

Ezer Kenegdo

A DEEPER LOOK AT WHAT
IT MEANS FOR A WOMAN
TO BE A 'HELP MEET'

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*This book is dedicated to my sisters, Nita, Susie,
and Kari, who have shown me what it means to be
women of noble character and true ezer kenegdos.*

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Introduction

I FIDGETED IN MY CHAIR, moving my left hand carefully to keep it hidden from view. My grandma was visiting, and as we chatted over breakfast, I felt the weight of my engagement ring on my finger. It had only been there a few days—not enough for me to be accustomed to it yet. My grandma didn't know, and I was in no hurry to tell her.

My mom finally broached the subject.

“Did Maria tell you she got engaged?”

I felt my grandma's eyes drill down on me. Somewhat sheepishly, I lifted my hand onto the table, displaying the beautiful diamond on my finger.

For a moment, my grandma was silent. Then she said, “So you sold yourself, did ya?”

I understood my grandma's response; hers had been an abusive marriage. Many times, she had returned to her husband, only to leave again. The trauma of those years never left her, and carried on into the lives of her children. Our family was dysfunctional at best. It still carried the secrets, shame and scars of a broken generation.

Growing up in an Old Colony Mennonite family, you would be forgiven for assuming we led peaceful, quiet and holy lives, but the truth was far darker. As a young girl, I didn't understand the cultural and emotional undercurrents that permeated our daily life; I only knew that I didn't want to get married. Oh, don't misunderstand me—I wanted to be loved; I just didn't want to be a slave.

My view of marriage was shaped by my Mennonite aunts who lived in a constant cycle of babies, diapers, dishes. Wash, rinse, and repeat. Their life was one of quiet obedience and submission while serving coffee at the snap of a finger. I was not interested in being such a doormat for any man, no matter how wonderful he may or may not be. So, I resolved to never get married, or at least, *never* marry a Mennonite man!

But God had other plans for me. After finishing my music degree, I set off to the jungles for a year-long adventure teaching at a small Mennonite school in Central America. There I met Jim, and quickly realized I was going to cross off the first ‘*Never*’ on my ‘*Never-to-do list*’. Jim grew up in a kinder, more gentle Mennonite home, which challenged my perception about Mennonite men, so when he asked me to marry him, I didn’t hesitate.

I was at peace with my decision, but I dreaded having to tell Grandma.



Jim and I soon settled into life as newlyweds, but I thought of Grandma’s words often. It grieved me to think of what she had endured in her marriage, and the bitterness it had caused. It pained me to think she had faced such brokenness and abuse, never experiencing a healthy or whole relationship as God intended.

I enjoyed my life with my new husband but I struggled to understand my position as his wife. I had read in Genesis 2:18 that God created Eve to be a ‘help meet’ for Adam but I had no idea what that meant. I only knew the struggle of being too assertive or too passive, too opinionated or too demure—it seemed I could never get the balance right!

The message I had absorbed from my childhood was that women were merely side characters in a movie which centered on the needs and desires of men. To reject this role was to place yourself in dangerous territory where angry women roamed, seeking the authority and power

that God had exclusively set aside for men. I often felt I only had two choices: remain a doormat, or become a raging feminist. Stay sweet, or be a ‘Jezebel’.

Were these my only options? Surely, there was an alternative! I wrestled with these extremes for years, trying to find a middle ground where I could respect my husband while being free to voice my thoughts and use my giftings.

Thankfully, my husband was much more relaxed about our gender roles, both in our home and within our church community. He valued my opinion more than I expected, and appreciated my input—a new and foreign experience for me. As a young couple, we ran a Bible study for the youth in our church. Even though I was a teacher, I assumed Jim would lead the Bible lessons—after all, women should be submissive, right? The problem was, every time Jim prepared to lead the lesson, he froze. He struggled with studying, and found leading stressful. He preferred serving coffee to the young people while having meaningful talks with them. I, however, loved teaching! I couldn’t wait to sink my teeth into a text and create an engaging lesson.

For the longest time, we were conflicted about how to proceed. Eventually, as we prayed about it, Jim and I felt at peace to lean into the obvious areas of our gifting. From then on, I taught while he shepherded. We made a great, cohesive team. This experience was the beginning of learning to work together in our individual giftings for the benefit of each other, not worrying about whether they fit into our cultural ‘norms’. I was me. Jim was Jim. And together, we accomplished a lot.

Twenty years later, we are more comfortable than ever with the different roles we continue to play in our marriage, our parenting, our church, and our community. I am the organizer, the planner, the dreamer. Jim brings the fun, the crazy, and the tools—just in case I break anything.

For many years, I had no words to describe the way in which Jim and I related to each other. We were simply partners, working together. Then one day, a question posed on social media caught my attention and opened the door to a new understanding.

“What is an *Ezer Kenegdo*?”

That was all it took for me to dive into this subject. I’m not sure anything excites me more than digging into God’s Word to explore God’s design and intention for His people, including women. Understanding what God had in mind for me . . . and for you . . . brings richness and meaning into our lives and allows us to step into the identity and calling He has for us.

So, what is an ‘Ezer Kenegdo’?

Well, that my friend, is what we want to explore. I pray it will change your life the way it changed mine.