked about women being pastors. See, the complementarian viewpoint isn't one which says women are second class citizens who aren't gifted by God to do extraordinary things. It simply says they have different roles, based on

explicit passages of Scripture. Bessey attempts to explain these passages of Scripture away using recycled arguments from Rachel Held Evans' book "A Year of Biblical Womanhood." In fact, she quotes Evans extensively throughout the book, which got a trifle annoying too. I found the arguments unconvincing, requiring a view of Scripture which says portions of the Bible that don't fit our cultural schematic can be disregarded. If you want a better discussion of this viewpoint, read Evans' book. I read it, and while I disagree with Evans, I found her style much more thought-provoking.

Indeed, Bessey herself says, "I hold almost all of it loosely in my hand now, all of it but this: the nature, identity, soul, action, and character of God is love--lovelovelovelovelovelovelove." "It" being former opinions about what God is like or should be like.

This is disturbing to me. God is many things besides love--he is holy, just, faithful, merciful, gracious, jealous, righteous--name your attribute. And he is all of these things completely. None outshines any other. But saying that God is love and love alone only allows us to throw out parts of the Bible that don't seem loving instead of trying to understand them.

This book turned out to be so much preaching to the choir--people already leaning toward a feminist interpretation of Scripture might cry "Amen, sister!" (Although, from reading other reviews, it seems that serious feminists didn't find this book compelling or helpful either.) But for someone who really wants a thoughtful discussion about a disputed topic, this book failed on every level. It's more of a memoir about Bessey's personal journey, but without enough details to make it engaging.

This book purports to be "An invitation to revisit the Bible's view of women: Exploring God's radical notion that women are people, too." This statement sort of sums up one of the major problems I had with the book--Bessey's assumption that being complementarian means you think women are less important or of less value than men. This accusation is unfair, just as it would be unfair to say that all egalitarians are power-hungry women who just want to rule over men. Neither caricature is true, and we can't have honest discussions that allow us to discover what God's Word actually says until we're willing to quit drawing lines in the sand and lobbing grenades at everybody in the other camp.

Ed Cyzewski says

Sarah Bessey boldly writes about the message of Jesus and its intersections with feminism while keeping her arms open and creating space for all.

I've followed Sarah's blog for years now. I knew that something like this book was in the works, and even I am still surprised at how she managed to take a strong and decisive line about the importance of equality and dignity for women in the message of Jesus without aiming shots at potential critics or opponents.

Sarah opens the book with a metaphor of a bonfire by the shore that is outside the "table" that professors, denominational leaders, and pastors have set up that has long been closed to women in many Christian circles. She returns to the bonfire often, advocating for the creation of a new space for the worn out women in ministry debates and gender role arguments.

Throughout the book Sarah shares glimpses of her own story that adds a layer of context and warmth to her writing. Although the first half of the book starts a little slow with some explanations about key passages of scripture and their relationship to the equality of women, she kicks into full on prophet in the latter half of the book. By sharing concrete stories about a new kind of "church lady" and more aspirational thoughts about what it could mean to be a "church lady," she manages to keep her tone both forceful and gentle,

inspiring without being overbearing.

I suspect that more concrete readers who want the plain facts will not enjoy this book as much as those who crave writing that is more lyrical, emotive, and metaphorical. I have not read a book quite like it, and to that end, I can see some readers clutching it to their hearts when finished reading it, while I can see others arching their eyebrows in confusion. I see that as a strength. This is a unique book that will speak to many readers like no other book has. We have our concrete books about Jesus and feminism. Why not turn a charismatic poet loose on them?

I also suspect that those well acquainted with feminism will come away from this book with some hard questions, such as whether we really can have a bonfire on the shore and leave well enough alone with "the table" where women aren't welcome. We take for granted many rights for women that were fought for when women didn't have a place at the table. For those committed to the love and equality of Christ, we need to talk more about what it could look like to gather in unity under Christ while also addressing the real injustices at "the tables" in our world. Sarah wrote about some of these topics metaphorically, so I may have missed her concrete conclusions at some key points.

This book will be especially well received by Christian readers who like the idea of equality for women but have heard primarily negative things about feminism from their churches. It provides a way forward for those who have been hesitant to call themselves feminists.

Most importantly, this book creates room for all of us to pursue equality in the company of Christ. That is perhaps the last thing many will expect from a book called Jesus Feminist, and the delight of that surprise is what makes it a worthwhile read.

I received a preview copy of this book from the publisher.

Dorothy says

This is heavy on the Jesus, light on the feminist.

This is not really the book I thought it would be, and I don't think the back blurb does it justice. It does not delve nearly as deep as I thought it would into biblical reasons for feminism, and is very, VERY heavy on evangelical Christian phrases. It is absolutely written for a devout, evangelical Christian crowd. If those adjectives don't describe you, this book won't hit home.

Bessey's writing style is overwrought, to be frank. Certain parts are beautifully crafted, to be sure, but this book is page after page of verbose, ornately-phrased prose. Like fudge, Bessey's writing is best enjoyed one tiny bite at a time.

That being said, if you're in the target demographic for this book, it might be just what you're looking for - a brief explanation of how one woman's faith and feminism mesh. If you're a not-very-devout Christian feminist, or a secular feminist curious about Christian Feminism, you won't find what you're looking for here.

I wish Bessey had explained a little more about how she reconciles her Christianity and Feminism. It felt like she was just about to... and then the book changed tack and she started talking about orphanages in Haiti. It felt like she wrote two short, tangentially-related pieces and joined them together to make a book.

I also wish Bessey had delved into feminism and feminist theory itself. It never felt like she had any kind of grasp on what secular feminists actually think. Which is fine, I suppose, but it feels a little misleading to title your book "Jesus Feminist" and never really think about what feminism is. It's like writing a book on a political ideology based solely on your lay understanding of that ideology, without researching what its proponents believe about it.

I had such high hopes for this book, and it just fell a little flat for me. There absolutely were shining moments (especially chapters one, two, and four), but not enough to salvage the book as a whole.
