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# A Woman Was Never Meant To Be Decorative

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*Rediscovering the Forgotten Power of the Ezer Kenegdo*

by Oludare Akinbo

*"I will make him a helper (ezer) comparable (kenegdo) to him." – Genesis 2:18*

*"He is your shield and helper (ezer), and the sword of your triumph." – Deuteronomy 33:29*

*In honor of one of the most amazing "Ezer Kenegdo" – best friend,  
wife, mother, and female human being I have been privileged and  
blessed to know and love!*

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*There is a word buried in the second chapter of Genesis that, if properly understood, would permanently silence every debate about women being lesser, weaker, or secondary. It is a Hebrew word. It is small. It is ancient. And God chose it deliberately.*

The word is Ezer (עֶזֶר) – pronounced *ay-zer*. In Genesis 2:18, God said: “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an ezer kenegdo.” Most English Bibles render this as ‘a helper suitable for him’ or ‘a help meet.’ And in doing so, they accidentally made one of the most powerful words in all of Hebrew Scripture sound like a secretary.

This is not an essay about who is superior. It never was. It is a call to recover something God considered so vital that He used the same word to describe Himself doing it – and then gave it to the woman.

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## **The Word That Changes Everything**

The Hebrew word Ezer appears exactly 21 times in the Old Testament. Only twice is it used in reference to women – both in Genesis 2:18 and 2:20, describing the woman created for Adam. Three times it describes nations – military powers to whom Israel appealed for help, and who failed to deliver (Isaiah 30:5; Ezekiel 12:14; Daniel 11:34). In every other instance – sixteen times – it is used exclusively of God Himself.

Not a servant. Not a subordinate. Not an assistant filling in the gaps. God – the Almighty, the sovereign Creator, the Lord of Heaven’s armies – is described as the *Ezer* of His people. Let that settle in.

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*There is none like the God of Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in His majesty... He is your shield and helper, and the sword of your triumph!*

— Deuteronomy 33:26, 29

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*I lift up my eyes to the hills — where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.*

— Psalm 121:1–2

“

*Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield.*

— Psalm 33:20

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*O Israel, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.*

— Psalm 115:9–11

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*Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God.*

— Psalm 146:5

The Psalmists used *Ezer* when Israel faced enemies too large to defeat alone — when the army was outnumbered, when the nation stood at the edge of extinction. They cried out for their *Ezer*: their God who would ride through the skies, bear the shield, and turn the tide of battle. That is the word God used when He decided to create woman.

This was not accidental. The renowned Hebrew scholar Robert Alter — who spent decades translating Genesis — noted that ‘*ezer elsewhere connotes active intervention on behalf of someone, especially in military contexts.*’ He translated *ezer kenegdo* not as ‘helper’ but as ‘sustainer beside him.’ Philip Payne writes: ‘The noun used here throughout the Old Testament does not suggest helper as in servant, but help, savior, rescuer, protector as in God is our help. In no other occurrence in the Old Testament does this refer to an inferior, but always to a superior or an equal.’

When God said ‘I will make an *ezer kenegdo* for him,’ He was not describing someone to fill in the quiet gaps. He was describing the kind of help that turns impossible situations around — the kind of intervention that makes the difference between failure and survival.

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## **Kenegdo — The Other Half of the Word**

The full phrase is *Ezer Kenegdo* — and the second word is equally important. *Kenegdo* (כְּנֶגְדּוֹ) means ‘corresponding to him,’ ‘equal and opposite,’ ‘face to face,’ or ‘counterpart.’ It carries the idea of a mirror image — not identical, but precisely complementary. Not above. Not below. But perfectly fitted to stand alongside.

Together, the phrase carries a meaning something like: *a powerful, vital, life-altering help that corresponds to him and completes what he cannot do alone.* Not a shadow. Not a footnote. A counterpart — like the second column that holds up the arch.

