

Bible Beater/Bra Burner

Jennifer L. Freitag

Bible Beater/Bra Burner explores the Christian and feminist identities of fifteen women in eastern Iowa. This artistic interpretation of women's perspectives includes those on faith, motherhood, relationships, politics, homosexuality, choice and freedom within and without the church institution. Bible Beater/Bra Burner asks probing questions about what it means for a woman to claim – or reject – a Christian, feminist, or Christian-feminist identity through music, poetry and creative theatre techniques.

Cast of Characters:

Voice 1, Ayanna
Voice 2, Dianne
Voice 3, Deirdre
Voice 4, Elizabeth
Voice 5, Jade
Voice 6, Janice
Voice 7, Jessica
Voice 8, Libby
Voice 9, Melissa
Voices A-E

Jennifer L. Freitag is a violence prevention/crisis services coordinator and adjunct women's studies instructor at the University of Central Missouri. In 2006, she developed "The Current" peer theatre program at the University of Central Missouri in which students promote dialogue about issues related to gender violence through Theatre of the Oppressed and bystander intervention techniques. She is a poet, musician, performer and activist. In Fall 2008 she begins a doctoral program in performance studies in the Department of Communication at Southern Illinois University.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

Spoken as a chorus of overlapping voices:

VOICE 3: Dear Janice

VOICE 8: Jessica

VOICE 7: Jade

VOICE 3: You are invited to participate

VOICE 8: You are invited to participate

VOICE 3: In a unique research project about your experiences as a woman

VOICE 7: About women who identify as both Christian and feminist.

VOICE 3: Your identity will be kept confidential

VOICE 8: Participation is completely voluntary

VOICE 7: Risks to participation are minimal

VOICE 3: To be fully aware of the nature and extent of your participation

VOICE 8: By interviewing women with multiple perspectives on this topic

VOICES 8 & 9: We will gain a greater understanding

VOICE 7: Christian and feminist identity

VOICE 3: Greater understanding of how these identities work for and against each other

VOICE 7: You are invited to participate

VOICE 8: You are invited to participate

VOICE 3: Sincerely, Jennifer L. Freitag.

ALL: I want to understand the experiences of women who identify as both Christian and feminist.

VOICE 1: How do women negotiate the relationship between Christianity and feminism in their daily lives?

VOICE 9 & 2: What are the struggles these women face?

VOICES 5-8: I want to understand

VOICES 1-4: I want to understand

VOICE 6: I do identify myself as both a Christian and a feminist and I don't find any conflict in that.

Others pause and react with surprise and confusion to VOICE 6.

ALL (except VOICE 6): I want to understand.

VOICE 5: We are volcanoes.

VOICE 9: When we women offer our experiences as our truth, all the maps change.

VOICE 4: There are new mountains.

VOICE 7: That's what I want – to hear you erupting. You Mount St. Helenses who don't know the power in you – I want to hear you¹.

VOICE 1: To hear you

VOICE 8: To hear you

ALL: If we don't tell our truth, who will?

A pause, and then...

VOICE 5: I am a researcher

VOICE 4: A college professor

VOICE 3: Instructor

VOICE 1: Graduate student

VOICE 2: A pastor

VOICE 7: Missionary

VOICE 6: A social worker

VOICE 9: Educated

VOICE 7: A working mother

VOICE 3: Catholic Christian

VOICE 4: Struggling

VOICE 2: Divorced

VOICE 8: White

VOICE 5: Hispanic

VOICE 7: A single mother

VOICE 6: A worship leader

VOICE 1: A volunteer

VOICE 2: Non-denominational

VOICE 7: Reborn

VOICE 8: Jewish

VOICE 9: Married

VOICE 6: A church staff member

VOICE 5: Not a Christian

¹ Le Guin, U. (1989). *Dancing at the Edge of the World*. New York: Harper & Row. Pages 159-60.

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VOICE 7: Cosmetologist
VOICE 1: African-American
VOICE 4: Rejected
VOICE 9: Involved in an international college ministry
VOICE 6: Have started programs and services in my community
VOICE 8: Reach out to other women
VOICE 9: Not a feminist
VOICE 3: Work at a state university
VOICE 2: Work with minorities in the school system
VOICE 4: Not exactly a Christian...yet.
VOICE 7: A Christian feminist.
VOICE 1: A Feminist Christian?

SCENE 2

SLIDE: *Inside of church*

*The women have clothed themselves with colored scarves,
signifying themselves as “in role” as their named character.
Throughout the show, they use the pieces to make this distinction.
VOICE 6 leads a call and response while facing the women.*

VOICE 6: We believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

All: We believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

VOICE 6: He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

All: He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

VOICE 6: He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.

All: He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

VOICE 6: He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

All: We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

VOICE 6: You may be seated.

*The women sit. **VOICE 6** joins them.
They begin conversing with one another.*

MELISSA: Basically the core of my belief is Jesus Christ as Savior...that we as humans are sinful and we need that savior to reconcile us to God. I think it's also living for something that is bigger than yourself, and doing so with purpose instead of just being a wandering soul, you know?

DIANNE: It's something that has sustained me over my lifetime in very difficult times. I always felt that no matter what I struggled with in life that it was there for me providing sustenance and a feeling of security.

DEIRDRE: It means service to me. Service to the wider community, not just my immediate church. It means teaching my kids the right way to be, the right way to act.

JESSICA & LIBBY: Jesus is Christ and Lord and Savior of my life.

JANICE: It's being who I claim to be...being active in the community, loving others, advocating for fairness and equality for women and working to ensure that in all aspects of life. For me the model of life that Jesus led is one I think is worthy of emulation. I believe that God created the world. I believe in God's sustaining power and presence throughout history.

MELISSA: It also means living a life of example, although I'm not always the best example from time to time. I think it's being open and accepting to people that are different from you and really living my life according to the rules that Christ shared.

ELIZABETH: I guess it is letting God have control of your life...which I'm not sure I'm ready for.

JANICE: ...active involvement in church activities. It impacts decisions I make about my life, evident in bible study and devotional activities.

DIANNE: I have confessed that Jesus is Christ and Lord and Savior of my life. It means I have a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with the people around me that includes caring, compassion and outreach.

JADE & AYANNA: I'm not really sure what it means.

DIANNE: Being a Christian means being a follower of Jesus and actually living a life similar to what he did, which was about self-sacrifice...about putting the other person first over myself.

JESSICA: He's my Redeemer, my Salvation, my Grace, my Love, and my peace.

JESSICA stands to begin monologue. She walks to a chair and sits down.

JESSICA: Basically, I became a Christian when I was five years old, which to me means I asked Jesus to be everything to me in my life – you know – I can say, “Jesus came into my heart” or the other cliché things that Christians say but really what that means to me is at that point I realized that my life was not my own, that there was a higher power and that to me was Jesus Christ. And even at five I realized I needed him. And that’s how I started my walk with him, my life with him. I grew up in a very poor, conservative Christian family that was pretty dysfunctional, but we did go to church and I heard tons of truth there, truth being that there is a God, he loves you, you need him, he created you to need him because he wants to help you through life and life is about knowing him and becoming more like him. Even at a very young age I understood this. And so I had this truth in me and then if you could imagine facing sexual abuse at that time – it wasn’t anyone in my family that was abusing me but my mom didn’t watch me very well. I didn’t tell my parents, but I went to the Lord and began a very real relationship with him at that point...at five, I remember hearing his voice and I remember knowing he was with me.

*The other women have kneeled down, as if beside their beds,
their backs to the audience.*

ALL (except JESSICA): Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen.

SCENE 3

AYANNA, DIANNE, JADE & JESSICA are seated in different areas on stage, as if being interviewed.

AYANNA: Growing up, baptized and raised in the church, I had to go to church all the time...it was a Baptist African Methodist Episcopal church. Baptist but Methodist, which means we would sing, but you don’t sing stereotypically how you see black people sing in the movies. You sing like how you see white people sing. And you’re supposed to be very dignified. Now every now then, somebody breaks out, does the other thing, but that’s kinda frowned upon, you know, like what are you doing? So that’s the church I was raised in until I was about thirteen or fourteen.

DIANNE: Well I was raised in the Christian Church Disciples of Christ. I was a sixth grader when I was baptized.

JADE: I myself was raised a Jehovah’s Witness. Do you know anything about that religion? Well...it’s basically a cult. It’s very restricting in the type of activities you can do that are the norm in society – you know, not

celebrating Christmas, birthday parties, Halloween, things like that. Even having friends outside that religion is frowned upon. And going to college was frowned upon. It was a very patriarchal religion and very authoritative. It was very easy to see that men were in charge and women followed.

