

The Silver Lining

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*To Anita, Diane, and Judy,
godly mothers who share dear descendants with me.*

C O N T E N T S



PREFACE	Look for the Silver Lining	I
CHAPTER 1	Understanding Who We Are in Christ . . .	7
CHAPTER 2	The Older Women.	17
CHAPTER 3	A Marriage Refresher.	25
CHAPTER 4	Widowhood	35
CHAPTER 5	The Mother-in-law.	43
CHAPTER 6	The Glory of Grandmothers	55
CHAPTER 7	The Duties of the Grandma.	63
CHAPTER 8	Common Temptations	75
CHAPTER 9	Feed Your People.	85
CHAPTER 10	Living in Community	93
CHAPTER 11	Physical and Spiritual Health	103
CHAPTER 12	Stewarding Affliction.	111
CHAPTER 13	The Big Picture	117

C H A P T E R 1



Understanding Who We Are in Christ

Whenever we turn to discuss our individual callings and duties (whether as mothers, daughters, or grandmas), it's important to first review, understand, and settle in our minds the foundational truths of who we are in Christ. It's possible to get distracted away from some very basic principles when we find ourselves in new territory. But no matter what our age or circumstances, biblical principles remain the same. Thankfully, God has not laid out a new set of standards for our older years. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).

The Christian life is the same from start to finish. It is a walk of faith, no matter what part of the road we are traveling. We continue to put one foot in front of the other, just as we always have, trusting God as we go. Sure, we are in new territory. But all of life has been new territory! Old age is actually a sign of God's blessing. Remember the first command with a promise? "Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:2-3).

WHO ARE WE?

Thankfully, in a world mixed up, it is our Creator who defines us. Who else could possibly know who we are and what we were made for but our Creator? We don't define ourselves, and neither does the world, despite its ongoing attempts to do so. We must listen to the Word. The Bible tells us we are created in the image of God, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, forgiven of our sins, reconciled to God, and sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

"In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:13-14).

This is the starting point for everything else that follows: we heard, we trusted, we believed, we were sealed. This is great news!

Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

What a joy to know it is “no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”? We are united with Christ. He lives in us, and this is a living union, characterized by close fellowship with Him. It is a dynamic relationship, not a static state. We are to be growing in Him.

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13–14).

We are subjects in the Kingdom of the Son. We no longer serve under the banner of darkness and sin, but under the banner of redemption and love.

We don’t need to “reinvent ourselves.” We don’t need to have an identity crisis. We know who we are in Christ, we know who our Father is, where we came from, what we are for, where we are now, and where we are going. That is actually huge! I remember back in the 1970s young people were trying to “find themselves.” Apart from Christ, we really are lost. In Christ, we are truly “found.”

This quote from Kenneth Boa's *Handbook to Prayer* puts it in a nutshell:

To love ourselves correctly is to see ourselves as God sees us and to allow the Word, not the world, to define us by telling us who and whose we really are. The clearer we capture the vision of our new identity in Christ, the more we will realize that our deepest needs for security, significance, and satisfaction are met in Him and not in people, possessions, or positions.*

So let's push this into the corners.

OUR IDENTITY IS IN CHRIST.

We are defined by Him, not by our culture, not by what we do.

Women tend to define themselves by what they do. And this motivates women to adopt externals to "belong." I suppose we could call it a tribal impulse. We want to belong to a group and let that define us. We might look to be part of a group based on our job: I'm a mom, a wife, a nurse, a teacher, a designer, a bookkeeper, a baker, a grandma. Or we could look for the same thing by our hobbies: working out at the gym, joining a quilting group, running marathons, or opening a soup kitchen. Now these are all great things in

* Kenneth Boa, *Handbook to Prayer* (Atlanta: Trinity House, 1993).

themselves, but they are all secondary. None of these jobs or hobbies or endeavors can bear the weight of providing meaning and purpose for our lives. They are all finite, as we are. Some day we might not be able to do these things anymore. Then what?

If we let ourselves be defined merely by what we do, then we are at sea when we are not doing those things anymore. When the kids grow up, we have the empty-nest syndrome. When we retire from our job, we get restless after a few months. When our husband dies, we don't know who we are anymore. But we are in Christ! That has not changed.

