

## **Finding my identity in Christ: I am enough...doesn't go far enough**

We live in crazy times - self driving cars are the next big thing, we can get on portable phones and access an ocean of information, there are 75 flavors of ice cream and at least six different kinds of milk to choose from at the grocery store, there's a small robot that will vacuum your house for you, I can get on social media and find out what Disney Princess my old friend from fourth grade identifies with or what my sister in California had for lunch. In 2019, everybody gets to find their own truth, choosing from endless options and configurations, none of which are deemed better than any other...you can make up your own spirituality based on gong meditation and yoga and you will be celebrated for thinking outside the box. Social media, cell phones, TV, blog posts, podcasts, advertising and the old standby's of newspapers and magazines all provide endless amounts of input, opinions and distractions for our lives. We can very easily find ourselves blown this way and that by the winds of other people's opinions and what's trending at the moment.

In one of our Women's studies last year we worked through the book "All that's Good – Recovering the Lost Art of Discernment" by Hannah Anderson, in which we dug into the topic of cultivating Godly discernment for our Information Age lives. This Spring, we walked through the book of Galatians, and saw how the purity of the Gospel message must not be corrupted by adding or subtracting anything from it, thereby stealing the glory from Jesus and giving it to ourselves. Today I would like to talk about this idea of Godly discernment and the Gospel and take it into the area of our female identity – what the world shouts at us vs. whom God says we are through faith in Christ. I want to encourage us to fight to keep our identity centered on Christ, as the solid foundation that we need to withstand the storm of the societal pressures that swirl around us, to lean in to God's Word for the answers to our identity, continually grounding ourselves in Scripture, so that we can be salt and light in the places that God has put us.

When we look to the broader culture and the media for the answer to our female identity/self worth we find out that as women we should be - 1) physically attractive – and spending lots of time and money on looking our best 2) well dressed and pulled together socially & emotionally 3)live in a well decorated home 4) have intelligent children that are involved in many extra curricular activities 5) have mentally challenging and fulfilling careers and romantic relationships. If we have all these aspects of our lives optimized we will finally be what we are meant to be and worthy of love and acceptance, the world's and our own. We will have achieved the ultimate goal of living our "best life now", thank you Oprah. That we cannot possibly do all these things creates a chasm of dissatisfaction between our perceived ideal life and the life that we are currently living. Into that space steps the very popular self help/personal growth movement.

A quick Google search of best selling Women's Self Help books in 2019 popped up with these titles –

- 1) "You are a BadA\*\* - How to Stop Doubting your Greatness and Start Living an Awesome Life"
- 2) "You are Enough – How to Elevate your thoughts, Align your Energy and get out of the

Comparison Trap”

3) “Girl, Stop Apologizing – A Shame free plan for Embracing and Achieving your Goals” which is the follow up to “Girl, Wash your Face- Stop believing the Lies about who you are so you can become who you were meant to be”

As we can see from these titles and other messages, the glorification of and focus on self appears to be the World’s answer to any dissatisfaction we have with our lives. One of these is even written by a Christian woman. These popular concepts are coupled with the “I am enough” mantra and enthusiastic, glittery exhortations to “love yourself”, “just be you”, “celebrate yourself” and my favorite, “follow your heart”! I appreciate why these refrains resonate so strongly with women and I do not wish to imply that there is no validity to the deeper, core feelings that they wish to cover over, however, I do believe that these self help tactics are band aids for deeper spiritual issues that we cannot resolve on our own. (At it’s core, self help is antithetical to the Gospel). I believe that searching for a vision of our identity that is not rooted in who the Bible says we are in Christ is ultimately going to disappoint us and lead us into idolatry and sin. When the “success” of our lives terminates on our own strength and whether or not we can accomplish our goals and live an awesome life there will still be that hollow empty doubt inside. To say “I am enough” means that I am ok as I am, right now and that I can create my own value. I understand where this feeling comes from and why women say it, but this approach is not the solution that people think it is.

What do we find when we look to the Bible for the answer of our identity? We find a much bigger perspective, the eternal perspective “the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. “ 1 Samuel 16:7 “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28. The ideals that society tells us to live up to do not carry any weight in God’s eyes. He does not care what we look like, how well decorated our homes are, how much we weigh, whether we are a #bossbabe or a SAHM. He cares about our heart and whether or not it finds its ultimate rest in Him. When our heart does come to rest in Him alone, all the other facets of our life find their rightful order.

On our own strength we cannot save ourselves or make ourselves enough, it is only by falling at the feet of Jesus and pouring out our sins, shortcomings, anxieties, worries and insecurities that we will be restored to our proper selves, as we were designed to be. “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. “ Romans 5:1- 2. Matthew 16:24 states and, “Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” . Which undoubtedly is a challenging statement, but through the process of sanctification and the power of the Holy Spirit, we can hear this and not turn away in defeat.

When we trust in Jesus Christ as our savior, His righteousness is imputed to us and God sees us as He sees Christ; His perfect, spotless righteousness covering us! Praise the Lord! There is inexpressible joy in discovering this, it blows me away every time that I think about it. My sin

exchanged for His righteousness! “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. “ Romans 3:21-24 Truly, as we sang in our Worship time, “ In Christ alone, my hope is found.”

The beautiful example of Christ is what we fix our eyes on – “Who existing in the form of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness” Philippians 2:6 Not the carefully curated image of a woman seemingly effortlessly juggling motherhood, fashion, marriage, career and social life.