AYANNA: My mom would not go to church...she was an alcoholic who was raised in the church herself but thought it was too late for her, meaning that she knew it was too late for her to change her life around, become a better person, a better Christian. She knew she was never going to change but felt the responsibility to put us in an environment aside from our living environment where we had the choice to develop faith.

JESSICA: My mom did not work outside the home, although she was educated as a nurse, but when she started having children she stayed home with us, and this always frustrated me and I would say things about it all the time. On one hand we had our mom at home with us, but then on the other hand I didn't see my dad as often as I would have liked because he worked two jobs. So it was a trade-off that I didn't quite understand and I would talk to them about that...asked my mom to please get a job because I rarely saw my dad and just wanted us all to come together at night and just be a family. I guess as a young girl I was very hungry for my dad's attention, especially after what I had gone through. So I always said I'm gonna grow up, and I'm gonna make money and I'm gonna be independent and I'm gonna choose a job that is totally flexible so that I can be a mother and set my own schedule.

AYANNA: So we were raised in this church, and I was just in love with my pastor and the people there – just a real sense of family and encouragement.

DIANNE: At some point I decided that if I was going to be a Christian, I wanted to learn what it was about. So I spent about six months in the old ladies' Sunday school class. I mean, all those ladies had to be in their late seventies and eighties. But what remarkable faith and how clearly they could speak to the faith. And it was really a phenomenal experience for me.

AYANNA: Then I hit twelve and my sister left home and I was very bitter about that, about being alone, so I started to act out in my dress and the people that I hung out with, this whole rebellion, like ok, you're not going to pay attention to me, so I'm going to make you pay attention to me, you know, in a negative way.

JADE: I think when you are in a conservative Christian upbringing, you kind of tend to look at people with the attitude of, well, they deserve where they're at. If they are poor, if they have problems in their life, if they have drug problems, financial problems or marital problems, they brought it

upon themselves. They did something to deserve it. They weren't doing the right things that God would like for people to do.

AYANNA: In my church, some of the mothers were like, you can't praise two gods, so...either do this or basically get out, that's where they stood. So I chose. I got out. I was like, okay, I don't fit in here, you know. There was always a question of me fitting in anyway, 'cause my mom never showed up, she was an alcoholic, people knew that, and my parents weren't married...I'm adopted, you know – it was all these things and that last thing confirmed what I thought anyways, I don't belong. So I turned my back on church and religion altogether. And I was very bitter and very angry, and I died as far as church went. Then I just went through the motions, did what I was supposed to do and then I got pregnant shortly after and then they were really like, go away, because I was going to get everybody pregnant...and so that's when I got really angry at God, just very angry, still acknowledging the presence of God and religion, but I just had an attitude of, you don't care about me, or you're not there for me. I thought that maybe God was punishing me.

SLIDE: *Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time².*

SCENE 4

Read conversationally as a blending of narratives.

JANICE: I was raised Catholic

ELIZABETH: Roman Catholic

DEIRDRE: with twelve years of Catholic school

ELIZABETH: in a traditional Italian Catholic community

DEIRDRE: which I totally hated.

MELISSA: It wasn't very Bible-based

DEIRDRE: We have a catechism of the Catholic Church, which is what we studied

² Deuteronomy 4:39-40, New International Version of the Bible.

JANICE: I went to a public high school, which was a blessing

DEIRDRE: We study other religions and we study our religion

ELIZABETH: I was in religion classes with nuns who were very intelligent and open

DEIRDRE: and we study sacramental preparation and going through lots of hoops to jump through

JANICE: I always assumed people other than Catholics went to heaven because my father and many of my friends weren't Catholic

ELIZABETH: it was about searching your soul, an exploration.

MELISSA: I was pretty much the good Catholic girl up through high school.

ELIZABETH: And that is my first memory of feeling that God is my friend and that I had a personal relationship with God, and that I talked with God on a daily basis.

DEIRDRE: It's not like I'm this amazingly wonderful person because of it.

MELISSA: I knew Christ in my head but not in my heart

ELIZABETH: I would really say at that time my faith became more personal and more real.

MELISSA: I was involved heavily with sports

DEIRDRE: I drank a lot

ELIZABETH: But I really struggled with self-esteem and I was really shy

JANICE: I was challenged often by friends who were minister's daughters

ELIZABETH: I was scared to death of boys

MELISSA: Sports and friends were pretty much my whole life

JANICE: And when I went to college

DEIRDRE: I still fucked around

MELISSA: I had no roots or morals anymore because I was away from my parents

ELIZABETH: I felt out of control with my life

MELISSA: and just went off the deep end with drinking and smoking

ELIZABETH: I felt that I needed to get control, and that I was not worthy of God's love, because I was a terrible person and so out of control.

MELISSA: I was just a floater – I just went wherever the wind took me

ELIZABETH: I became very ritualized with a regimen of prayers and strict exercise. I was anorexic for a good year. I weighed eighty pounds at one point.

MELISSA: Then one of my drinking buddies became a believer. She died in a car accident two weeks later.

ELIZABETH: In college I had let go of my diet rituals but I was still strict about prayer – I remember my senior year of college telling my boyfriend at that time that I felt like a prisoner to this obsession.

MELISSA: Then I had an uncle and a teacher pass away and when you go to three funerals in three months, you start thinking about what happens after *you* die.

ELIZABETH: I felt guilty all the time for how much food I was eating, and that I had to say so many prayers.

MELISSA: I remember walking across campus thinking, there's got to be more to life than this.

ELIZABETH: And my boyfriend said, "Just stop." It was the weirdest thing, like I needed somebody's permission to stop. That's all he said to me. And I stopped going to church shortly after that.

MELISSA: After a party one night I walked home drunk and decided that...this is stupid. I don't want this life I am living. I want you, Jesus. And so now I try to live for something bigger than myself. I began to live with purpose, and my faith began to grow.

JANICE & DEIRDRE: (*crossing themselves*) In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SCENE 5

LIBBY: I grew up in a Jewish family, bat mitzvah, synagogue, Hebrew school, the whole thing. And typical for my sex, drugs, and rock and roll

generation I was a total participant in it. At twenty-four I went through an extremely dramatic and miraculous experience. It was around Yom Kippur, must have been about September, and I was with an old friend from Hebrew school at the synagogue.

SLIDE: Outside of synagogue

LIBBY is sitting beside **ANNE (VOICE 5)** on a bench.

LIBBY: Do you think God is here?

ANNE shrugs.

LIBBY: Seriously.

ANNE: I don't think God hangs out at the synagogue.

Silence. Both are deep in thought.

LIBBY: The other night I was in my office, and...you're going to think I'm crazy.

ANNE: What?

LIBBY: Well, this might sound weird, but I got down on my knees and told God I needed him to show me if he was real.

ANNE: What brought this on?

LIBBY: Lately I've just been wondering about, you know, the presence of God. I mean, if this is all there is to life, I'd rather be dead.

ANNE: What? Are you depressed?

LIBBY: I guess.

ANNE: Are you suicidal, Libby?

LIBBY: No, no, I just...I want more.

ANNE: Well what is it you want?

LIBBY: I need to know who God is...I want to know his name.

ANNE: If this is going where I think it's going...

LIBBY: Anne, what if it is Jesus?

ANNE: Libby, get a hold of yourself! I can't believe you! You know that isn't possible! And how could you do that to us? Your family? You are way off the deep end.

LIBBY: I just...I just don't know anymore.

ANNE: Well you better get your priorities straight.

ANNE gets up to leave.

LIBBY: Wait, I...

ANNE is gone before LIBBY can respond.

LIBBY: (*praying*) I need to know who you are. I know you're real. I just need to know your name (*crying*)...but please don't be Jesus, please...I can't...but if you are, if you can prove it to me, I'll give the rest of my life to serve you...

As LIBBY continues to pray

ANNE: (*as if reading a letter*): Dear Libby, I heard about your recent conversion to -- Christianity. I feel it is my responsibility to alert your mind to the immensity of what you have done. You have betrayed your community and your heritage. Do you realize how much you have hurt and shamed your own family? Your mother and father? Your act is unforgivable. People like you made all six million die in vain.

LIBBY reacts, shocked and dismayed.

VOICE 4 *begins singing as LIBBY is left with ANNE's words.*

VOICE 4: Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong, they are weak but he is strong.

ALL: Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so.

SCENE 6

Conversing with one another...

JANICE: I chose to go to a private Catholic college

DEIRDRE: Feminism was a new concept there

JANICE: I think feminism is about choices

DEIRDRE: It was attractive and exciting

JANICE: But I don't want to be affiliated with a feminist label. I don't like labels.

