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Becoming

Who You Are
in Christ

Group

Loveland, Colorado



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The aim of Christian education is to equip learners to be both hearers and doers of God's Word.

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Learners understand and retain more when the learning process takes into consideration how they learn best.



Wonderfully Made: Becoming Who You Are in Christ

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Introduction



"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." (Psalm 139:14)

Welcome to *Wonderfully Made*, a movement of girls and women like you who are passionate about living lives of lasting value, beauty, and purpose.

Maybe you're holding this book and wondering how in the world you got it. Maybe you're not sure what you believe about God, about Jesus, about yourself, or about your place in this world. We just want to tell you that we're glad you're here. We understand you because we've been where you are—and we're the first to admit that we still don't have it all figured out. We've questioned who we are, who we're supposed to be, and why we are here. We've struggled to make sense of this crazy world. We've wrestled with our faith.

We believe the answer to these questions begins with one simple, mysterious, and profound truth: you have been made. Made by God and made for a purpose. You are not an accident. Your life is not the result of random chance. You have been beautifully, lovingly, and marvelously created. You exist because of God and for God. Not only were you created by God but you were created for a relationship with God. And that relationship is possible through Jesus Christ.

How do you answer the question *Who are you?* There are so many different roles we can play and so many masks we can wear. Our identity is often shaped by our surroundings and experiences. However, those masks we put on are not truly who we are—they are false and temporary. True identity comes from the One who made us, and that's what we'll explore together though this study.

We invite you to take a journey with us, one of discovering who God is, the kind of woman he created you to be, and the life he has for you. *Wonderfully Made: Becoming Who You Are in Christ* is a guidebook to understanding your true identity in Christ. When we firmly establish our identity in Christ and choose to believe what God says about us is true, something amazing happens. We no longer have to worry about "finding ourselves" or "creating ourselves" because we understand that in Christ we have been found.

Our hope is that through this journey, you will

- Be inspired, encouraged, and challenged to know your true value.
- Begin, grow, or deepen your relationship with God.
- Be empowered to live an outward-focused life and make a difference.
- Have fun on this journey called life as you step into your true identity.

We are so glad you are here. We invite you to learn more about our community of women and get more involved at wonderfullymade.org.

Love & Hugs,

The Wonderfully Made Team

Allie

Kayla

Christie

wonderfullymade®
♥ know your value



Allie Marie Smith | Kayla Mertes | Natalie Lynn Borton | Christie Myers





How to Use This Book



We encourage you to work through each lesson at your own pace. We've found it works great to spread the personal study out over the week, giving you plenty of time to absorb the material and not feel rushed or overwhelmed. The reason we didn't give you specific homework for specific days is so that you can do the lessons in the way that works best for you. Please don't feel pressured to do the a lesson in one sitting, but rather make a commitment to be intentional with your study by setting aside a little bit of time each day. To help the truths sink in deeply, we recommend having a Bible and journal handy as you dive into each week's lesson.

This study is designed to be done in a small group of four to ten girls or women. Each lesson includes both a personal study section (that you do yourself) and a group study outline (that you do with others). This book can also be used individually if you desire; however, we've found that going through it with at least one other person offers valuable encouragement and community.

If you have a larger group using this resource together, we encourage you to break into smaller groups during your weekly meetings. There are six lessons total; it's up to your group to decide if you'd like to do the study in six weeks or spread it out across twelve weeks. Choose whatever works best for your group's schedules and needs.

When you get together with others for the group portion, we recommend having one or two facilitators, depending on the size of your group. Feel free to break into smaller groups, if needed, to make the sharing time more personal. Each girl needs her own copy of this book so she can journal in it and make it her own!

Friendship and community is a core part of any Wonderfully Made group. Our hope is that you embrace this gift wholeheartedly. Be the friend, listener, and encourager you would want for yourself. We ask that you treat your sisters as you'd like to be treated—with respect and keeping confidential all the information that's shared. Our desire is that this will be a place where you feel welcome, safe, and valued.

We're so excited that you're a part of Wonderfully Made and pray that God will shine his face upon your journey toward becoming the woman he created you to be!







