

Real Insight from Real Women About *Invisible*...

I think of the many teenagers and young adult women in my local body church who feel unloved, and they need to read and absorb *Invisible*. Jennifer writes simply, delightfully, and to the point about your value as a person.

—Pam B.

By the first few pages of chapter 1, I wanted to scream, “That’s me!” Jennifer’s storytelling is so personal, like sitting down over tea with an old friend and chatting. Reading this book reminded me that Christ sees me as His beloved, and it made me feel ten feet tall and proud to be Christ’s precious child!

—Kim L.

Jokingly, friends and I say we are more tempted to run away from home as adults than we were as children! The chaos of work, children, ministry, and responsibility leads my heart to wander and ask, “Is this it? Is this all I am?” Jennifer helped me understand that downward spiral of questioning and doubting and how it all gets back to our Source of identity.

—Kristin H.

I have often felt like a “Gomer” and can relate to feeling “invisible.” I am a single woman who has always longed for that special man, and haven’t always made the best choices when it comes to relationships. Now as a woman who has accepted Christ, I still find relationships with men hard, and I tend to shy away for fear of rejection. I know I am loved completely by the Father, and I truly needed the reminder that He accepts me just as I am and expects no more from me than to be who He has created and is creating me to be.

—Jackie F.

Confession time! I am a fake! I have stared at, ignored, and judged many “Gomers” in church, work, and the marketplace! Did I act

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as Hosea did toward Gomer? No...I bypassed them, leaning toward “pretty people” ...people who appeared “fixed”! Today, I am on my knees asking forgiveness...and for grace to become more like Hosea...

—Bettie B.

At a time when insecurity and invisibility mark my life, the teachings and questions in this book shot straight to my core, disengaging the cloak that Satan was attaching to me. Who knew I was a Gomer girl?

—Cynthia M.

I'll be honest — I never thought I could relate to Gomer. But in the opening pages of *Invisible*, Jennifer Rothschild reminds us that we are Gomer when we go looking for love, acceptance, and OURSELVES anywhere other than God. We are all Gomer girls, and, just like Gomer, we need to remember that we are God's beloved.

—Melody N.

Somewhere along life's journey, now at age 70, I lost my spiritual identity. The path back to healthy spiritual self-esteem is laid out plainly by Jennifer (and supported by God's Word) in this book.

—Judith M.

I laughed, cried, and thought about myself and my relationship with God. I love how Jennifer presents stories in such a vivid and real way. Throughout the book, there are so many profound statements that shook my heart to make me move a step further in my daily walk.

—Yolanda B.

As I read this book, God spoke to my heart that my identity is in Him. For years it was in my work, then in my Mom. I have wondered, “Who am I?” As I read, I felt alive again. As I read “God is always ready to redeem you to rest in His abundant grace,” I felt a burden lifted.

—Karen G.

INVISIBLE

JENNIFER ROTHCHILD



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EUGENE, OREGON

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INVISIBLE

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Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rothschild, Jennifer, 1963-

Invisible / Jennifer Rothschild.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-7369-6573-6 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-6574-3 (eBook)

1. Bible. Hosea—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 2. God (Christianity)—Love—Biblical teaching. I. Title.

BS1565.52.R68 2015

224'.606—dc23

2015007408

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Printed in the United States of America

15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 /VP-JH/ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Acknowledgments

With heartfelt thanks...

To Phil: There are just not enough pages in this book to capture all I could say about who you are and what you do! You are both my coach and cheerleader, and I am forever grateful for how you sacrifice for me and the ministry God has given. I couldn't do any of this ministry thing without your guidance and enthusiasm—and, I wouldn't want to either.

To Connor: You're the only child still home, and you're so flexible and patient with your mom's weird hours! Thank you, son. You make me laugh and think—I'm so proud of the man you are becoming.

To Clayton and Caroline: Even though you live far away, you are always so close to my heart. Thank you for all of the texts that encourage me and make me smile. I am so proud of you both.

To Harvest House: So glad I'm home! Thank you for your consistent and unwavering commitment to Jesus and for your patience and kindness toward me.

To Leslie, Valerie, Carolyn, Nicole, Terrie, Denise, Teresa, and Pat: You all work so hard to make everything look easy! You are true partners in ministry, and I thank Father God He has brought us together.

To Paula and Joan: What would I do without you? God used you in more ways than I can list to help me along the way. Thank you for the homemade bread, the lake rescue, the laughter, the prayers, the tears, and the endless supply of Tasia! I am so thankful for your faithfulness to God and for your friendship to me.