DEIRDRE: I'm not part of the hard core school. I guess I've matured in my definition of feminism and it's not as angry as it was when I first studied it.

JANICE: But I do have a tremendous respect for feminists who have made awesome differences – we're talking the Gloria Steinems of the world. I just don't feel the need to be called a feminist. Labels are too limiting. But I would have to say I'm pretty progressive—

DEIRDRE: I'm socially extremely liberal—

JANICE: In this church of ours. We are a church that has to evolve and grow or I would not be here. Can I be a priest? No. Is that limiting within the Catholic faith? Yes. Is my hope someday in my lifetime to have female Catholic priests? Yes, if we keep going.

*The women begin finger snapping.
The others join them and all form a circle.
The circle revolves as the women address one another articulately.*

SLIDE: Arrangement of pins with feminist slogans

ALL: Feminism.

VOICE 5: A theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes.

VOICE 2: Organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests.

VOICE 7: The non-acceptance of subjugation based on gender.

VOICE 3: Affording women opportunities previously withheld them.

VOICE 6: Advocating fairness and equality for women in all aspects of life.

VOICE 1: Speaking out for justice.

VOICE 8: An egalitarian view of women in leadership.

VOICE 4: A developed sensitivity of society's impact on women.

VOICE 9: The freedom to pursue any career regardless of gender or sex.

ALL: Choice.

SLIDE: "We can do it" image/slogan

*The women stop snapping and the circle breaks as the women
begin addressing the audience.
The energy builds as the lines are spoken in a cacophony.*

VOICE 2: The acceptance of many available choices.

VOICE 7: A concern for social justice, inequity and the impoverished.

VOICES 3 & 5: Self-awareness.

VOICE 6: Advocating on behalf of minorities or any marginalized demographic of people.

VOICES 8 & 9: Fighting oppression.

VOICE 1: The passionate struggle to end violence against women.

VOICE 7: An obligation to promoting social change in the world.

VOICE 4: Freedom from the confines of gender.

ALL: Social consciousness.

VOICE 5: Or:

VOICE 8: Bitchy bra-burning butch leather-boot wearing lesbians.

*The women respond with hollers and comments like,
"Can you believe that?" "After all this time?" "Oh yeah!" "Hell yeah!"*

SCENE 7

AYANNA, DIANNE, JADE & JESSICA are again seated in different areas on stage, as if being interviewed.

AYANNA: When I first heard about feminism, I completely hated it, I thought it was stupid, I thought it was a bunch of women whining about the color pink and things like that. I was totally resistant to it, thinking, uh! They're part of the problem. And then I had a few classes and learned a few things...and discovered the Vagina Monologues. And with my child getting older and entering school age where it's totally boy and girl, and then it was this baahooooo!!! – This feminist explosion and I got into my radical feminist stage, this, ooo, I'm a feminist, you know?

DIANNE: At first, I was absolutely turned off by feminists at seminary because they were so, in my opinion, aggressive. One of the first people I met at college was this loud, obnoxious feminist, and I thought, oh no, I can't tolerate this. But then I began experiencing life outside my Pollyanna world, and deal with the fact that there diminished human spirits simply because of gender. I began to encounter resistance to my aspirations because I was a woman.

JADE: To me it boils down to being able to make my own decisions on what I want in life, what I want to pursue, the whole notion of the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness. I should be able to do that regardless of my gender or my sex. And I shouldn't have to be dictated to because I have breasts and a vagina. Nobody should be able to tell me what to do just because they don't have the same genitalia I do.

JESSICA: I've run my own business as a cosmetologist since I was twenty-one. I'm divorced, I've been a single mom for eight and a half years, and I'm

a strong mom. I'm not overwhelmed with life, I enjoy being a mom, I enjoy running my business, I enjoy the ministry I do and I live a very full life. I'm extremely independent and I know sometimes people are surprised at my conservative views because they look at my life and they think that I am like fully feminist, especially because of the work I have done in Costa Rica to get women who are prostituting themselves educated and off the streets. I opened a hairstyling school for them and I poured my life into these women and tried to show them they were worth more than they were ever told...and that's my passion, working with women like that, because I believe I was born to do that, to liberate them, to free them from the lies they've always believed, and to share the love of Christ with them. And so I do believe in women's rights, completely, but nobody has called me feminist to my face.

LIBBY stands and walks forward to address the audience.

LIBBY: Feminism isn't something I identify explicitly as – I have one cause: to see Jesus glorified. But, I do identify as feminist. And it's taken me awhile to get there.

The other women take their chairs as they exit.

LIBBY: I mean, I grew up in a very traditional, *Leave it to Beaver* home.

SLIDE: *Kitchen*

Together, the other women walk quickly forward as they speak to form a straight line around LIBBY as they mime mixing a bowl of cookies. LIBBY reacts incredulously.

ALL (except LIBBY): Hi dear. Welcome home from work. Dinner is almost ready.

The others continue to mix their bowls synchronously

LIBBY: The men were rabbis and doctors...and the women...well let's just say I had no real aspirations. I was shallow in that sense, unaware...

ALL (except LIBBY): Hi dear. Welcome home from work. Dinner is almost ready.

The women have now begun rocking babies synchronously

LIBBY: I didn't have an issue or a cause if it looked me in the face.

ALL (except LIBBY): Hi dear. Welcome home from work. Dinner is almost ready.

As the women speak, they robotically wave hello to their husbands and lean forward to kiss them. Then, as Libby observes, they each begin repeating a domestic activity as they move around the stage. They continue to randomly repeat the following phrase:

ALL (except LIBBY): Hi dear. Welcome home from work. Dinner is almost ready.

An egg timer sounds, bringing the women out of their robotic, trancelike actions.

All the women except LIBBY and VOICES 1, 2, 5 & 7 remain standing. The rest slowly walk away in a daze.

LIBBY: And then I started a bible study that accidentally grew into a church for some refugees I was serving in my community. I still remember going to my male pastor and saying,

VOICE 7: I think I'm leading it, and I'm a woman

VOICE 5: Is this ok?

VOICE 1: I don't know how this happened

VOICE 7: Pastoring is for men

VOICE 2: I'm terribly sorry

LIBBY: And then later I got invited on staff, and my husband and I became the senior pastors of our own church—

VOICE 1: Meaning, he works a full time job and *you* are the senior pastor.

LIBBY: Right. We just look fine because he has stood next to me at all the important meetings.

VOICE 5: No one would question you with your husband by your side

LIBBY: Except that it's not acceptable for a wife to be the senior pastor.

VOICE 1: But you are the senior pastor

LIBBY: I don't know how I did it. I am terribly unconfident.

VOICE 2: But you did

VOICE 7: But you have

VOICE 5: You've found favor with the men

VOICE 2: And you've ridden that wave

VOICE 1: But the rest of us haven't found that favor

VOICE 7: When are you gonna care about the rest of us who haven't found that favor

*The women face **LIBBY** and begin to plead with her.*

VOICE 5: We haven't found that favor

VOICE 1: When Joshua was preparing the people to enter the Promised Land

VOICE 2: When he was ready to take them across

VOICE 7: He called together the tribes and told them,

*The women have surrounded **LIBBY** and clasped hands.*

LIBBY: The Lord your God has given you rest and has given you this land.

VOICE 7: All your warriors, fully armed, must lead the other tribes across the Jordan to help them conquer their territory.

*The women are standing in warrior stance behind **LIBBY**.*

VOICE 1: Stay with them until the Lord gives rest to them as he has given rest to you

The women begin to pray, some of them on their knees.

VOICE 2: Until they, too, possess the land the Lord your God is giving them³.

LIBBY: That's my life. I've been enjoying my ride a lot. And I'm not doing a darn thing to help other women. Maybe I'm not just here because I have some special gift and that's why I've become accepted. Maybe I can help to raise up other senior pastor women.

³ Paraphrase of Joshua 1: 10-15, New Living Translation of the Bible.

The women help those kneeling to stand.

LIBBY: There are so many who are more than qualified. Maybe the church has been historically...wrong.

VOICES 1, 2, 5 & 7: We're wrong. We're every bit as wrong as the slave drivers were.

VOICES 2, 5 & 7 leave **JESSICA** alone on stage.

JESSICA: I tend to go to contemporary churches but I'm always pushing the envelope. I'm always writing songs that are a little shocking, or I am speaking about something that is not mentioned in the church. For example, once I spoke about my story of sexual abuse and molestation – and I knew statistically in a church this size there were abusers there. And I forgave them on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ and it was shocking to a lot of people but I know it freed three men who over the next year came up to me and wept and said you have no idea what that did to free me in my life from things I had done to children in the past. So I surprise people, and I push the envelope as far as things like that go – and I've definitely pioneered some things for other women within my church. And I've gotten interesting reactions from the male senior pastor because of it, especially when he first started to get to know me.

