

The background of the entire page is a dense, shimmering red sequin texture. The sequins are small, circular, and highly reflective, creating a sparkling effect against the dark red base color.

# ruby slippers

**reading group guide**

## Introduction: Femininity Beyond Fairy Tales

1. When you hear the word “femininity,” what does it mean to you? What does it mean to be feminine? Where did you learn these things?
2. How does secular culture define femininity? How is it similar to and different from the Christian culture’s definition of femininity?
3. On page 23, Jonalyn explains that she is an essentialist about femininity that there are characteristics women share across time, place and culture. For more, flip to page 194 and glance at endnotes 1 and 10. Do you think you are an essentialist about femininity?
4. What do you like about being a woman?
5. What bothers you about being a woman?
6. Which corsets are you wearing? What additional roles do you play?
7. Write out *The Prayer of Identity*, stripping away the roles you play in order to remember what is at the core of your identity.

## 1: Materialism for Women

1. Who taught you that your body matters so much?
2. What magazines, shows are instructing you today about body care? What lessons about body image have you learned from culture? What are the lessons our daughters and sons are learning about what it means to be a woman?
3. Take inventory today on how many times you look in the reflective glass (mirrors, windows, storefronts). Could you go a day without looking in the mirror? Why or why not?
4. Do you find yourself regularly assessing other women's looks? Comparing your body to theirs? Do you ever turn this critical gaze on yourself?
5. Fast from mirrors/reflective surfaces/makeup for one day with your other girl friends for the purpose of learning to be less self-conscious of your body. Afterwards ask yourself these questions.
  - What did I learn about myself?
  - What was hard about this fast?
  - How did it change my perception of myself?
  - How did it change my perception of other women?
  - Would you agree with what this woman said, "When the mirrors weren't distracting me, I got to look into the mirror of my soul"?
6. How do you respond to the idea that God accepts "dirty knees, broken and corseted bodies, smudged mascara, overweight and underweight women"?
7. Jonalyn received a powerful, positive early catechism about her true worth from her father. Reflect on the early catechisms (both positive and negative) about beauty and self-worth you received. Share one that made a difference in your life.

## Chapter 2: Uncorking the Soul

1. What does it mean to be made in the image of God? How are you like God?
2. Draw a picture of a coat rack with five hooks. Label each hook with one of the five capacities (for more see page 196, endnote 25). List examples of each capacity from your life.
3. Attend to your mind. What are some beliefs you hold right now about your femininity? About your body? About your value in the church?
4. Attend to your feelings. What are your emotions when you hear: “role,” “home maker,” “helper,” and “femininity”?
5. The Bible uses “spirit” to mean many things, read page 197 endnotes 36 and 37. One use of “spirit” is our introspective faculty. Take time to introspect, using these verses as guides.
  - Read Psalm 4:3-4. Sit in the silence for 1 minute, what bubbles up within you?
  - Read Psalm 23 and ask God to help you with the truth, “He restores my soul.” What capacity of your soul most needs restoration?
6. Scripture uses “heart,” “soul,” and “spirit” interchangeably to mean mind, feelings, desire, will, spirit. Read Mark 7:21-23; 2 Chronicles 15:15; Jeremiah 29:13; and Psalm 16:7–9 and mine out which capacities (some? all?) of the soul are being discussed.
7. Read page 198 endnote 41. Think about times you’ve devalued a woman’s soul. Have you ever treated another person as a mere body? Have you experienced this in your own life? Watch the movie *Mean Girls* paying attention to the way the teens label one another.

## Chapter 3: The Same Planet

1. The word “equality” can make women feel they must be exactly like men to be as valuable as men. Do you believe you can be equal without being identical? What makes men and women equally valuable?
2. Adam was made first. Does that bother you? Does it sound like man was made “ahead of” Eve, and somehow won first place? Have you ever believed that “first” means “better”?
3. Do you like the word “helper”? What does it make you think about? How does the description of God being *ezer* change your thoughts about “helper”?
4. See Genesis 49:25; Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; 1 Samuel 7:12; and Psalms 20:2; 33:20. What characteristics does an *ezer* need to have? Do you want to grow your soul into becoming an *ezer*? Why or why not?
5. How do you feel when you hear a joke about gender stereotypes? Do you laugh? Why or why not?
6. What about being feminine makes you uncomfortable? As one professor told me, “Few have grasped the meaning of their gender unless they have wrestled with it.”
7. How have you propagated exaggerated differences between men and women? What do you do with the exceptions to your rule?
8. Think about what you uniquely contribute to your male friends. Think through and discuss a list of character qualities that you consider to be unique strengths of women.
9. Do you think the fall changed the soul of woman? Was her body different? Was her soul different? How?