ONE: *Discovering Your Value*

Personal Study

"When a woman knows that she is loved and loved deeply, she glows from the inside. This radiance stems from a heart that has had its deepest questions answered. 'Am I lovely? Am I worth fighting for? Have I been and will I continue to be romanced?' When these questions are answered, yes, a restful quiet spirit settles in a woman's heart."
(John and Stasi Eldredge)

Hidden deep within the heart of every girl lies a series of lingering questions:

Am I worthy?

Am I enough?

Do you think I'm beautiful?

Am I of value—to my friends, my family, and the world?

From girlhood to womanhood, we are on a quest to have these questions answered with a resounding "yes!" The desire to be found worthy, loved, beautiful, and valuable is an insatiable search for significance, a soul hunger that fuels our every dream, decision, and relationship. Our search for value is unbreakably tied to our self-identity—how we perceive ourselves.

How do you answer the question, "Who are you?"

Are you your name?

Your parents' daughter?

Your boyfriend's girlfriend?

Are you your sport, job, GPA, talent, or checking account balance?

Are you an accumulation of all these things put together?

Take some time to reflect on who you are, and write your thoughts here.

My reflections: _____




There are limitless roles, material things, and identities you can “put on” to give you a sense of value. You can wear the role of an exceptional student, a great athlete, the nice girl, the successful working girl, or so-and-so’s girlfriend. Dressing ourselves in desirable roles, lofty achievements, fashionable clothes, and coveted appearances seems like the best strategy to silence the pervading insecurities we face. However, these roles, identities, and masks offer a sense of significance that only temporarily hides the frail inadequacies within our hearts.

While our relationships, interests, talents, and roles converge to give us a sense of self-worth, there’s a much more pressing identity issue our souls won’t let us ignore. We ache to know our core identity: where we came from, why we exist, what we’re worth, and who we really are. Unless you choose to totally ignore humanity’s most pressing question, you must either believe that we inexplicably “just happened” and evolved or that we were divinely created by God. Ultimately, our worldview shapes our identity-view, and what we believe about our origin dictates how we understand ourselves and our value.

This study you’re working through now builds on a foundational belief in the God of the Bible (the bestselling book of all time). Romans 1:20 says, “For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.”

While creation gives evidence for God, Jesus is the exact representation of the Creator (Hebrews 1:3). We stand on the belief that Jesus Christ is who he said he is as recorded in the New Testament. This is what we mean by “discovering who we are in Christ.” It’s the journey of knowing Jesus and discovering our part in his story. In God, “we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:28), so it is only fitting that through him we discover our true identity, purpose, and worth.



I was a good girl from a good home. I was a tomboy with missing front teeth who loved to play dress up in my mom’s pearls and high heels. I had a freckled face that turned tomato red after my soccer games, and I was as feisty as a girl could be. Sometime between growing from a girl into a young woman, my happiness, stubbornness, and confidence began to fade, and by the age of 12, feelings of unexplained sadness and unworthiness came to visit me.

Alie's Story





I started attending an all-girls private high school with everything going for me. On the outside, my life looked picture-perfect. I got straight A's, was captain of the soccer team, dated the captain of the football team from the all-boys school, and was well liked and accepted by my popular group of friends. But under the surface, I was crumbling with self-doubt, loneliness, and insecurity. During my sophomore year, the guy I was dating dumped me for one of my close friends. This broke my heart and seemed to confirm the lies I already believed about myself—that I wasn't pretty enough or skinny enough and that I didn't have a good personality.

Throughout high school I continued to battle insecurity, poor body image, and disordered eating. On the drive home from Friday night parties or football games, I often felt the urge to crash my blue Ford Explorer against the concrete on-ramp. I longed for an escape from the endless striving and sense of unworthiness and sadness. I tried hard to make myself happy and valuable. Next to my white nightstand sat my stack of self-help books and the journal where I confided my deepest thoughts and listed my big, lofty goals: to lose 10 pounds; to get a full-ride scholarship for soccer; to be a model. I believed once I looked a certain way, started school at my ideal college, and achieved notable accomplishments, I would be happy, worthy, and loved.

Shortly after I graduated summa cum laude from high school, I came undone. A dangerous combination of physiological, hormonal, emotional, and spiritual circumstances culminated in a deep, debilitating depression, and I found myself unable to sleep, talk, or eat. My body was alive, but there was no life within me. I remember lying on my bedroom floor with the lights off, the shades drawn, the light in my eyes dark, and the smile on my face hidden. Three weeks after graduation, I found myself in the behavioral health section of the hospital, signing papers saying that I was a danger to myself. Everything that had deemed me worthy in the world's eyes was stripped from me. My success. My beauty. My dreams. My goals. Even my sanity.