### **A NOTE ON TRANSLATION**

*The ancient Greek translators of the Hebrew Bible rendered ‘ezer’ using the word boethos — a term used in medical contexts to describe a skilled specialist called in to assist a colleague in a difficult, life-threatening case. Not a nurse. A specialist. Someone whose expertise you need to survive the situation.*

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## **Different, Unique, Designed — Not Better or Inferior**

Before we go further, something must be said plainly — because the same error that diminished women for centuries is now being repeated in reverse, and it is no less damaging for having changed direction.

For a long time, men misread the word ‘helper’ as ‘servant,’ turned a theological partnership into a social hierarchy, and used the design of God as a tool of

suppression. That was wrong. But the corrective emerging in many quarters today is not recovering the Ezer – it is producing a different distortion: the idea that because the Ezer was powerful, women are therefore superior. That the discovery of what the word truly means somehow crowns women above men.

That is not what the text says. It never was. The tension between the sexes – this exhausting, endless competition over who is more important, who is more capable, whose role is more significant – is one of the saddest features of our age. God designed neither superiority nor inferiority between man and woman. He designed difference, complementarity, and purposeful distinction.

Yes, the physical design of women is different from men's. The Apostle Peter acknowledged this plainly, calling the wife 'the weaker vessel' (1 Peter 3:7). But Peter is not making a verdict on worth, intelligence, spiritual capacity, or relational importance. He is describing a physical reality in the same way one might note that a hummingbird weighs less than an eagle – different design, different function, both purposeful, neither lesser.

God designed women to be physically lighter, with a hormonal architecture and physiology oriented around bearing and nurturing life. That is a design choice for a specific assignment – not a verdict on value. The body is the instrument. It is not the musician.

#### **ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY**

*In a family or marriage, God designed women to be the dependable, reliable friend, lover, and partner – equal in potential and destiny before God, though by divine arrangement, not an equal in authority and responsibility within the family unit. Not because of lesser value or importance. Because of unique function. The Ezer is a staunch pillar, a shoulder to lean on when a man tires from the weight of providing and protecting, a co-nurturer whose presence makes the impossible sustainable.*

When God looked at Adam – a man with a mandate, a garden to tend, a world to name, a calling to fulfil – He said, 'It is not good for him to be alone.' Not because Adam was sad. Not because he needed company at dinner. But because the task God had given him could not be fulfilled without someone whose strength was precisely

what he lacked. God's answer to the insufficiency of Adam was not to make Adam stronger. He made an Ezer.

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## The Proverbs 31 Woman — Ezer in Living Colour

If you want to see the Ezer Kenegdo in her most complete Old Testament portrait, do not look for a warrior or a prophetess. Look at a housewife. Look at the woman of Proverbs 31 — and look carefully, because she is anything but what modern culture has reduced 'domesticity' to.

“*An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.*

— Proverbs 31:10–12

She is introduced with the Hebrew phrase *Eshet Chayil* — a woman of valour or strength. The word *chayil* is used elsewhere in Scripture to describe Boaz as a mighty man, and to describe armies and warriors. This is no passive figure waiting to be admired. She is a woman of force.

She is industrious — rising before dawn, working with her hands, managing a household of real complexity. She is capable — an entrepreneur who considers a field and buys it, who plants a vineyard, who trades and earns. She is compassionate — extending her hand to the poor and the needy. She is an enabler — her husband is known at the city gates, trusted among the elders of the land; his reputation and standing are built, in significant part, on the foundation she provides. She is reliable — 'the heart of her husband trusts in her,' which means he can take risks, lead boldly, and build a legacy precisely because she is dependable. And she is feminine — clothed in strength and dignity, laughing at the days to come, her speech filled with wisdom and kindness.

Notice what the text does not say. It does not say she sits beautifully and waits to be served. It does not say she measures her contribution by how desired she is. It does not say her husband's income level determines her commitment. It says she does him *good* – not because the circumstances are good, but because she is.

This is the Ezer in living colour: industrious, capable, compassionate, an enabler, reliable, and thoroughly feminine. The world has not improved on this portrait. It has only forgotten it.