OUR NEED TO FEEL NEEDED

We all have a basic need to feel needed by someone, and certainly this is a God-given need. It is not evil. But we can look for our personal value or significance in the wrong places. In other words, if we feel needed at work or if we know our kids need us, we can begin to look to them to make us feel important. But we can be fired or replaced at work. Our kids grow up and don't need us to hover over them or care for them the same way. This can lead to disappointment. We can be overlooked, under-thanked, misunderstood, unappreciated. Someone (important) forgot our birthday. No one noticed how hard we worked to prepare a meal. No one

compliments us anymore. We may feel minimized, unimportant, not needed. And of course these feelings can lead to self-pity, attributing motives, and more disappointment.

But if we find all our significance in Christ, those things we do are offered up to Him as a means of thanking Him for His goodness and kindness to us. He has made us for a purpose. He has created good works for us to do, and He has created enough to last our entire lifetime. This elevates the significance and importance of all we do. Rather than finding value in being successful at our work or in our homes, we find our value in pleasing God. He made us for a purpose, and He enables us to fulfill it. So our callings as grandmas or wives or mothers become more significant, not less, when we recognize them as not the source of our fulfillment. Unmarried women need to understand this too. They will not find their ultimate needs met in marriage or childbearing, and knowing this frees them to enjoy who they are in Christ as whole women.

OUR NEED TO FEEL SECURE

Security is not found in a blanket we carry around, but we might be actually viewing our husband, children, job, house, health, bank account, friendships, or dress size like a security blanket. These are

very unreliable sources of security. Husbands die, children grow up, jobs end, houses get old, bank accounts fluctuate, friendships can drift, health can change, and dress sizes are very fickle things.

We feel anxious and worried about many things if we put our trust in earthly creatures or things. The older we get, the more there is to worry about. So it is better to decide right now to forsake worry. It is like taking ugly pills anyway. Worry robs us of our sense of peace and skews our perspective.

The future can cause insecurity because we don't know what's coming. If we try to anticipate every contingency and have a plan for every possibility, we can run ourselves ragged. Remember, all worry begins with two words: What if? Don't do traffic in "what if" questions. Ignore suggestions of that nature because you can't answer them anyway! What if I get cancer? What if I don't?

In Christ we are safe. He defends and protects us. He will never leave us or forsake us. We have rock-solid promises, certainty, and assurance in Him. We can cast all our cares on Him for He cares for us. He knows the future and He will be there for and with us.

OUR NEED TO FEEL SATISFIED

True fulfillment is not going to be found in worldly success, as attractive as it seems. And by success I

mean yours or your husband's or your children's, whether it be in wealth, education, athletics, promotions, reputation, relationships, success, beauty, health, or popularity. These are all earthly and very temporary, and they can change or disappear in a flash. Don't let your hearts and minds be focused on things on the earth, but on things above, where Christ is. When we are giving our attention to these worldly things, then we are not giving Christ our all. If we focus on these fleeting things, we are set up to worry over them. If we strive for all this earthly stuff, it will drive out our desire for God.

Looking for fulfillment in people or stuff brings restlessness, dissatisfaction, and makes us discontent. You might know people like this, who are always adrift, always looking for something, never sure of their direction or purpose, moving here, moving there, and never finding paradise.

But Christ is the only source of true fulfillment. We can't look to our husbands to fulfill all our wants and needs and desires. Think of the tremendous burden that puts on them! We must look to Christ. We don't look to our retirement package or health insurance to give us security. They won't!

None of our deepest needs for these things (significance, security, and fulfillment) can be met in people (what a burden to put on them) or in our

stuff (what a foolish idea) or in our positions (which are changeable).

The Word defines our ultimate purpose, not the world. The world is always telling us what we should look like, how we should spend our money and our time, how we should dress, and what we should eat (and not eat). The target is always moving, and we can never finally arrive to the place of satisfaction. The world wants the glory that belongs only to God. In fact, worldliness is giving the world the glory that belongs to God.

When we let God's Word define us, we can find fulfillment derivatively from the things (good works) He has given us to do because we are fulfilled in Christ first. Living this way sets us free to enjoy the life He has given us in each and every stage. Knowing who we are gives us confidence and joy and courage.