In my own life, I have found the answer to who I am meant to be by laying down my self centered busyness, spending more time in God’s Word and fixing my eyes on Him. I stopped trying to find truth myself, and let the Word of God speak for itself, reading God’s Word as His inerrant revelation of Himself and His plan of redemption. As a native New Yorker, half Irish and half Italian, I couldn’t have avoided the Roman Catholic Church if I had tried. My immediate and extended family worshipped and continues to worship the Catholic Church, with all of its sacraments and rituals, the Pope, the Virgin Mary and the local Priest, Jesus Himself is lucky to make the top 5. Access to God was through the institution of the Church – confession was made to a Priest who told you to say several Hail Mary’s as penance on your Rosary beads and absolved you of your sin. We prayed to Mary, as our intercessor to Jesus, the Priest performed the rituals and liturgy and no Bible ever had to be cracked open. There was no practical outworking of faith in our daily lives, only reliance on the system, including lots of kneeling and standing. I felt that it was empty and hypocritical, but thought that was my only choice. As soon as I left for college, I left the Catholic Church behind. I decided that I would have to go find truth myself. A charismatic college professor introduced me to Buddhism and Eastern Spirituality which I explored for a while - the ideals of compassion, focus on the present moment, karma, non attachment to material things, generalized spirituality and the personal search for enlightenment were attractive to me, although meditation was not my strong point. Sitting still for long periods of time drives me crazy. I continued through the next few years of my 20’s rather aimlessly – career wise and spiritually, in the whole “Nature is my Church” sort of way. This eventually ran its course as the vagueness of it all gave me no answers, the circular logic of my purpose being to make the most of myself did not satisfy me. The core of this self help/generalized spirituality, is that the individual is responsible for their own enlightenment and progress and there is no concrete truth or point of arrival, which I found empty and pointless

One evening in 1998, I remember being in my room and finally, rather miserably, saying – “God, I need help. I don’t know what I am doing.” Some months later I was going through a Mountaineering Class in Seattle, when a guy named Jason Nathaniel Griffith came into my First Aid class. Somehow we started talking and I began going with him to his College Group at Calvary Fellowship in Montlake Terrace. There I heard the Gospel from a Youth Pastor named Craig Finley. I had always thought that my options were the Catholic Church or some form of atheism, this Christ centered Protestant faith was new and like a breath of fresh air to me. While I certainly don’t recommend missionary dating, God brings His plans to fruition in His own ways.

I was baptized in the true sense of the word and a few years later, we were married. Unfortunately, I brought a lot of my humanist leanings into my faith, trusting Jesus and Scripture, but often trying to understand it through my old worldview, wrestling with God's sovereignty, reading to find inspiration, or personal application instead of letting the Word of God speak for itself. I definitely worked out my salvation "with fear and trembling" as Paul tells the Philippians in 2:12.

As I came to understand the Bible as God's plan of redemption and His revelation of Himself, not my personal "How to live a Successful Life" manual, I found the end of myself and a deeper understanding of my sinful nature. Over time, by His grace, and by fighting against distractions, I have come to crave the time that I spend being in His Word. I am certainly not perfect at this, but God has given me the desire to pursue knowledge of Him that I didn't have before and I am thankful for that. As I continue to navigate this earthly life in my roles of wife, mother, sister, child of God, the truth of Romans 12:2 has become more and more evident to me "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." I no longer feel blown about by the messages of this world or the personal need to figure it all out on my own and my prayer is that God would keep me in this place. One of my favorite Christian authors, Francis Schaeffer, writes that "As there are no little people in God's sight, so there are no little places. To be wholly committed to God in the place where God wants him- this is the creature glorified." We worship God wherever He has us, seeking to bring His light to those around us.

We humans have been created to be in relationship with our Creator and until we find rest in Him we can only make rudimentary attempts at creating our own value. We can attempt to fill ourselves with self affirmations, beauty products and great fashion sense. We can wash our face, pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, buy all the popular books on personal growth and follow the next female guru that comes along, trying to prop ourselves up from the outside when the only true sustenance is to find rest in Christ. In one of my favorite verses, Paul tells us "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:8-10 That is my identity, that is our identity, that is who we are meant to be, not what the outside world shouts at us.

Continuing to give superficial societal ideals our time and energy keeps us focused on ourselves and down in the weeds, when God means for us to "seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness" Matthew 6:33, to take our eyes off of ourselves and to seek His eternal perspective. Then, to go about the good works that He has prepared us for, living and sharing the Gospel of Good News with the world around us.

My prayer for myself and for us as women is that we would spend so much time learning about God and taking hold of the promises that are laid out in His Word that we would forget that there is any other way to see ourselves. That we would remember the words of Jesus in John 15:5 " I am the vine, you are the branches, if a man remains in me he will bear much fruit." So, I will

never be enough and you will never be enough because that is not how we have been created, and that is awesome because Jesus is more than enough for all of us.

Thank you : )

#### Discussion Questions

- 1) What role does social media have in your thought life ? Does it cause you to fall into envy, covetousness, feeling less than other people aka the comparison trap ? Or are you able to put boundaries around what you see/interact with ?
- 2) In one of Pastor Jim's sermons in the "Reframing Jesus" series, he said "Jesus crushes the things that masquerade as answers in your life." Take a few minutes to think about an area of your life that you have made an idol, either currently or in the past. If you have moved past it, how has it felt to let it go ? If you have not moved past it, think of a few action steps that you can take in that direction.
- 3) Why do you think the self help movement is so attractive to people ?
- 4) As a woman, is there an area in your life that you thought was important but when you search Scripture you find that it isn't important to God ?
- 5) List a few characteristics of a person whose identity is rooted in Christ.
- 6) Even though God's Sovereign plan will be carried out through us or despite us, do you think that your personal priorities are in line with God's ? If so, what do you attribute that to ? If not, what can you add/delete from your life to get more in line ?