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## **Women Who Were Ezer — Portraits From Scripture**

The word *ezer* as a formal title is only applied twice to women. But look across Scripture, and the fingerprints of the Ezer woman are everywhere. *My Tohungbogbo was exactly such an Ezer Kenegdo in every respect!*

### **Deborah (Judges 4–5)**

When Israel was crushed under Sisera and his nine hundred iron chariots, God raised up a woman to be the help that turned the tide. Deborah was a judge, a prophet, and a military commander. When general Barak refused to march without her, she went. The victory song of Judges 5 is one of the oldest poems in Scripture – and it belongs to a woman who rose in a moment of national crisis and became the difference between survival and collapse. She did not seek a throne. She sought the rescue of her people.

### **Abigail (1 Samuel 25)**

When her foolish husband Nabal insulted David and his men, it was Abigail who moved with speed and intelligence to prevent a massacre. She loaded donkeys with food, rode out alone, dismounted before David, and delivered a speech so perceptive and theologically grounded that it stopped a future king in his tracks. David himself said: *'Blessed is your discernment, and blessed are you who have kept me this day from bloodshed.'* She did not wait to be told what to do. She saw the crisis, assessed it, and intervened with everything she had.

### **Ruth (The Book of Ruth)**

Ruth's famous declaration to Naomi is not romantic poetry. It is a covenant. Ruth bound herself to a destitute widow in a foreign land, worked the fields daily under the sun, provided food, and ultimately secured their entire future through wisdom, loyalty, and courage. She did not wait to be rescued. She did the rescuing. Boaz saw it clearly: *'All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character.'*

### **The Mother of Moses (Exodus 2)**

Jochebed's courage in hiding her infant son, then engineering his placement in Pharaoh's own household, was the intervention that preserved the man who would lead an entire nation out of slavery. No Jochebed — no Moses. No Moses — no Exodus. The history of redemption rested, in part, on a mother who refused to surrender her child to death.

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## **How Did We Get Here? From Ezer to Entitlement**

There is a question that hangs heavy over this entire conversation: how did we travel from the magnificent dignity of the Ezer Kenegdo — this image of strength, rescue, and vital partnership — to a cultural moment where a significant number of women measure their worth by their beauty, their capacity to be pampered, and their right to leave a man the moment his financial circumstances change?

The journey was long, and in its worst phases, the fault was shared. Men spent centuries misreading ‘helper’ as ‘servant,’ turning a theological partnership into a social hierarchy, and producing cultures where women had no legitimate avenue for the exercise of their Ezer gifts. When an eagle is caged for long enough, it forgets what its wings were made for.

But the corrective that emerged – especially in the post-industrial West, now exported globally through screens and social media – did not recover the Ezer. It created something different: a vision of womanhood centred on *receiving* rather than giving, on being pursued rather than partnering, on the performance of desirability as the primary currency of worth.

The logic runs something like this: because women suffered, they are now owed. Because men historically demanded too much, women are now entitled to demand everything. The result is a generation of young women raised on the idea that being female – specifically, being attractive and female – is sufficient grounds for expecting a man to build an entire life of provision and comfort around them while they contribute their presence.

This is not freedom. This is a different kind of captivity – one in which a woman has exchanged the Ezer’s shield for a mirror, and now spends her days admiring her own reflection while the battle rages without her.

When a woman walks away from a man who loses his job – not because of character failure or broken trust, but simply because the income stopped – she has revealed that she never saw herself as an Ezer at all. She saw herself as a customer. And she is returning a product that no longer meets the standard she paid for. But the Ezer does not leave when the battle is hardest. The Ezer is precisely why the battle does not end in defeat.

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## 10 Practical Ways to Live as an Ezer Kenegdo in the Modern World

The culture will not encourage any of this. The algorithm is not interested in helping you become the woman who changes the outcome of someone's life. But God is. And the women who have most shaped history were not waiting for the world to validate them. They simply were who they were made to be.

### 1 Invest in his vision, not just his wallet

Ask the men in your life — your husband, your father, your brother — what they are trying to build or become. Then learn enough about it to speak into it, pray for it, and help carry it. Know what keeps him awake at night. The Proverbs 31 woman knew her household's needs in detail because she was paying attention. Pay attention.