God began to use Christians in my family's life to shine light in my darkness. They began praying for me, offering me verses and words of encouragement. I became hungry to intimately know the God of the Bible whom I always believed in, and I threw myself into a relationship with him that would forever change me. As everything I claimed to be and placed my self-worth in was stripped from me, I was free to allow God to clothe me in my new identity. As I allowed Jesus to heal the innermost parts of me, I began to build my value and worth in him—simply as his daughter.



In Search of Value

Today's generation of girls and young women are having a hard time believing their value. We are people who don't what it means to be "wonderfully made."

- Only 4% of women describe themselves as beautiful.²
- Up to 20% of girls ages 10 to 19 are experiencing episodes of major depression.³
- Roughly 1 in 3 women will have an abortion.⁴
- 1 in 4 women will be sexually abused before the age of 18.⁵
- As many as 10 million girls and women are fighting a life-and-death battle with an eating disorder such as anorexia or bulimia.⁶
- In 2005, about one-tenth of all teenage girls tried to end their lives.⁷
- The prevalence of self-injury among teenage girls and young women is rising dramatically.⁸

The world's solution to insecurity is to simply find inner strength and love yourself. In the September 2009 issue of Glamour Magazine, Jessica Simpson opened up about her lifelong struggle with self-confidence and body image: "No matter how much money you spend to make yourself beautiful—with all the products, the diets, the plastic surgery—in the end, women need to fall in love with themselves and realize they're beautifully and wonderfully made."⁹

We commend Jessica Simpson and other celebrities for offering wisdom and opening up about their struggles. We totally agree that women need to know they are beautifully and wonderfully made. As a ministry, we are obsessed with spreading this message to women everywhere, but the very last thing we need to do is try to fall in love with ourselves. It doesn't work. We have tried, and failed. Failed miserably.

As warm-fuzzy, promising, and hopeful as the words of the world may sound, the world is never going to tell you the full truth. The truth is, you haven't been wired to fall in love with yourself but have been created to fall in love with the One who made you. Through knowing and loving our Maker, we will discover our true value. We can then love others and even ourselves because God first loved us.

There's a deeper message behind being wonderfully made that no "real beauty" campaign, celebrity, or any other self-esteem movement the world promotes is going to share. And it's this: You are not an accident. You have a Maker. A Maker who loves you, who knows you. Who calls you worthy. Beautiful. Valuable. A God who has planned all of your days before one of them came to be (Psalm 139:16). A Maker who has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into this broken world to redeem you (John 3:16); to one day make



things right; to turn your ashes into beauty (Isaiah 61:3); to give you a hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11); and to give you life to the fullest (John 10:10) and life everlasting.

To be a girl who knows her worth requires that you look away from the world's value system and instead look into the Word of God. Because it's there we discover why we are here and who we really are.

Our True Value

Our true value isn't that we're beautiful, brilliant, talented, or fabulous. It is not hidden in what others think of us or what we think of ourselves. It is not equal to our output—our accolades, failures, or potential.

The truth is, we are but a vapor, here today and gone tomorrow (James 4:14), yet God loves us. We are messed up, fragile, and coming apart at the seams, yet God doesn't abandon us.

We have worth because God himself is worthy and he calls us his own. "See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are" (1 John 3:1). We are worthy because our Maker and Life-Giver loves us in a way no friend, parent, boyfriend, husband, or person could ever match. God extravagantly, unconditionally, and boundlessly loves us.

Though we fall short, God picks us up. He sees us (you!) as worthy enough to fight for, die for, and to redeem. He has made a way for our wrongs to be forgotten and forgiven. For our sickness and sin and frailties to be healed and our souls to never perish. Our true value does not lie in who we are, but in who God is and in who we are as his children.

The Definition of Me

It's so natural to define ourselves in terms of our relationships, talents, hobbies, and accomplishments. Take some time to reflect on the specific things you define yourself by.

- What identity do you "clothe" yourself in each morning?

- How do you want other people to perceive or define you? Is this important to you? Why or why not?



- What ability, advantage, possession or relationship do you take the most pride in?