VOICE 2 steps forward.

VOICE 2: She's kind of a loose cannon.

JESSICA: He didn't know if he was scared of me, or if he really liked what he saw...but the more he got to know me the more he could be honest with me and just say,

VOICE 2: You'll have to excuse me, Jessica, but the giftings that you possess are normally possessed by *men* in the church. I'm not sure what to do with that.

VOICE 2 leaves.

JESSICA: I can speak, I've preached on Sunday, I pray for people, these gifts just come out of me, it's just who I am. I was in counseling once and my counselor was getting me to describe myself and I said, well, I have this conflict: I'm a princess and I'm a warrior. I am a warrior. I have instincts in me where I wanna pray all night long and I get really intense against the enemy you know, and I have confidence in that, I'm not scared. Then I'm this princess in the eyes of God. And she said to me, you're exactly right. You don't have to be one or the other.

ALL (except JESSICA): I do identify myself as both a Christian and a feminist and I don't find any conflict in that.

SCENE 8

JESSICA: So, I guess I'm not sure what feminism is to me. Maybe it's just like in Christianity some people think of a Christian as a psycho on the sidewalk who's shouting at the abortion clinic that God hates what you're doing. You know some people think that's what all Christians are like and that they are just nuts, like what are you doing, how're you gonna reach people like that. In the same way, when I hear the word feminism, I think of someone who doesn't wear a bra who maybe has really short hair, who doesn't like men very much and who really doesn't care about the structure of family as we've always known it. I think of someone who is liberal politically, who most likely believes in abortion and who basically has a chip on their shoulder and is not somebody I would want to have a conversation with for any length of time. Now I realize that's an ignorant view. I realize that is the view that I've been taught and that's just what feminism is to me. I know there's great things about feminism as far as equal rights for women and that the feminist movement has done many things for women that I'm now benefiting from – you know, I'm a business owner, I can survive as a single mom, I'm not scorned by society for the lifestyle I'm living even though I didn't choose it. But if someone labeled me as a feminist I would have a really hard time with that. But, maybe I am a feminist – I've never really thought about it this much before.

As "Living Water" begins to play, the women speak over the music

VOICE 5: A birthing of social consciousness...

VOICE 6: In the true sense of Christianity and the true sense of feminism, there is no opposition.

VOICE 4: We must abandon our culture's preconceived ideas...

VOICE 2: I have come that you may have life, and that you may have it abundantly⁴!

VOICE 3: If anyone is in Christ, she is a new creation – The old has passed away.

⁴ Paraphrase of John 10:10, New American Standard Version of the Bible.

VOICE 9: Behold! New things have come⁵!

VOICE 8: A merging of Christianity and feminism...

VOICE 1: Freedom for the feminist!

VOICE 7: Freedom from the restraints of her gender

VOICE 9: Freedom to be who she is as a person

VOICE 4: Freedom from years of patriarchy.

VOICE 5: Freedom for the Christian!

VOICE 8: Freedom from the bondages of sin

VOICE 2: From the bondages of a fallen world

VOICE 6: From the bondages we place on ourselves.

*The women have formed three circles and begin inviting members
of the audience to stand with them, holding each other's hands.
The mood is prayerful, reflective and unifying.*

SLIDE: *Pictures of various women*

As the song fades out, there are a couple moments of silence, and then...

VOICE 4: Christian feminists do not have identical opinions about the Bible, the church, or even Christianity; but most would agree on a basic definition of feminism as a commitment to the humanity, dignity, and equality of all persons. They seek equal rights for women, but their ultimate goal is a social order in which women and men of all races and classes can live together in justice and harmony⁶.

VOICE 1: This is what Christian feminism is all about. Freedom for all persons, not just for middle-class white women, but for all women and men. Freedom to do God's work. Freedom to live without destructive stereotypes. Freedom to value women's stories as much as we value men's.

⁵ Paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 5:17, New International Version of the Bible.

⁶ Japinga, L. (1999). *Feminism and Christianity: An essential guide*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon. Page 13.

Freedom to “stand upright on that ground which God designed us to occupy.”⁷

ALL: I do identify as both a Christian and a feminist and I don’t find any conflict in that.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

VOICE 7 performs the spoken word-style poem as **VOICES 3, 7 & 9** move continuously, forming various silent images.

VOICE 7:

I’m tired of certain feminists
Thinkin’ they own this word
like it’s theirs.
Like they invented it.

Look, the way I feministicate
isn’t done for you to appreciate—
It’s an expression of my being.
Is it an unspoken assumption
that anyone with Christian faith
is oppressed and doesn’t possess
a free feminine spirit?
I shouldn’t feel like you won’t listen
just because I call myself a Christian
because of some limited definition
of who I am, like
I’m some pro-life picketer
protesting the baby-killer clinic.

I’m pissed at feeling divided,
at feeling like I’m slighted
by my brothers and sisters—
for your definition of who I should be

⁷ Japinga, L. (1999). *Feminism and Christianity: An essential guide*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon. Page 14.

as a Christian—if I'm a feminist,
have I lost my conviction?
If anything, I am more enraged
by the social injustices of this country
and the ways women are kept in their place
at their jobs and their roles and their homes
and even at church.
I'm tired of women being abused
and used against one another.
And I'm sick of the conformation
of feministication or particular denominations
that I might choose to belong to.
Take a look on my shelf—
Judith Butler next to the Bible,
some Ani DiFranco and an old hymnal
of songs I love to sing when
I've had it with ya'll.
Did it occur to anyone that Jesus was a feminist?
I choose to be gentle and fierce
and if you wanna to pierce my side
over your confusion, go ahead,
live inside your illusion.

SCENE 2

*The women are seated at various places on stage.
As they speak, they address the audience as if being interviewed.*

AYANNA: I almost think that being a Christian and being a feminist could not work together in some ways. I think there are parts in the bible that support both, I really do. I almost see them as opposites but very much the same. I feel it could work for you and me in our own private lives, but society-wise, you're gonna have to choose one or the other. Like black women when they wanted to be feminists and the black men said, what do you think you're doing? You need to be over here with us. And I think those extremes, which are the representations of everything, the angry bra-burning feminists and the Christian moms that have eight or nine or ten babies – still exist in our society. I think in this world it would be very hard to be both because people would always make you choose. And I think some of the radical extreme sides of Christianity would always be calling feminism into question. I think it's possible, but I just think it would be very, very hard.

LIBBY: I think it's really because feminism has such yucky connotations – if people didn't have them, many would consider themselves feminist who are pretty conservative. I also think language like "Jezebel spirit" is damaging as

well – In the past few decades, if a woman was controlling or whatever she had a Jezebel spirit. We didn't have language for men who were controlling. If a woman was a feminist, she was a Jezebel spirit.

JESSICA: I have this idea in my head of a feminist, and it's not a good one. And I know that comes from how I was raised, and I know that I am so offended when people identify me in that category – yet I totally support women's rights and believe in the strength and independence of women. I guess I identify feminism with liberalism. And I have never really met any conservative feminists that have in my mind a good balance of morals and an understanding of feminism.

AYANNA: I think that being an African-American woman, you know, I'm not supposed to identify with feminism, I should be a womanist or something else...because, how dare you deny that race is first and foremost your problem, and the gender stuff is for other people. For feminists, to be a lady, to be a girl, is so offensive to us. But I come from roots that the whole point is to be a lady, to be a girl...please please consider us ladies and girls so you don't split our families up, so that you don't rape or beat or molest me, please consider me this pristine protectable thing, and so that's such a compliment when someone sees that you're striving to be a young lady, a real woman.

DIANNE: I'm not a radical-type of feminist who constantly looks at men as being the enemy. I remember when I was going through my divorce there was one of my neighbors that was going through a divorce and every other word that came out of her mouth was some derogatory thing about men and my life is not about, you know, putting down men – it's, how can I lift women up? And I think you have to find a balance, you know? And I look at my brothers and I see how they're living their lives and in some respects they're kind of trudging in that same hole, but on the other hand I'm seeing some change in them, and I think it's because the women they've married are strong and are starting to change the way they look at women – that they deserve respect. That's the awareness of feminism.

AYANNA: I remember they did a seminar at my university and it had something to do with...what do feminists do at the end of the day? And it was a lot of professors and faculty and staff and they're like...

The women begin addressing one another

JANICE: We bake cookies...

JADE: We go to PTA meetings...

ELIZABETH: We go home and make dinner for our husbands (laughing).