### 2 Become the safest place he has

The Ezer is a shield, which means there are things that should not be able to reach him because you are in the way. Protect his reputation. Create a home — emotional and physical — where he can bring his failures without being destroyed by them. Men who have a safe Ezer take far greater risks for the Kingdom.

### 3 Develop genuine competence

Deborah was not a decoration. Abigail was not waiting to be rescued. Ruth was not hoping someone would notice her. They all brought real, developed capacity to real problems. Invest in yourself — not just or simply cosmetically, but substantively. Develop skills, read widely, learn to manage finances and navigate complexity. Beauty fades. Wisdom does not.

### 4 Be present in the hard seasons

The Ezer shows up most fully when circumstances are worst. When finances fail, when health declines, when purpose feels lost — the Ezer does not reassess the relationship. She reassesses the strategy. She finds the resources. She stays.

**5 Pray like an intercessor, not a passenger**

The greatest intervention you can make in any person's life is to stand between them and God's throne on their behalf. Intercession is not passive. It is the most active form of help available to a human being. A praying woman is a weapon in spiritual warfare.

**6 Speak truth, not flattery**

Ezer kenegdo means standing face to face – which sometimes means being the voice that says what no one else will. Abigail told David the truth about what he was about to do, and it saved him from a sin he would have carried for the rest of his life. Flattery is cheap. Truth, delivered with love, is one of the most costly gifts a woman can give.

**7 Refuse to make yourself the centre of the story**

The Ezer is not the one being rescued. She is part of the rescue operation. This requires a fundamental shift from 'What am I getting from this?' to 'What am I bringing to this?' It does not mean self-erasure. It means that the highest use of your gifts is in the flourishing of the people you have been placed beside.

**8 Build, don't just inhabit**

Proverbs 14:1 says: 'The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her own hands.' An Ezer is a builder – of a home, a family culture, a financial foundation, a legacy. Not a passive recipient of whatever circumstances produce, but an active architect of what her family becomes.

**9 Serve freely, without resentment**

Service is not servitude. The greatest in God's Kingdom is described as the servant of all – and no one considers Jesus lesser for it. The Ezer serves from the overflow of strength, not from the drain of compulsion. Do not mistake service itself for indignity. It is the highest calling.

**10 Know your worth so you never need to perform it**

The Ezer does not derive her value from how desired she is or whether a man is chasing her. She already knows who she is – because God, who described Himself as Ezer sixteen times, chose that same word to describe her design. You were not waiting to be made significant by someone’s attention. You were made significant by the intentional word of God before you were born.

**A Reflection**

*Before He breathed life into her, God already had a word for who she was.*

*Not a word borrowed from weakness. Not a word that meant decoration, or ornament, or reward.*

*He reached into His own self-description – the word His people cried out when the enemy was at the gates, when the army was outnumbered, when survival itself was uncertain – and He said: that is what she is.*

*She is the help that makes the impossible possible.*

*She is the shield in the day of battle.*

*She is the intervention that turns the tide.*

*She was never meant to be decorative. She was meant to be decisive.*

*The world will offer you a smaller story. It will tell you that your face and body are your fortune, that your comfort is your right, that the best life available to you is one in which someone else carries all the weight while you bring your presence as payment.*

*Do not believe it. You were made for something the world has nearly forgotten.*

*Somewhere right now, there is a man with a God-given assignment he cannot complete alone. There are children who need a mother who fights for them with wisdom and*

*courage. There is a marriage that will survive or collapse, in part, on whether the woman at its centre sees herself as a customer or a covenant partner.*

*The Ezer who sat beside Boaz changed the entire lineage of Israel – and from that lineage came the Messiah.*

*The Ezer who stood before Pharaoh's river did not simply save her son. She saved a nation.*

*The Ezer who rode out to meet a furious David with bread and wine and wisdom did not just stop a massacre. She preserved the integrity of a king.*

None of them were waiting to be pampered.

All of them were too busy being the reason things did not fall apart.

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## **Rise, Ezer.**

*The world does not need more women who are simply admired.*

*It needs women who are desperately needed.*

*God already described what that looks like.*

*He used His own name.*

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