

# You Who?

WHY YOU MATTER AND  
HOW TO DEAL WITH IT

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# 1

## TROUBLE, TRUTH, AND GLORY

PERHAPS I SHOULD OPEN THIS BOOK with a warning. If you are looking for a book that will gently pet your bangs and soothe your worried brow, telling you how beautiful you are, this is not it. I will not stick only to the feel-good themes and ways to boost your confidence, telling you that you (no matter what you are doing at the moment) are *enough*. I will not give you a big pep talk about how to fight for you, and there is no chapter on morning affirmations.

This book is not here to help you in your quest for self-love. I want something much, much better for you, because I want something *true* for you.

The goal of this book is to encourage and equip believing women to see their identity in Christ as the most essential part of them, and to see all the ways which believing that will work its way out in their lives, manifesting itself as strength, dignity, and clarity of purpose.

My goal here is not mere hard words for the sake of hard words, but rather hard words so we can embrace the glorious Good News. We cannot have the one without the other. There is no need for Good News if we will not see the problem of sin. When we want to celebrate what God has done for us, we need to look honestly at why we needed it in the first place and what we are without it. If you won't face the fact that we have sin, there will be no joy in looking to a Savior.

My grandpa has always said that soft teaching makes hard hearts and hard teaching makes soft hearts. When we encourage each other with platitudes about our self-worth and our beauty, we are simply lying for the sake of *feelings*. When we accustom ourselves to soft

lies so we won't feel affronted, we become a hard-hearted people.

Ironically, the harder we try to make ourselves feel better, the further we remove ourselves from the one true comfort in this life. Our pain will only grow. We need comfort more and more, but we are taking away all hope of comfort by looking to ourselves for salvation. We are turning ourselves into a bunch of brittle, crackling liars who do nothing but affirm each other. There is no actual joy or peace here—just an endless quest to feel better, and maybe some throw pillows telling us we are beautiful.

On the other hand, when we are willing to face the hard truths about who we are and what our purpose is, we will not become a bunch of hard-hearted robots without feelings. Rather, our hearts will be soft, and our feelings will be rightly ordered, not defending us from God but making us run to Him. We will become much more real, much more tender Christian women. We can encourage each other without lying. We can receive encouragement that is true and actually life giving. Without our self-protecting goggles on, we are free to rightly see our Savior.

When we love the good news, we will willingly endure the hard words. When we discard the

hard words to protect our feelings, we will find that we have also discarded the Good News.

Parts of this book will be all about trouble. The trouble with us. The trouble with what we have been taught. The trouble with how we try to find out who we are and what we are for. The trouble with what our unbelieving culture has made normal. The trouble with our philosophical heritage (mostly those existentialists). The trouble with sin. The trouble with our broken relationship to God. The trouble with our attempts to self-flatter our way out of it. The trouble with self-worship and the trouble with soft words. Truth-telling doesn't always go down easy, but when it finally does, the dying patient gets better.

But in every case where we look honestly at the trouble, we will be equipped to see the truth and the glory that the trouble has kept us from. It is not enough to simply reject falsehoods; we must grab onto truth in their place. We don't want to simply get the rank stench of unbelief out—we want to bring the sweet aroma of truth in.

As a young child I could not decide whether to be a missionary or a cheerleader when I grew up. I remember the hilarity that broke out when

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## FOOLISHNESS

THE HUMAN STRUGGLE WITH IDENTITY is so pervasive that it is commonplace to hear people say things like, “I don’t even know who I am anymore.” This is not exclusive to unbelievers: it is also common among Christians. We have novels, stories, movies, and advertising campaigns about people who go on quests to find themselves—sometimes literal journeys, sometimes only spiritual or philosophical ones. That lost-self cry of “Who am I?” is the cry of a person who suddenly realizes that the



philosophy he has been following around in the grocery store isn't his mother after all.

Our modern society has been following wrong philosophies around for generations. We have wandered so far that we need a map to find our way home. Many of us would not recognize a Christian philosophy of identity if we ran into it in the street. We are so muddled about the self and the purpose of humanity that we no longer even know where to begin. We can wander hopelessly through life like so many people do, trying out one new technique after another to try to make ourselves feel better, or we can deal with our confusion (whatever it takes) and be living and acting in the confidence of our salvation and the joy of our Lord.

Paul says in Colossians, "Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words" (2:4). And then a minute later "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit" (2:8).

Worldly philosophies have fundamentally and tragically affected our modern culture. While we will be looking at some of that godless philosophical influence, I want to make clear that philosophy is not bad in itself. This book is in many ways an exercise in philosophy. The

things that Paul warns us about is not philosophy but deception. We can lose track of our fundamental beliefs through persuasive words. Empty, vain philosophies can and will cheat us of real understanding. The problem is not that we discuss ultimate things (obviously), but when we lie about them, or listen to lies. There is no gentle way of saying that the Christian world today has largely been deceived. We have listened to lies. We are entangled (though we are believers) in the consequences of unbelief. In some cases, we believe that a simple, “I believe in God” or even a vague God reference will erase all the ill effects of a deceitful philosophy. Christians must learn to look beyond the surface and evaluate the belief at its core.

The worldly philosophers and thinkers have always been something like the high-fashion designers who live in a sort of alternative reality. They make unbelievably stupid outfits for unbelievably tall and harsh looking people with show-poodle hair, wearing cinder-block shoes and pants made out of an innertube. They do all this while praising each other as stunning and innovative and talented and surprising, taking pictures of everything and putting enormous price tags on it all. Meanwhile, most of

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## SORTING OUT SARTRE

“BEWARE LEST ANYONE CHEAT YOU through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8).

Nihilism (the belief that all of existence is devoid of meaning and that nothing really matters anyway) should be easy for a Christian to recognize. This is the really bad counterfeit money that very few people who are looking for real meaning will fall for. Friedrich Nietzsche

(pronounced *NEE-chuh*) is the best-known philosopher who is associated with nihilism, but many different philosophers have dabbled to different sorrowful depths in this particular mud pit. There is a profound hopelessness to it. As Christians, we ought to know well that we have a hope. When nihilism creeps into the view of self, what we will see is usually drug addiction, crime, hopeless despair, self-hatred and loathing, self-mutilation, and just dead sorrow.

Nihilism is still a heavy influence in our world today, but this is a class of philosophical struggle that Christians recognize usually as the big E on the eye chart of spiritual hunger. We know that someone in this case needs Christ. They need to know that they have value. They need to know that Jesus loves them. They need to know there is help and hope, and a future with meaning. This is something that Christians are traditionally quite well equipped for. You don't have hope, you say? *I have that!* No one cares about you? *Yes! Jesus does!* You feel a great gnawing void in your life? *I know the answer!* Nihilistic expressions are to Christianity like a great lobbing softball to a well-positioned batter. It is hard to miss.

I do not think that nihilism has deceived many true Christians. In order to get us off our

guard it needs to be much closer to our experience of reality, or at least a little bit attractive.

Existentialism is related to nihilism, but we don't recognize it because it is all dressed up in human action. It appeals to us because it majors on what we might make of ourselves. Existentialism is a belief that has been accepted by many philosophers, but most famously Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre gave existentialism this accessible definition: *Existence precedes Essence*.

What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world - and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist conceives him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself.<sup>1</sup>

The idea here is that you don't mean anything, objectively. You exist as a person before you mean anything. Existence comes before you have any essence (which is the value of

1 "Existentialism is a Humanism," trans. Philip Mairet, in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, Revised and Expanded Edition*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (1956; New York: Penguin Group, 1975), 360.