AYANNA: And so it was just like, yeah, 'cause we're all people.

MELISSA: Feminists aren't the only ones that have to deal with stereotypes.

One woman begins repeating the rhythmic, choral style chant as others slowly join her.

VOICES 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8: Prude, virgin, radical Christian

The chant continues under words spoken by VOICES 4, 5 & 9

VOICE 4: Conservative

VOICE 5: Pro-life

VOICE 9: Jesus freak

VOICE 4: Superficial

VOICE 5: Hypocritical

VOICE 4: Ignorant

VOICE 9: Arrogant

VOICE 4: homophobic

VOICE 5: Brainwashed

VOICES 4, 5, & 9 *rejoin the others to repeat the sequence, which is now becoming more intense.*

The chant then becomes a whisper and stops abruptly.

The following phrases are spoken overdramatically between sequences of the women beating Bibles like drums.

VOICE 8: "I've never been drunk!"

SLIDE: STEREOTYPE

VOICE 6: "I'm saving myself for marriage!"

SLIDE: STEREOTYPE

VOICE 9: "In the name of the Lord Jesus, be healed!"

SLIDE: STEREOTYPE

VOICE 2: "Hate the sin, love the sinner!"

SLIDE: STEREOTYPE

VOICE 1: "My Bible is my most prized possession!"

SLIDE: STEREOTYPE

VOICE 4: "Since Jesus came into my life, I'm always happy!"

SLIDE: STEREOTYPE

VOICE 5: "Jesus is my husband!"

SLIDE: STEREOTYPE

VOICE 7: "Thou shalt always be submissive to thine husband!"

SLIDE: STEREOTYPE

VOICE 3: "It's my dream in life to be preacher's wife!"

The women have begun chanting together...

ALL: Bible beater, Bible beater, Bible beater, Bible beater, Bible beater,
Bible beater, Christian!!!

The women freeze in fanatical poses.

SCENE 3

The women return to their seats and begin reading their Bibles.

AYANNA: I still don't consider myself a Christian or religious, but just because I don't know about my relationship or connection to God, it's still not my right to make that choice for my son. And even if I'm not going, we have a Bible, it needs to be there for him so he can choose, that's how I feel about it. So that's why I put him in the Catholic church – I guess I'm still kinda sore about what happened in the church I was in and kind of scared about that, so I put him in there and he has developed his own orientation to God. He considers himself Catholic, which I think is so cute. I just do. He gets argumentative about it and he'll defend his identity to other people. He notices in the world there's a sort of attitude toward Catholics, and he'll ask me about it, and I'll say, I really don't know. I'm not Catholic (laughing).

DEIRDRE: Can I just say, I think confession is ridiculous? Honestly, it's never done anything for me. I don't believe I need a priest to be an intermediary for God to forgive my sin, I've never believed that. Sure, I've gone with my kids to be a good role model when they've made their first confessions, it's not like I mind doing it. But I just don't know what to say, you know? I guess I've never wanted to itemize this little laundry list – let's see, I said damn four times and fuck four times – that's my language choice, that's not a sin to me. And I'm sure I have lots of other sins, but – like I'm going to give the priest all these sins and now – poof! – they're gone? It's a frickin' waste of time. Of course, the kids go and they say they love it. Amy especially – she came home from a confession at school last week and said it just felt so good. So maybe they're being effectively brainwashed into it.

JADE: My daughter doesn't go to church. I feel so bad when people ask her questions like, who was Moses?

DAUGHTER (VOICE 4): Is he a coach?

JADE: (laughing) She has no clue! And I feel so bad about that sometimes and then again I ask myself, how important is it for her to know these things? She has no clue what an apostle is, or what a disciple is, or about Matthew, Mark, Luke and John...she has no clue what's in there. But I'm so

proud of who she is as a girl and I'm proud that she doesn't necessarily think of herself as a strong girl, she thinks of herself as a strong person.

LIBBY: I home school – I'm anything but a traditional home schooling mom, so I don't know if I want to be identified that way, but I've done it and loved it. And it works out great for my husband and me. I guess we are traditional in some ways and not in others. He cooks, I clean, he hates to clean, I hate that he hates to clean, I home school the kids, he goes to work at the hospital, I work for the church, we both work for the church. We kind of just do whichever thing that either one of us dislikes the least or likes the most.

MELISSA: I was at dinner the other night talking with some other couples about the fact that some Christians really look down on those of us that send our kids to public school. And I have a real issue with that. Jesus didn't walk with everybody that was like him – he was hanging out with the people that needed a light. When my kids complain about situations at school, I will say to them, be the light. It doesn't mean that you have to go in and break up the fight, but be the example.

JESSICA *begins to pray:*

JESSICA: If the king finds favor in me and it pleases the king, may he grant me this petition.

ALL: May you give me favor in finances, ministry, relationships and love. May we be generous givers and never forget the poor. May our homes be a place for your holy spirit to dwell and may new songs of praise be continually on our lips.

JESSICA: Help us to be a people willing to go anywhere and do anything for you, that we would be known for our passion for you through our love for one another and for those that you entrust to us to care for.

JESSICA & MELISSA: Father God, let your gospel be spoken through our lives so that everyone we meet would be touched by you. Make our desire for you stronger than our desire for any other person or thing so that your kingdom would come, and your will be done through us and in us.

ALL: And that at the end of our lives, you would say to us, well done, and we would dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

MELISSA: Oh Lord, you've brought me so far. I don't know where I'd be without you. Sometimes I just don't understand this world, and I'm so confused about who I am, God. I just...there's all these ideas just swarming around me and I don't know what the truth is. I know you speak to us through the Bible, but there are so many interpretations and what if I have been taught the wrong one? Is it ok for me to be on staff at church? For a

woman to be a pastor? The president? I need your help...please speak to me, somehow.

The women's voices overlap as they begin to physically close in on Melissa.

VOICE 1: Women should remain silent at church.⁸

VOICE 7: Although men and women are equal, they are different.

VOICE 2: They are not allowed to speak.⁹

VOICE 3: They must follow the lead of those who are in authority,¹⁰

VOICE 4: As the Law says.¹¹

VOICE 8: There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.¹²

VOICE 5: As the Law says

VOICE 6: Women are fully capable of doing anything. It's just not best for them to do certain things, like leading a church.

VOICE 3: If they have a question about something, they should ask their own husbands at home.¹³

VOICE 5: The husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church.¹⁴

VOICE 7: The husband is the president, and the wife is the vice-president.

VOICE 2: It is shameful for women to speak in church meetings.¹⁵

VOICE 7: According to the biblical principle of headship, women should not be the final authority in a church or organization.

VOICE 8: Listen, we're as wrong as the slave drivers were.

⁸ Paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 14:34, New International Reader's Version of the Bible.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:34, New International Reader's Version of the Bible.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 14:34, New International Reader's Version of the Bible.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 14:34, New International Reader's Version of the Bible.

¹² Galatians 3:28, New International Version of the Bible.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 14:35, New International Reader's Version of the Bible.

¹⁴ Ephesians 5:23, New International Version of the Bible.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 14:35, New International Reader's Version of the Bible.

VOICE 4: It would not be right, biblically, for a woman to be the president of the United States.

VOICE 8: Holding back women on any level is akin to abortion.

VOICE 3: There is neither male nor female

VOICE 8: It's a moral issue

VOICE 7: We must not be swayed by the radical feminists of our day

*The women have formed a circle around **MELISSA** as they begin pushing her body in different directions.*

VOICE 8: An egalitarian standpoint

VOICE 5: The husband is head of the wife

VOICE 4: The Law says

VOICE 1: Women must be silent

VOICE 2: It is shameful for women to speak

VOICE 8: The Bible's position on women in leadership was actually progressive for its day.

VOICE 7: We can't take verses out of their context

VOICE 5: The Law says

VOICE 8: I pray that the church would raise up women

MELISSA: Stop! Just stop!

***SLIDE:** If you need wisdom--if you want to know what God wants you to do--ask him, and he will gladly tell you.¹⁶*

SCENE 4

JADE is alone on stage. She addresses the audience.

¹⁶ James 1:5, New Living Translation of the Bible.

JADE: My sister is super super religious. She's in an abusive marriage – and when I say abusive I mean getting hit in the head with an ash tray, um, he attacks her with scissors, they have a four year old daughter and he does this in front of the daughter. She finally got separated from him but the reason she can't leave completely is because she believes firmly that God will be furious with her if she gets a divorce and you know, I'm like, do you think God hates you? Why did he put you in this relationship? Well, maybe it's a test, she says. And she has no sense of that strength that I used to know she had. She's a totally different person now. And I totally blame religion for taking away her sense of being a strong woman. I blame it outright. She can't – she's in church probably three or four times a week and cannot let go of this notion that leaving this marriage would piss off God.

