

IDENTITY

The Essential
Building
Blocks for
Wives of Elders

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Our Identity in Christ: Chasing Trophies

A few years back, my daughter helped me clean out the storage room in our basement. The area was filled with boxes that mostly contained junk, but a few had memorabilia from my childhood. One box in particular housed several trophies that my two sisters and I acquired throughout our childhood. One by one, my daughter pulled out trophies and read the plaques which proudly displayed titles such as “winner” and “MVP,” and each one displayed one of my *sister's* names.

There was one trophy left in the box, and I was sure this one would have my name on it. Sure enough, it did. That last trophy displayed my name in small print next to the larger letters which boldly spelled out, “Honorable Mention.”

I rolled my eyes while my daughter laughed.

Hey, at least I had a trophy.

The funny thing is that I still remember the feeling I had—the bit of defensiveness in my tone when I assured my daughter that along the way I won *something*. Even now, I can still feel the sting of that little “Honorable Mention” plaque. Not because the trophy mattered, but because being seen mattered. Being impressive mattered. Being enough mattered.

The truth is most of us don't ever stop chasing trophies. The trophies just change shape. Whether the trophy comes as praise from a boss, affirmation from a congregant, or appreciation from a friend, we feel unsteady until we receive it. And even then, the satisfaction never lasts. We strive again, slowly building our identity on fragile trophies which can never bear the weight of our worth.

As wives of elders, we are especially vulnerable to building our identity on things other than Christ—our husband's role, our ministry, or the approval of others. But Scripture dismantles those fragile identities and gives us something infinitely steadier: *We are children of God, united to Christ.*

Many women spend their lives trying to prove themselves, but ministry wives often do this with spiritual language attached. In church culture,

identity can easily become tangled up with ministry visibility, usefulness, or reputation. Without even realizing it, we begin measuring our worth by how well we serve or how faithfully we support our husband's leadership.

Now, here's the thing. None of those things were ever meant to carry the weight of our identity. Identity is the answer to the question, "Who am I at my core?" Scripture teaches that for the believer, the deepest answer to that question is not found in performance, relationships, or reputation, but in our union with Christ.

Identity in Christ is far more secure than an identity in what we do or with whom we are associated.

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THAN AN IDENTITY IN WHAT WE DO OR
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Before you are a ruling or teaching elder's wife, before you are a ministry leader, a hostess, a counselor, or a helper, you, sister, are a child of God *in Christ*. That is your truest identity, and every other role *must* flow from there.

So, what are some of the false identities in ministry which threaten to distract us from our true one? Here are just three along with the freeing, gospel counter-message.

False Identity #1: I matter because of who my husband is.

The first claim is that our spiritual significance comes from being married to an elder. It's so easy to try and find our self-worth in the role of teaching or ruling elder's wife, and in doing so, we ever-so-subtly begin finding our self-worth in our spouse's role, finding our identity in his position of leadership.

The Bible tells a different story; it reminds us that our identity comes from our union with Christ, not association with leadership.

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

In Christ, we died to the condemnation of the law when Jesus died on the cross. He took our place and

paid for our sin, and because of this, we now live under the law of grace. We are now not only alive, but Jesus is alive in us. What exactly does that mean?

For children of God, to be united to Christ means that by faith, we are spiritually joined to Jesus so that what is true of Him becomes true of us. His death is our death; His resurrection is our new life, and His relationship with the Father becomes ours through grace.

I once heard a theologian explain that union with Christ is like the thread of a necklace. All the beads on the necklace are the aspects of our salvation: adoption, sanctification, justification, forgiveness, etc. But the thread that holds it all together – is our union with Christ.

Your spiritual status is not inherited through your marriage union or ministry environment. It is a gift given to you because you are united fully and completely to Jesus.

False Identity #2: I matter because of what I do.

A second false claim is that our worth is proven by how well we support, serve, or hold things together. What we “do” as elders’ wives runs the gamut. Some work on staff at our churches; others volunteer in

the nursery once a month. Some have a flourishing career outside the home, and others work at home with young children. Some volunteer on a Sunday morning; others make space to attend a weekly Bible study. The point is not *what* you do but *why* you do it. And buying into this false identity is seen not only in our motivation, but also in the way we compare ourselves to others.

The Bible frees us from the incessant striving and unreasonable comparison. It assures us that our justification and worth are grounded *in God's grace, not in our output.*

*Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit,
are you now being perfected by the flesh?
– Galatians 3:3*

The question posed by Paul to the Galatians is an attempt to get them to consider how their new spiritual life began. Were their eyes open to the gospel because of the works of their hand? No. What we *do* does not ultimately define who we *are*. Who we are, before God as His child, is the work of the Spirit. And praise be to God for that!

Are you striving either externally or internally in order to feel like you have value? Rest, sister. You have received the greatest gift by faith, and that is

the Spirit of God living in you. We didn't earn it, and we don't deserve it, but because of God's grace, we freely receive it. Let your works be a joy-filled response to the One who saved you and not a means to prove your worth. Christ already demonstrated your worth by laying down His life for you.

False Identity #3: I matter because of what people think of me.

A third false claim is that who you are is shaped by how the church perceives you.

When I first became a senior pastor's wife, I was twenty-five with a toddler and a newborn, and we moved to a new, affluent city where I knew no one.

To say I was on the struggle-bus for a while . . . *is an understatement.*

Desperate to fit in, I tried to prove I belonged through outward appearances. The tipping point came when I came home with an oversized silk palm tree just hours before a leadership dinner we were hosting. I don't even like silk flowers, but I had noticed them in several homes, so I purchased a (*way more expensive than I thought it would be*) fake tree and wrestled it into our little Honda.