

Seen & Loved - Heather Kimura

July 28th, 2023

I have a couple things I want to mention before I get started tonight. When God put this event on my heart, I felt strongly that we needed to also offer a survey to our women. I really do want to hear from you, even in this small way. It can be anonymous if you'd like it to be. So if you haven't had a chance to fill it out, please take some time tonight to do that and you can return it on the tables in the back.

Also, if you'll notice, we have vinyl waterproof stickers at your tables that say "Seen & Loved". Again, that was intentional, take one and put it somewhere where you'll see it. Maybe on your water bottle, or in your bible, or on a journal. There is something about taking this truth with you. Not just to know it now, but to remember everyday how seen and loved you are by Jesus.

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Did you know, that the Lord loves it when we gather as women? He's the one who put this event on my heart. And as I prayed more about it, it felt as though I was catching up to something he was already up to, and if I'm honest, I love that. I want you to hear this, **God cares deeply about the women in this church, and he's got us.** As I've been blessed to pray for this event with a few women, it was God who brought about this title Seen & Loved. He knows the deep cry in our hearts, and he longs to be the one that fills them.

Well, let me ask you a few rhetorical questions: Do you ever feel insecure? Do you ever wonder if anyone sees you? Do you ever find yourself comparing yourself to other women? Or secretly or not so secretly compete with them? Do you ever feel judged? Do you ever wonder if people really knew me, they probably wouldn't like me? Do you ever find yourself wanting to please other people? Do you ever struggle with a deep sense of loneliness? Do you ever daydream about an ideal relationship where all your needs are met and you're finally happy?

How many here can relate to one of those questions? I'd say we all have, right. Can I just say, this is totally normal? You are not alone.

Story

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There is lie that is being actively sold to us by the world and by the very real enemy of our souls, that to be seen and loved is all up to you.

1. The Lie: Being Seen & Loved is up to me

You've gotta be good enough. I hate that one. You've gotta be strong enough. You've gotta figure yourself out. You've gotta succeed. You've gotta fit in. You gotta find the right person or a better person to fill that need. You've gotta find what makes you happy, right. And then we look to our accomplishments, to our relationships, to our appearance, to our own self-righteousness for our salvation... for our feeling of worth and security. And they become merciless masters, chaining us to momentary sense of feeling seen and loved which never lasts.

Ask anyone whose had all the things, and they'll tell you it's empty. Fame, celebrity, popularity, beauty, respect, admiration, sexual desire, money, success, never satisfies, it just leaves us more depressed because what we thought would satisfy, ends up leaving us empty and disappointed.

"Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise... If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." – C. S. Lewis

As **St. Augustine** said, *"Our souls are restless until they find their rest in thee."*

Deep within us is a strong desire, a drive to be seen and loved. We were created first to know God and be known by God and then after that, all your other relationships fall into their rightful place. Some of you here have restless hearts tonight, hearts that have been hurt, exhausted, and disappointed. And the Lord is hurting with you. He doesn't want you to be enslaved to those lies any longer.

We have to first start by identifying what's there, what's in here, the lies we believe, if we want to be able to embrace the good things God has for us. We need to relinquish and surrender our own ideals and expectations made in our image, and we need to confess and repent of them. It's God's gift to us. We confess and say God I blew it with Adam, forgive me. I give him back to you Lord, he's not my god, you are. And then we repent, and we turn around, and get back to that beautifully orienting place of God's presence. It only takes one step to get back in step with God. He's so merciful, and he longs, he longs for your freedom even more that you do.

Matthew 11:28-30

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

So this is where we start, by identifying the lies that have held us in bondage - by confessing them. But now, let's look at the truth – That you are seen and loved by God.

2. The Truth: Seen & Loved by God

One of my favorite stories of this in the gospels is the story of the bleeding woman. If you've ever struggled with chronic illnesses or pain, you can relate to her story. Now in this day, any condition with bleeding, you were considered unclean. You'd be an outcast. Anything or anyone you touched would also be seen as unclean. Anytime you entered the city, you'd have to shout, unclean. Let's look at:

Luke 8:43-48

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. ⁴⁵ "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." ⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." ⁴⁷ Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. ⁴⁸ Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

After years of suffering. "Immediately the bleeding stopped." It was over. Think about it... 12 years of pain and suffering... gone. Healed.

And yet we know her story doesn't end there. If you know this story, you remember, Jesus is on his way to heal a dying girl. This girl is in critical condition, but, instead of charging ahead to attend to the urgent request of Jyrus, even surrounded by a crowd, he just stops.