SLIDE: *Jesus said, "If a woman divorces her husband and remarries, she commits adultery."¹⁷*

She can't tell him she doesn't like to be hit in the head with ashtrays because it will upset God. And her husband does it to her every time, he will say, you know you're not supposed to do that, you know the Bible says you're not supposed to do that. And she'll back down every time. Do you know he's allegedly a minister? He's one of those people that you know was called from the wilderness, no training, no seminary...but God has called him he's said, and he firmly believes he can heal people. Well, he freaks me out and he doesn't like me, and I know that he doesn't like me because he knows I can see right through his crap. And...I said to him, my father has taught me to shoot. I shoot very well. Dad even brags that I'm a natural with a gun. And I always remind him of that. Fuck around with my sister if you want to, but if you come over here, I'm not playing with you. I don't have any tolerance for that. So he keeps his distance from me but he knows he can beat my sister up with religion...it just pisses me off that she's allowed religion to take her strength. She has to be meek and mild and stupid and abused.

MELISSA *steps forward as JADE leaves.*

MELISSA: I feel that the feminist community does a much better job fighting violence against women. It's really not talked about or promoted as well in the Christian community, I think partly because it has been embraced by feminists and so when Christians want to promote this idea of being against violence it puts the Christians in the same category as feminists and there's this fear of being associated or labeled with what feminists are associated with. But there's also a just kind of a sense of it being uncomfortable, and

¹⁷ Mark 10:12, New Living Translation of the Bible.

that makes it difficult to talk about anyway. Or you know, general apathy in our society is probably part of it.

AYANNA *steps forward as MELISSA leaves.*

AYANNA: I think some of my problems with the church are tied to black men. I guess that's my biggest problem with my own churches, with my own people, because I see black men, who are the head of the church, using the love, emptiness, and vulnerability of black women to become gods themselves. And in these churches – black churches – you're not worshipping God, you're worshipping these men. These charismatic, well-spoken, usually attractive men, you know? Like Martin Luther King, such a great guy, and I have so much respect for him. But he rode off the backs of black women in the church who did what they did, who washed clothes and made dinners and spent all the time and money and energy to get him where he was. And if you look at a lot of our leaders, they all have got there by black women who don't exist.

ELIZABETH *steps forward as AYANNA leaves.*

ELIZABETH: I struggle getting my hands around a Christian faith that's about grace, not authority. It's just so different with Catholicism. For example, my mom died a few years ago and all the rosaries were said for her. It's all about praying her into heaven, like she couldn't be there yet, like she couldn't be there without our prayers. It's just a bizarre concept.

DEIRDRE *steps forward to join ELIZABETH.*

DEIRDRE: My husband and I joke around about the sacraments – is this Catholicism or is this voodoo?

DEIRDRE & ELIZABETH *leave as JADE steps forward.*

JADE: The ideal Christianity for me...is that god wouldn't be a person and there would be no gender, no sex, no race to god. God would be a notion, a theory, god would be that feeling that makes you do right things, that keeps you from harming people. It would be a sense that we all had but it wouldn't be a person. It's just a *thing* that makes you want to do right. *That* would be my ideal Christianity. Just to love love love and give give give.

SLIDE: *Outside scenery on a sunny day.*

*The women begin to step forward, walking and talking with another.
They sit in groups on the floor, as if at a church picnic.*

JESSICA: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.¹⁸

MELISSA: Love your neighbor as yourself.¹⁹

JANICE: Walk as Jesus did.

JADE: If God wasn't a person, there wouldn't be a reason for some of us to say we were made in God's image – that I'm better than you. Or there wouldn't be this argument about a place for certain kinds of people. If we didn't think god was a man, I don't think we would ask questions about well what's a woman's place in the church? Or what can women do? There wouldn't be rules, there wouldn't be an entire book of laws in the bible about when you can touch women and when they're clean and when they're not, we wouldn't use women the way we did in the Bible. I just think we would be so much better off because we have done some really nasty, nasty horrible things in the name of or in the idea of believing that God's a man.

AYANNA: Even now, because of the way I was raised, I always think of god as he. And probably like a lot of people, god's got on a long white robe and he's got a long beard, he's white, and he's just floatin' around lookin' at things.

ELIZABETH: I feel like I'm so stuck where my faith is concerned. My husband wants to become a member of the church we go to, and I know they will ask me, is Jesus Christ your savior? I could probably say he is my savior, but I can never say he's everybody's savior...I'm not willing to say Jesus is the only way.

MELISSA: I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.²⁰

ELIZABETH: Sometimes I feel pressured to conform to my husband's notion of Christianity and feeling that there is one true Christianity that leaves no room for people like me. I think I'm also afraid to take that leap of faith because I'm afraid of losing control also. I'm just afraid of this authoritative notion of God...And I'm not there yet. I cannot give my heart completely.

JADE: What I wanna know is...How can you pray to someone who doesn't believe you're equal? How can you pray and ask for help or guidance from someone you have been told has said you're second? Maybe not even

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 6:5, New International Version of the Bible.

¹⁹ Mark 12:33, New International Version of the Bible.

²⁰ John 14:6, New International Version of the Bible.

second – maybe you’re third after the oxen. If you don’t mean anything, why would this deity care what you think, or care about your life, or wanna give you guidance?

JESSICA: Well, that’s a skewed version of God. Look to the word – it’s God’s perfect truth.

ELIZABETH: I just can’t see the Bible as untouched from human influence. I believe in diversity and I know that knowledge is socially constructed...

JESSICA: All scripture is God-breathed.²¹

DEIRDE: I’m a cafeteria Catholic – I take some and leave the rest.

DIANNE: I don’t even think that Christianity has the right to claim total ownership to God. I think God is manifested in many different ways and that each religion has a part to play in how they choose to acknowledge that entity and how to incorporate it into their lives. The most important thing is what kind of a person are you and how do you choose to live your life and respect other people?

JANICE: I think it’s troubling that we have a right wing, a conservative part of the church that claims God is on their side, that they have an exclusive claim on God. That they alone know what God is saying. There is a lot of money being raised by evangelical groups to perpetuate that agenda.

JADE: Take the last election, for example. I thought it was nasty how one party really preyed on people’s faith. That if you’re godly you vote republican. And people got caught up in it, people believed it, and that to me says we have some rather stupid people in this country, wow. Who was it that said, “You will never grow broke underestimating the intelligence of the American people”?

MELISSA: Well just because someone votes republican doesn’t mean they’re ignorant.

DIANNE: One thing that really angers me is this division amongst the population of the United States that if you aren’t a Christian then your political views aren’t correct, that you can’t be on the same side of the page and that only Christians have the right views.

JADE: I’m looking for that candidate who, if someone asks you about your faith tell me but please, please don’t tell me that your faith in a particular

²¹ 2 Timothy 3:16, New International Version of the Bible.

god is telling you how to lead this country, because that's what happened in the Salem witch trials, that's what happened in the inquisition, that's what happened in the crusades. George Bush scares me. God told him to invade? I have a girlfriend who's a mental health worker and she says, "The only people who hear god speak are the ones we lock up." You shouldn't be hearing anyone talking up there!

JESSICA: Hey, I voted for Bush. And I believe God still does speak to his people today.

LIBBY: I think fallen leaders lead both parties.

JANICE: I'm a very strong democrat.

DEIRDRE: I almost always vote straight-line democrat. I feel that the democrats have stronger social justice ties and fairness.

JANICE: Many of my friends are republican and it is probably one of the hardest lines I walk.

DEIRDRE: I'm married to a republican veteran.

JANICE: Good lord, I've never voted a straight ticket but I philosophically believe in the premise of being a democrat.

DEIRDRE: He was in the air force, and he's a good dad and a great husband, but we will fight to our dying day over political issues. We are completely opposed on every candidate from the local school board all the way up to the presidency, and I don't see that ever changing. I listen to a lot of republican shit on the radio so I can argue with him. I listen to Shawn Hannity and Rush Limbaugh all the time when I'm headed to work so I know what's going on and I can see what sucks people into that stuff.

DIANNE: We take things to such extremes it's ridiculous. What about this whole idea about division between church and state? Like this guy out in California that now wants us to remove "in god we trust" from money and says that god doesn't have any say in our government – Where's all this gonna end?

JANICE: It's so difficult right now especially because homosexuality and abortion have become so politicized that it's difficult to talk about them in church without drawing up signs...