You are not your job. You are not your best talent. You are not your failures or set-backs. Take time to reflect on the thoughts below, and write down the things you consciously or subconsciously define yourself by. Some ideas include your job, your relationships, your appearance, and your possessions. Let this exercise be a reminder of what your true identity is not.

I am not _____

I am not _____

I am not _____

I am not _____

I am not _____

Whatever we try to clothe ourselves in other than our identity in Christ is a mask, a temporary cover for the needs, hurts, and desires only God can fulfill.

Losing Yourself

On the journey toward self-discovery, how often do we hear people say something like this:

I just need to find myself.

I'm still figuring out who I really am.

Life isn't about finding yourself, it's about creating yourself.

Our true self cannot be found through writing poetry, meditative enlightenment, world travels, or deep introspection. A self-consuming hunt for your true self does not begin and end with you. We must lose ourselves to truly be found. Jesus tells us: "Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39, NIV).

As author Eugene Lowry said, "The search for one's identity is doomed for failure because it rests on the false premise it is incumbent upon us to be successful in the search for self. Instead the gospel declares that we have been found; that identity is a gift one can never obtain or reach on the basis of human effort."¹⁰

In the same way that you don't need to find yourself or create your life, you don't need to worry about creating the "perfect personality." C.S. Lewis said, "The more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become—



because He made us. He invented us... It is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own."

The more consumed we become by the character of God and the causes he cares about, the less consumed we become with trying to figure our whole life out. When we really love God with our whole heart, mind, and soul, our whole focus changes. Instead of trying to love or find ourselves or getting others to love us, we find that we are flawed, ordinary people, extravagantly loved by an extraordinary God. Our true value (not our value to the world) isn't dependent on what we do or don't do. Apart from our Maker, we are absolutely nothing.

Remember that your significance doesn't come from doing, but simply being. You are invited to receive the most amazing identity: daughter of God. You didn't do and can't do anything to deserve God's love. Through faith in Christ, you are adopted into God's family (John 1:12). Now, hold your head up high!

Prepare your heart before God. Quiet your spirit, and spend some moments in prayer.

How do I become God's daughter?

We invite you to turn to page 90 in the back of this study to learn how you can make the decision to commit your life to Christ if you haven't done so before.



Loving Father, _____

It is in you that I live and move and have my being. You are the author of my life, the perfecter and finisher of my faith. Help me let go of the things I have placed my value in and to cling tightly to my identity and worth as your daughter. Reveal yourself to me in a greater way as I seek to live a life of lasting beauty, purpose, and significance.

My reflections: _____



ONE: *Discovering Your Value*

Group Study

Settle In and Catch Up

Set aside 15 minutes to catch up on life before you dig into this week's study. Get to know each other better!

Recap

Discuss this past week's lesson. What resonated with you? What did God teach you?

Sharing and Discussion

Use these questions to go deeper in your sharing. Be sure everyone has a chance to talk. This might mean you need to form smaller groups or pairs. And remember, what is shared here is shared in confidence.

This week, you had an opportunity to reflect on and answer questions about *your* identity. Take time now to share with each other what you discovered:

- How do you define yourself to other people?
- What identity do you "clothe" yourself in each morning?
- How do you want other people to perceive or define you? Is this important to you? Why or why not?
- What ability, advantage, possession, or relationship do you take the most pride in?

Reflection

Play J.J. Heller's song "True Things." This is available through iTunes or can be found on YouTube. Take time to reflect on the lyrics in this song, and then share your thoughts. (You can hear more of J.J. Heller's music at jjheller.com.)

Now spend a few minutes sharing your personal "prayer of identity." Refer to your responses on pages 13 and 14.

Take about 5 minutes to respond to the following questions on your own. Record your thoughts in the space provided. Once you're finished, you'll have the opportunity to share your responses with the group. You may want to get into groups of four or into pairs for the time of sharing.

- What are some of the places and relationships girls look to for a reflection of their value?



- What lies has the world told you about your value?

- What is a time when you felt that you weren't "good enough"?

- What worldly ways have you tried, hoping they would make you valuable, beautiful, or worthy? Explain whether you succeeded or failed.

Prayer

Grab one other person in your group, exchange prayer requests, and spend a few minutes praying for one another.

Write prayer requests here: _____

