



Paul Coughlin



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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH PAUL COUGHLIN AND JENNIFER D. DEGLER

1. Aren't Christian women supposed to act nice?

It depends on what you mean by nice. If you mean kind, caring, and compassionate, then yes. But many women are nice, not because they truly care about other people, but because they fear conflict and rejection. That's not peace-making. That's peace-faking. Keep in mind that the word *nice* is never listed in the Bible as an attribute of Jesus, his Father, or the Holy Spirit. The word itself has meant "unable to endure much."

2. How does having an incomplete picture of Jesus make Christianity seem impractical or not useful in everyday life?

Far too often, women are presented with a one-sided picture of Christ that ignores His loving forcefulness and highlights his gentleness. Women then believe that timid compliance and bland niceness are always the answer to the question "What Would Jesus Do?" When this passive, superficial sweetness doesn't help them, women blame themselves and believe following Christ's example doesn't work in everyday life. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

3. What caused you to write a book that encourages women, especially Christian women, to become courageous truth-speakers?

Both of us have worked for years helping nice Christians grow into good Christians, and along the way, reached a startling conclusion: Many believers lie repeatedly in their relationships. They lie by denying their anger, hiding their true opinions, and ignoring their own needs—all of which ends up hurting themselves and the people they care about.

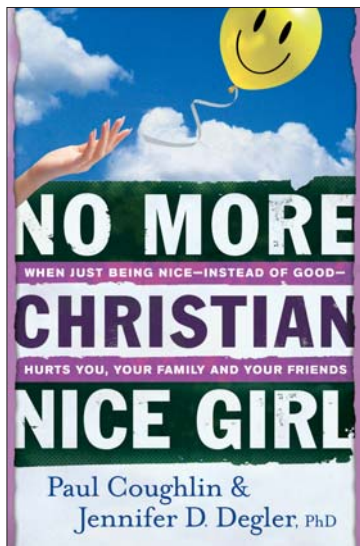
4. You emphasize just how important courage is in a Christian woman's walk with God. Why?

Because courage is the virtue that underpins all other virtues, especially deep and abiding love (*agape*). In fact, without courage, we are incapable of creating deeper acts of love. We see this in many places in the Bible, such as when Jesus rescues the woman caught in adultery. We usually focus on his compassion and mercy toward her, but if Jesus did not possess the courage to confront the Pharisees, the world would be denied one of the greatest examples of compassion and mercy throughout history. Courage is indispensable to lasting love and faith in God.

5. How does our culture produce Christian Nice Girls?

Women are socialized from infancy to believe that if they want to keep their relationships, they must behave like Nice Girls who are unrelentingly helpful, quiet, self-effacing, and compliant, and who never openly express anger. This Nice Girl culture, instead of producing girls who are honest, kind, strong, and brave—the kind of truly good women who can change the world—actually produces the opposite—catty girls who learn to lie to each other because it just seems too risky to speak the truth. It helps to create an endless procession of female bullies who believe that they have to silently attack other women in order to have their wants and needs met.

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No More Christian Nice Girl

When Just Being Nice—Instead of Good—Hurts You, Your Family, and Your Friends

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6. Tell us how both overprotective parents and abusive parents can produce fearful Nice Girls.

Overprotective, anxious parents send the message “Life is to be feared” by hovering over their daughters like a search-and-rescue helicopter. Abusive parents send the message that the world is unpredictable and that the only way to survive is to hide your thoughts, numb your feelings, and deny the painful truth. Both types of parents produce daughters who often live small, passive, fear-controlled lives.

7. You write that God prefers His women to follow Him rather than rules. Could you give an example?

The Bible has several examples of God’s Good Women who chose to be good instead of just nice. These trailblazers include Deborah, who bravely spoke God’s hard truths instead of following the Nice Girl rule of “if you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all.” Also, Priscilla, who courageously taught a male preacher what she knew about Jesus rather than following the Nice Girl rule of “just sit quiet and look pretty.”