ELIZABETH: The issues are so polarized

JANICE: We've got to find a way to talk about these issues in a holistic, healthy, open manner so they don't divide the church. I mean, every time

the church is divided on political issues, that's not a witness to the wholeness of God...And that fact that we can kill one another because we don't believe the same way...oh dear.

MELISSA: I really think it takes trusting in God, in his sovereignty over our lives, over our country.

SCENE 5

JESSICA stands.

JESSICA: If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.²²

"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" begins to play. The women rise to form a triangle of bodies with VOICE 7 as the front point. As VOICE 7 moves her body in slow, continuous motions, the others follow her in worship.

It looks as if their bodies are one, in complete unison.

Part way through the song, the voiceovers begin and VOICES 5 & 6 join hands and walk away from the group to begin mirroring one another.

As the song climaxes, they move in fluid motions, caressing one another without touching.

At the end of the song, VOICES 5 & 6 rejoin the group in worship.

(VOICEOVER)

VOICE A: And God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. (Wo)men committed indecent acts with other (wo)men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.²³

JADE: My mother and father both believe it is Satan alive in people.

DIANNE: I believe there should be absolutely no discrimination – it should be fully accepted as it is acceptable to God. No one can say that these people are an abomination, that this is against God – Jesus never said one word about homosexuality. There is not one word about it in the ten commandments. It's only mentioned in several places in the bible – some people say four verses and some people say six. I've done a lot of studying, I took classes on the controversy and when you look at the context and what they refer to – there is no basis. But it's part of a larger cultural fear,

²² 2 Chronicles 2:14-15, New International Version of the Bible.

²³ Paraphrase of Romans 1:26-27, New International Version of the Bible.

discomfort in our society about sexuality...which is a bigger question than homosexuality. It's a very uncomfortable thing for a lot of people. We've got a long way to go.

VOICE B: I'm seeing that homosexuality is a growing problem in more conservative Christian circles. When you're told to guard your hearts and bodies against men, you tend to become closer with women and boundaries end up getting crossed. You spend so much time protecting yourself from men that you don't realize that you're heading towards unhealthy relationships with women. And let's face it, homosexuality just isn't something you can talk about with other Christians if you're struggling with it. There's so much shame associated with sexual sin – especially homosexual sin – as if it's worse than drunkenness or pride.

LIBBY: I cannot justify a homosexual lifestyle; I consider it one of many sins. Hermeneutical analysis shows that although the bible is progressive in terms of women's leadership, God does not advocate a homosexual lifestyle. And some people have approached us and said that our church's stance on homosexuality is the one thing that's kept them from becoming members...but they just have to encounter Jesus enough to say, this doesn't make sense to me God, but I trust you enough that you've got a reason that's smarter than my humanistic sensitivities which are aching right now at how unfair this seems to be.

VOICE C: The penalty for homosexual acts is death to both parties. They have committed an abhorrent act and should be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.²⁴

ELIZABETH: When it comes to issues like homosexuality I really really struggle deeply. I will never believe that my lesbian friends are bad people, or that God doesn't love them, or that God will send them to hell because they're...practicing this. Or that it is wrong...I just find that so hard to grasp.

VOICE B: I love my gay friends. That doesn't mean I deny the presence of sin in their lives, but that I love them in their sinfulness, as God loved me in mine.

VOICE D: Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor

²⁴ Paraphrase of Leviticus 20:13, The Message, New International Version, and 21st Century King James Version of the Bible.

the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.²⁵

(Music ends)

VOICE D: And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.²⁶

SCENE 6

VOICES 1, 4, 7 & 8 are positioned as one body upstage facing the audience. The other women are seated in a semicircle facing them. As each speaks, she stands to address the other women who are seated.

MELISSA: I struggle as a Christian sometimes because I'm pro-choice – I feel guilty that I lean that direction. I had a friend in college who got pregnant her senior year. She found out she was pregnant two days after missing her period and had the abortion a week later. And it was hard for me, I can still remember that day when I went with her. And yet I know she would have not been prepared to have a baby for a lot of reasons. And I still feel some guilt, I pray for forgiveness for that, and yet I look at her life and maybe that was the right thing that happened at that time for her, I don't know. But I do know it's a lot easier to hold an opinion about an issue like this until you or someone you know is in that situation and has to make a decision.

VOICE 1: Being a mother is just one option for women²⁷.

VOICE 7: Oh God, You created my inmost being.²⁸

MELISSA: I'm very much pro-choice, but I would never consider abortion for myself.

VOICE 7: You knit me inside my mother's womb.²⁹

MELISSA: I would never be able to live with that decision.

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:8-10, New International Version of the Bible.

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:11, New International Version of the Bible.

²⁷ "Nine Reasons Why Abortions Are Legal." (2004). Planned Parenthood Website. Retrieved

January 27, 2006 from <http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

²⁸ Psalm 139:13, New International Version of the Bible.

²⁹ Psalm 139:13, New International Version of the Bible.

VOICE 7: I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made³⁰

VOICE 8: Legal abortions protect women's health³¹

VOICE 7: You watched me as I was being formed³²

DEIRDRE: My religion is quite clear on being against it, but although abortion is sad and I wish no one would do it, I'm pro-choice as far as a political issue.

VOICE 1: Outlawing abortion is discriminatory³³

VOICE 7: When you made me inside my mother's body³⁴

VOICE 4: A woman is more than a fetus³⁵

VOICE 7: Your eyes saw my unformed body³⁶

VOICE 1: Laws against abortion kill women³⁷

DEIRDRE: Some pro-lifers are scary and they shoot people

VOICE 7: Your eyes saw my unformed substance³⁸

VOICE 8: Compulsory pregnancy laws are incompatible with a free society³⁹

³⁰ Psalm 139:14, New International Version of the Bible.

³¹ "Nine Reasons Why Abortions Are Legal." (2004). Planned Parenthood Website. Retrieved

January 27, 2006 from <http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

³² Psalm 139:15, New Living Translation of the Bible.

³³ "Nine Reasons Why Abortions Are Legal." (2004). Planned Parenthood Website. Retrieved

January 27, 2006 from <http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

³⁴ Psalm 139:15, New International Reader's Version of the Bible.

³⁵ "Nine Reasons Why Abortions Are Legal." (2004). Planned Parenthood Website. Retrieved

January 27, 2006 from <http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

³⁶ Psalm 139:16, New International Version of the Bible.

³⁷ "Nine Reasons Why Abortions Are Legal." (2004). Planned Parenthood Website. Retrieved

January 27, 2006 from <http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

³⁸ Psalm 139:16 Amplified Bible.

³⁹ "Nine Reasons Why Abortions Are Legal." (2004). Planned Parenthood Website. Retrieved

January 27, 2006 from <http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

VOICE 4: Outlaw abortion, and more children will bear children⁴⁰

VOICE 7: You watched me grow from conception to birth⁴¹

VOICE 1: Every child is not a wanted child⁴²

VOICE 8: Choice is good for families⁴³

VOICE 7: All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.⁴⁴

VOICE 7's last words are followed by a few moments of silence.

DIANNE: I have always thought of myself as a pro-choice person. But this summer I had a really unusual experience. I was working with a young Latino couple and she was five months pregnant and went into premature labor and ended up giving birth – so she had this baby born at just five months old. The baby lived for five days...because it was born so early it had what's called a brain bleed, which means that even though it might have been able to live, it would have been a vegetable, it would never have been able to sustain itself. But looking at this little being, I mean, this baby was born totally whole – it had all its fingers and toes and everything. And thinking that women can abort a baby until twenty-four weeks of age, and this baby was born only a week after that time limit, that this baby could have been aborted. And it really struck home whether we have the right to do that. Are we playing God...are we...do we really have the right to do that?

VOICE 1: This surgical abortion is done during the second trimester of pregnancy.

VOICE 8: Because the developing fetus doubles in size between the thirteenth and fourteenth weeks of pregnancy, the body of the fetus is too large to be broken up by suction and will not pass through the suction tubing.

⁴⁰ "Nine Reasons Why Abortions Are Legal." (2004). Planned Parenthood Website. Retrieved

January 27, 2006 from <http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

⁴¹ Psalm 139:16, The Message.

⁴² "Nine Reasons Why Abortions Are Legal." (2004). Planned Parenthood Website. Retrieved

January 27, 2006 from <http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

⁴³ "Nine Reasons Why Abortions Are Legal." (2004). Planned Parenthood Website. Retrieved

January 27, 2006 from <http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

⁴⁴ Psalm 139:16, New International Version of the Bible.

VOICE 1: In this procedure, the cervix must be opened wider than in a first trimester abortion.

VOICE 4: This is done by inserting laminaria two days before the abortion.