## Chapter 4: Leaving Eden

1. What do you think Eve's soul was like before the fall? Try to describe her whole and healthy capacities: mind (what did she think about? what were her beliefs?), will (how free was she?), feelings (how did the garden, her relationship with God, her relationship with Adam make her feel?), spirit (how self-aware and introspective was she?), and desire (what was she drawn towards?)
2. How do you think God's judgment changed Eve's body?
3. How do you think God's judgment changed Eve's soul? Be specific.
4. Do you need to discard any frivolous, flimsy, or flawed ideas of femininity? What ideas are cramping your soul?
5. Read pages 201-202 endnote 25. What is wrong with Augustine's understanding of women? How does Genesis 1: 27 clash with Augustine's words?
6. What areas of your soul are broken and need redemption? Think of each soul capacity: mind, will, feelings, spirit, and desire.
7. Does natural femininity always feel natural?
8. Read page 202 endnote 31 and talk about the unique problems intersexed people live with. How should we, as followers of Jesus, love them?
9. In preparation for the next chapter: Is weakness different from vulnerability? Can vulnerability be good? How?

## Chapter 5: A Natural Woman

1. How is a family resemblance list different from most lists you've found for femininity?
2. Are there any resemblances you think should be added to this list?
3. Which resemblances are natural to you? How do you know?
4. Have you always embraced your body's uniqueness?
  - When did the bad relationship with your body begin?
  - Write out a letter apologizing to your body expressing your amazement and gratitude for what this body from God has done for you.
5. Are you tempted to think that if you don't own all resemblances, you are not fully feminine? What does that say about you? What does that say about the way you will judge the women who have fewer resemblances than you?
6. Do you value sensitivity?
7. What does your current emotional filing system look like? Describe or sketch it.
8. How are cultivation and nurturing similar and different?

9. Have you felt silenced in one resemblance? Is something within your soul clamoring to be let out?
  
10. Read Job 19:25–26. Do you think your femininity is something about you that you keep, even when your body is gone? In other words, do you think you will interact with God in heaven as a woman, or as an androgynous soul?
  
11. Read Luke 10:34–38. Does Jesus mean our resurrected bodies will have no gender, or that we will no longer participate in the exclusive institution of marriage?
  
12. Men's souls are unique as well. Read page 203 endnote 5 and compare this list with the family resemblances for women. How might men and women's souls compliment each other?
  
13. In preparation for the next chapter:
  - List some similarities between women you know and God
  
  - Look up Isaiah 49:15–16; 66:12–13; and Matthew 23:37 and compare God's desires to your own. What does this tell you about God's soul?

## Chapter 6: Finding the Feminine in the Sacred

1. Does it seem strange, inappropriate, or degrading for God to be feminine?
2. What beliefs do you have about God's masculinity?
3. Read page 210 endnote 22. How did Altson's discovery of a gender-neutral Bible (like *Today's New International Version*) transform her understanding of God? How does her poem renew your understanding of God?
4. How did you feel when you read "She writhed in pain for me"?
5. How have you experienced God's interdependence, sensitive awareness, or cultivation in your life?
6. Read Psalm 131. What similarities do you find between God and mothers?
7. Explain how the identity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit emerges from their intimacy. How is this like many women?
8. Pray for a new perspective, "Lord, teach me the value you have for my femininity. I want to see myself as you see me. I want to know the shapes you have carved into my soul, the things in me that show you better on earth. Are there places in me I have hidden? Is there something good in me that I am embarrassed to be? Make me confident to be more of you on earth."

## Chapter 7: Frailty, Thy Name Is Woman

1. How have you used your feminine strengths for hurt instead of healing?
2. If you are sensitively aware, how have you wounded another with this ability?
3. If you are interdependent, how have you abused this ability?
4. With whom are you unhealthily enmeshed?
5. Describe women you disrespect. How are you like them?
6. Are you prejudiced against women? If so, which types of women?
7. Do you prefer men to women? Why might this indicate your discomfort with your femininity?
8. Are there women you admire? Describe them
9. Read page 212 endnote 1. How have you seen men misuse their soul's strengths?

## Chapter 8: Far As the Curse Is Found

1. What are the different ways Eve was fit for Eden?
2. The chapter opens with a quote from Simone de Beauvoir, French existentialist philosopher and lover of Jean Paul Sartre. Though Beauvoir was not a Christian, she concedes that “Christianity . . . endowed the human female with a soul.” How have you seen Christianity help women?
3. How have you seen Christianity hurt women?
4. Do you feel “at home” in the church body? If so, what has created feelings of being “at home?” If not, what has created feelings of “homelessness”?
5. Read Gen 3:16. How have you understood the judgment on women before this chapter?
6. Jesus went against the dominant culture in his interaction and support of women. Think of two biblical examples of Jesus interacting with women. How are the two stories similar? How are they different? (Here are some examples to choose from: Woman at the well, John 4:7-30; Martha and Mary, Luke 10:38-42; Women financial supporters, Luke 8:1-3; Mary at the tomb, John 20: 1-18; Woman with hemorrhage, Mark 5:24-34).
6. How does Christ want to help lift the judgment of Eden off you today? Be specific.

7. Jonalyn writes that “Submission lets me be God to others.” What do you think that means? Did Jesus model submission when He was here on earth? How?
8. Is this concept of submission a difficult one for you? If so, why? Is the biblical picture of submission different from the world’s picture?
9. When and how have you enforced God’s judgment on other women? Be specific.
10. If Jesus were offering you a new pair of ruby slippers, customized for your soul, where would these slippers allow you to walk? What would these slippers allow you to do?