8. If acting falsely nice is so harmful to relationships, why do so many women do it?

Because acting nice feels natural, so natural that it’s hard to detect its hidden, selfish payoff: It allows women to avoid uncomfortable but necessary conflict, and it permits them to chicken out of doing the challenging work of establishing healthy boundaries with gracious firmness. They get to ignore the damaging long-term consequences of smothering the truth and instead focus on the short-term comfort that false niceness (lying) can bring.

9. Why is conflict so difficult for Christian Nice Girls? How can they overcome their fear of conflict?

Conflict is difficult for CNGs because they are people-pleasers who feel terrible when other people are disappointed or get mad at them. Also, their spiritual training may have taught them that conflict is wrong or sinful for Christians. This is contrary to what Jesus said. He warned people that conflict would come their way when they followed Him.

Overcoming fear of conflict requires women to face the thing they are most afraid of: the possibility of rejection. If they will risk conflict by being frank and firm in addition to being gracious and loving, they will conquer their fear and develop genuine, intimate connections with other people.

10. Why do Christian Nice Girls often attract Mr. Wrong?

While it seems like ever-so-gentle, hyper-compliant, perpetually smiling Nice Girls would attract Mr. Right, many times that’s not what happens. Like the smell of blood for a shark, a CNG’s passivity and inability to say no are powerfully attractive to Mr. Wrong. He’s a “user” who knows that CNGs are easy prey who won’t fight back, stand up for themselves, or maintain healthy boundaries.

11. What is “Doormat Syndrome,” and how does it harm relationships?

When women don’t assert themselves properly and instead let others walk all over them, they resent it and stockpile unexpressed angry feelings. These eventually tumble out and are expressed indirectly in other situations, leading to unpredictable explosions over minor annoyances or to subtle passive-aggressive behaviors that allow women to get back at someone without being seen as openly angry.

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12. You make the distinction between experiences that hurt and harm. Please explain.

All Christians need to understand this crucial distinction. Spiritual growth and healing often require experiencing uncomfortable and even hurtful change, but no permanent harm happens. It's like when you go to the dentist. It may hurt, but the pain is necessary for health, and you weren't permanently harmed. Contrast this to experiences that harm us, which actually bring lasting destruction that keeps us from living abundant lives. Sometimes God and people who love us may hurt us in order to bring us a greater life. Christian Nice Girls don't understand this distinction, and it harms them in almost all areas of their lives.

13. How does a Christian Nice Wife act more like a little girl than a grown woman in her bedroom?

She lies to get out of doing an unwanted chore: she pretends to be asleep or sick to avoid having sex with her husband. She hides her body by keeping the lights out during lovemaking. She apologizes for flaws in her body that only she notices. And she won't speak the truth about her sexual preferences. All of this is very frustrating to her husband who senses that he's being lied to, which feels very disrespectful.

14. You write that God's Good Working Women sometimes need to offend others or make waves in the workplace. Explain.

If your primary goal is to be well-liked at work, you will probably end up trying too hard not to offend anyone, ever. But the nature of the work world, of competition, of supply and demand, requires change and change inevitably makes waves. CNGs believe that creating waves is offensive and bad, but God's Good Working Women know how to make waves that benefit themselves and their organizations, even if those waves bring changes that feel uncomfortable at first. And keep in mind that Jesus was offensive at times, even to his co-workers, the disciples. If you aren't offending someone occasionally by speaking the truth, you are likely too wishy-washy and are coming across as lacking backbone.

15. You are frank about the challenges women will face, particularly from other people, as they begin assertively speaking the truth in love and establishing healthy boundaries around their time and talents. What are some of those challenges?

While women can expect that their spiritually mature friends will support their positive changes, they should also expect that less spiritually mature people will complain about and unfairly criticize them for becoming more like the real Jesus. They should also expect to outgrow some of their friends and experience temporary loneliness as they await new, healthier friends.

16. If you could leave women with one insight, what would that be?

You will not experience the abundant life that Jesus promises until you courageously speak the truth in love in all your relationships and situations. It's a non-negotiable part of being Christlike.