VOICE 8: After opening the cervix, the doctor pulls out the fetal parts with forceps.

VOICE 1: The fetus' skull is crushed to ease removal⁴⁵.

JANICE: I'm in a Catholic environment where placards are all over the place for anti-abortion. Don't speak to me of that if you are not going to speak to all life issues – capital punishment, euthanasia. And then, if you're going to believe so strong on that aspect of life, create programs to help these people. I just think instead of debating the issues we should be doing something about them.

JADE: I struggle every time there's an election because I am staunchly pro-choice. I've heard my grandparents and parents talk about what they think about abortion and how horrible it is and that angels cry every time there's an abortion. Angels are very busy crying, let me tell you that. I can't believe God wants any woman to become a mother when she isn't ready. Then people will say, for instance, well, it's God's will. If you were raped or molested is that God's will? What the hell kind of God is he if the *only* way he could think of to get this child born was for you to be raped? I don't think so! That doesn't even make common sense to me.

SLIDE: *Hospital room*

The women are helping VOICE 9 through labor.

VOICE 1: I started labor on a Monday morning

VOICE 2: They can't give me any medication and I have been up all night

VOICE 3: Crying 'cause my stupid husband missed his plane

VOICE 4: And I finally have her on Wednesday

VOICE 5: Having her was horrid

VOICE 6: Then they lie to you and tell you that

VOICE 7: You have to hurry up and use the bathroom

VOICE 8: So I go and—

VOICE 9: EAHHHHHHHHH!!!

VOICE 1: My entire vaginal canal is a rugburn

VOICE 5: but they forgot to mention that

⁴⁵ "Abortion Procedures." OptionLine Website. Retrieved January 27, 2006 from <http://www.optionline.org/>

VOICE 3: Then they come in and push on my stomach 'cause they gotta get the goop out

VOICE 2: It's just so bad

VOICE 7: And my breasts are blowin' up all huge

VOICE 4: They feel like someone stuffed with gravel

VOICE 9: 'cause I was gonna nurse

VOICE 8: And oh god, it hurt so bad I cried for two weeks straight

VOICE 6: You can't get any rest because the baby needs to eat

VOICE 1: You can hardly walk

VOICE 3: And no one tells you your stomach won't go down.

VOICE 4: And that's when I thought,

ALL: God must have been furious with Eve!

VOICE 5: He must have literally had fire coming out of his ears to put anybody through this.

VOICE 2: My mother's had three kids and she said,

VOICE 9: "Oh, you forget about it"

VOICE 7: And you know what I did?

VOICE 8: I wrote it down, kept a journal about how furious and mad I was

VOICE 3: This is not even real!

VOICE 1: Who would personally do this to us?

VOICE 4: An entire population of people!?!

VOICE 6: Who would do that?

VOICE 9: Nobody could love you and do that!

VOICE 1: Nobody!

A long pause. VOICE 6 breaks away from the group to speak.

VOICE 6: When I die, the only words I want on my gravestone are: "Mother of Tom and Matthew."

ALL: This is my body, broken for you. This is my blood, shed for you.

The women begin to move in reverence to Mary (VOICE 7)

VOICE 3: Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you!⁴⁶

VOICE 6: Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Luke 1:28, New International Version of the Bible.

⁴⁷ Luke 1:30-33, New International Version of the Bible.

VOICE 8: The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.⁴⁸

VOICE 4: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel.⁴⁹

VOICE 1: He will save his people from their sins

VOICE 7: I am the Lord's servant. May it be unto me as you have said.⁵⁰

VOICE 2: Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it!⁵¹

VOICE 7: My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.⁵²

*The rest of the women bow their heads as **VOICES 3, 5, 6 & 9** address her from their knelt positions.*

VOICES 3, 5, 6 & 9: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

SLIDE: *Her children arise and call her blessed. Her husband praises her.*⁵³

⁴⁸ Luke 1:35, New International Version of the Bible.

⁴⁹ Isaiah 7:14, New International Version of the Bible.

⁵⁰ Luke 1:38, New International Version of the Bible.

⁵¹ Luke 11:28, New International Version of the Bible.

⁵² Luke 1:46-49, New International Version of the Bible.

⁵³ Paraphrase of Proverbs 31:28, New International Version of the Bible.

SCENE 7

*The following monologues are spoken simultaneously.
VOICES 5 & 6 are standing on opposite sides of the stage,
and the rest of the women are seated around them.*

VOICE 6: Jesus is Lord. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.⁵⁴

VOICE 5: We have no clue that you even exist. We have no solid evidence that there is a god. We don't even know which religion is right. Is it the Muslims, is it the Buddhists, is it the Christians, is it the Catholics? We don't know. We have no freaking idea. People die, they can't come back and tell us what happened afterward. Bad things happen to good people, good things happen to bad people, it's hell, this is hell. And that's what déjà vu is about. Really, we had another life and now we're stuck and we're in hell now and the worst part of it is not knowing what's really going on outside of us. And that's my theory. We all screwed up really bad and this is hell. No fire, just not knowing.

"My Insect Life" begins to play. The women stand as VOICE 1 speaks.

VOICE 1: I do identify as both a Christian and a feminist and I don't find any conflict in that.

VOICE 8: I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.⁵⁵

VOICE 4: A history of patriarchy...

VOICE 9: Part of me chooses to be naïve

VOICE 2: God's truth will liberate women

⁵⁴ Colossians 1:15-20, New International Version of the Bible.

⁵⁵ Psalm 86:12, New International Version of the Bible.

VOICE 5: Women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.⁵⁶

VOICE 7: The king is enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord⁵⁷

VOICE 4: I can't believe that Jesus is the only way

VOICE 1: I do identify as both a Christian and a feminist and I don't find any conflict in that.

VOICE 8: Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.⁵⁸

VOICE 6: Jesus is the only way

VOICE 2: I am a warrior

VOICE 9: Many of us get stuck in a Christian box

VOICE 8: Hey, Jesus was a social activist

VOICE 7: I am a princess

VOICE 3: People like you made all six million die in vain.

VOICE 4: I don't like labels

VOICE 5: Pastoring is for men

VOICE 9: Notions of the feminine divine

VOICE 1: I do identify as both a Christian and a feminist and I don't find any conflict in that.

VOICE 6: Freedom from years of patriarchy

VOICE 7: Enduring pain

VOICE 9: A birthing of social consciousness

VOICE 2: The power to choose

⁵⁶ 1 Timothy 2:15, New International Version of the Bible.

⁵⁷ Psalm 45:11, New International Version of the Bible.

⁵⁸ Proverbs 31:30, New International Version of the Bible.

VOICE 1: I do identify

VOICE 5: My religion

VOICE 3: My feminism

VOICE 6: The power to choose how I practice

VOICE 1: Christian and feminist

VOICE 8: My faith

VOICE 7: How I serve my Lord

VOICE 1: I don't find any conflict

VOICE 2: I'm sick of the stereotypes

VOICE 8: Why can't we all just get along?

VOICES 1-4: I want to understand

VOICES 5-8: I want to understand

VOICE 9: These are my struggles

VOICES 3 & 6: Our struggles

ALL: Your struggles

VOICE 2: I found God

VOICE 7: I found God in myself. And I loved her. I loved her fiercely.⁵⁹

As the song continues to play, the women begin removing their colored scarves and they study them intently. They begin milling around the space, still studying the cloth and starting to connect with each other and members of the audience.

As they do so, various words appear on the screen.

SLIDE: *discovery*

⁵⁹ Shange, Ntozake. (1977). *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf*. New York: MacMillan. Page 63.

SLIDE: struggle

SLIDE: liberation

SLIDE: identity

SLIDE: faith

SLIDE: understanding

SLIDE: journey

SLIDE: freedom

*When the voiceover begins, the women begin to tie the pieces together.
When all the pieces are connected, they begin to move about the room,
everyone still holding their section of the connected garment.
The women place the long strand on the floor and look at one another.
As the song ends, each woman looks in different directions –
inward, outward, to others, to God.*

(VOICEOVER)

VOICE E:

She is standing barefoot in the kitchen
humming Sunday hymns in the morning.
Her body is swaying back and forth
as she kneads with her palms, pushing the weight
of her body down, down into the flour
and yeast, the dough sticking to her fingers
as she rocks, wrists aching with the melody
of her song. The notes hide in the creases
of cotton that drape her smooth hips swaying
back and forth and fall on the yellow tile
like soft raindrops, the glistening beads
on her neck. Her song is low, like the moan
of a laboring woman pushing life
from the sensual rhythm of her arms.
Her lips move slightly, words lost in the tone
of her body swaying with the rain outside.

END ACT TWO