He turns around in the crowd and asks, "Who touched my clothes?" When the woman hears this, she stops, she slowly turns back then falls at his feet and tells him the whole truth. Then Jesus kneels down and says to her with kindness in his eyes... "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

For the first time in twelve years she has a name. And not just any name, but "daughter". She was actually the only woman ever recorded in scripture to be called "daughter" by Jesus. Jesus stopped because there was more for this woman than just her healing. Jesus cared about her personally. And when he saw her and heard her story, he knew there was more there than a physical need, there was a need to be seen and loved. And with such tenderness, he took this rejected, hurting woman from obscurity and made her family. For 12 years her name had been unclean... she was something to be avoided, a disease, a curse. But now she had a name of inclusion, she belonged, she was beloved, restored to her people, and to her God. Talk about God meeting us at the point of our greatest need.

I know this is just one example, but when we look at Jesus, we see picture after picture of gracious compassion. Jesus is so riveting, magnetizing. Did you know you're the apple of his eye, you're a gem in his hand, you are so, so precious to Jesus. **You're worth stopping for.**

Eleanor Mumford says it this way: “Jesus was the greatest liberator of women the world has even known. Jesus loved and loves women. He honored them, included them, he included them as his friends, they were part of his inner circle. He began to bring Freedom to women from their oppression, he encouraged Mary to sit at his feet and to listen to him among in the company of the men, he sought out a Samaritan woman who no one would even go near because she was so disreputable and then he sent her out as the first preacher and missionary. He commended a prostitute who washed his feet with her hair, and he said to her she’d be remembered for all time because of her love for him, he was so proud of the Syrophenician woman, he commended her brazenness, I think Jesus loves feisty women, I think he loves spirited women. He was unbelievably kind, and gracious to the woman who was taken from the act of adultery and brought in front of group of leering men, naked with barely anything wrapped around her, in the very act of adultery for him to condemn, but instead he got down near her, and said to her, who’s condemned you? I do not condemn you, just leave your life of sin. Women were first at his cradle, and last at his cross, it was women who took care of his body for burial, it was women who he first revealed his resurrected body to, it was women who got to share the news first, all that in a culture where the word of a woman wasn’t even to be trusted, when her evidence wasn’t even admitted into a court of law, Jesus chose first to reveal himself to a woman. Women of God, Jesus is for us.”

Dorothy Sayers says:

“Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man - there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronized; who never made arch jokes about them... who praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously... who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious.”

God wants you to know that He sees you at your best and your worst and He chooses to love you regardless. He also wants you to know that your actions do matter and that you matter. He wants to speak to you. It’s in his words to us that we find a love we don’t have to work for or strive to maintain. God loves you. And you can experience that love on a daily basis. *“You can live into God’s love by hearing God’s words in his word, through the bible. Studies have demonstrated the fact that regular Bible reading reduces stress, produces peace, and helps people live lives of love and appreciation.”* There is a power in the words of God to us in the Bible that we cannot substitute with words from other people. Do we meet with him there?

When we spend time with God, when we have a growing sense of intimacy and dependency with him, something beautiful happens—a sense of *togetherness*. *“Togetherness is the immunization from the disease of loneliness. Togetherness is transformative, reversing the isolation of our souls and even reversing the impact of the disease in our cells because it comes with communion with God and companionship with others.”* As we give God our undivided attention, as we treasure Him, we deepen our relationship with Him and experience this sense of togetherness.

Our deepest longings and hunger for love and companionship are found in our relationship with Jesus. God promises that we will never go hungry or thirsty if we come to Him. He invites us to come to Him because He loves us with an everlasting love.

Jeremiah 31:3

The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

“To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.” — Timothy Keller

3. The Result: See & Love God and Others

And until our deep need for love is met, we are not likely to become lovers ourselves. We must first receive love, to give it.

1 John 4:19-21

We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

God’s love enables us to see and love others, it fills us with a gratitude that wants to also give it away. We want others to know what it’s like to know and see and love God and likewise be known and seen and loved by God. God desires to overflow our cup, so that it might spill out on those around us and change the world.

There has been an increasing sense of awakening in this season. God is bringing his presence. He’s reigniting calling and purpose in our lives. We as women are uniquely positioned to carry the Gospel forward in this season.

Will we be willing to participate with Jesus in seeing and loving others in a world that is hurting?

God is inviting us to partner with him. “Here am I, send me Lord.” Are we ‘willing’ and are we ‘wanting’ to be used by God? Let’s support each other as women in saying ‘Yes’ to the call on our lives, that we could be used in greater measure to bring God’s kingdom.