To Drew Voris: Just because you keep hounding me about your name appearing in one of my books! There, Drew, satisfied? Keep growing in your faith, little brother, God has a bright future for you.



The ME in GoMEr

One humid August day, my husband, Phil, and I flew down the highway in our ultracool white minivan. (We call it the “swagger wagon”!) We were in a huge hurry because it was just the two of us on our way to a much-anticipated lakeside getaway. To help pass the miles, Phil turned on satellite radio—you know the one with about three thousand channels? He began with the audio feed of ESPN sports, which I quickly tuned out. He then flipped over to an afternoon talk show, and I spent the next part of our journey doing my best to ignore the host, guests, and audience members yelling at—as well as over—each other.

Next, he tried a live audio feed of one of the major news outlets. Listening, I mused that most of the news we were hearing couldn’t really be classified as news at all. These 24-hour stations had a lot of time to fill, and the stories reflected that fact. They were shallow and irrelevant.

How was I to know how relevant they would become for me? While listening to all this chatter, I was bombarded with about

three hours' worth of commercials—more than a lifetime's worth in my opinion! By the time we arrived at the lake, I was frustrated by the sad state of our media. I was concerned about the future of our country. But the main thing—the most important thing—on my mind was *me*.

Are my teeth white enough? How do I get rid of my hard-to-lose belly fat? Do I need to take fish oil?

I sized myself up by comparing myself to that brilliant news anchor I had just listened to and determined she was definitely smarter than me—and probably thinner too! *I bet she takes the fish oil I should probably be swallowing for my aging brain.*

All of a sudden, I was uncomfortable with everything about me—things I hadn't even thought about before—because I hadn't spent this much time in a long time focusing on *me*.

Was I skinny enough? Cute enough? Successful enough? Was my skin too wrinkly for my age? Did I need an eyebrow lift? Could that berry extract booster for only \$30 a month really make me trim, give me more energy, and totally change my life?

And what about my thighs? According to one of those talk shows I'd just heard, my thighs were definitely too flabby. I poked and pinched them as Phil drove along, and by the time we got to the lake, I was convinced that not only were my thighs too flabby, but I also needed a knee lift. Yes, I had just learned from satellite radio that women get them, and I wanted one. No, I needed one! Badly!

When we arrived at the lake, I pulled the seatbelt from my hard-to-lose belly fat and swung my thunder thighs out the van door. As the skin under my eyebrows and above my knees simultaneously sagged to my ankles, I lumbered into the condo.

You'd think that by then I would be more than ready to shift the focus off of me and instead just relax at the lake, right? Not a chance! As soon as I'd brought in my luggage and settled in, I fired up my Facebook and Twitter iPhone apps to write a post.

As I leaned back in the creaky bamboo rocker on the deck and turned on Twitter, I was notified that someone had retweeted me. For you non-Twittery people, this means that a follower quotes something you tweeted and sends it out to their followers.

Most of the time, I barely notice. I rarely click on the link to find out what else they may have retweeted. But this time—with my mind totally on me, myself, and *oh, my!*—I felt the need to see who else my follower had retweeted.

So I started scrolling. And you know what I discovered? I am not nearly as clever as that brilliant woman whose tweets are so profound. I have far fewer followers, so I must not be as interesting or well liked. I am obviously not as capable and keen because I can manage tweeting just once or twice every two days, but other friends of mine seem to tweet up to 12 times a day. (I know this because I counted. Yes, can you believe I counted?) And they are so much wittier! How can they be that funny using so few letters? They have a presence on Pinterest. You can find them illuminating Instagram. They're brilliant and busy, put-together and perfect. How perfect? Most of these women I was comparing myself to blog every day. E-V-E-R-Y-D-A-Y! Seriously, sometimes I don't even shower every day. That's not something I would tweet (#gross).

All Twitter was doing was making me feel insecure. So what did I do? I closed Twitter...and opened up Facebook. And instead of popping open my page and leaving a post, I clicked on the pages of other friends—especially the other authors and speakers I know.

Now, here's something you need to understand. Because I am blind, navigating Facebook is just plain hard for me. Even though my iPhone talks to me, Facebook isn't always user-friendly for those who can't see. So for me to spend my time—precious time that I should have spent refreshing and recharging—clicking and tapping until my knuckles were swollen and my fingertips were raw just shows my momentary obsession with myself and my desperate search for a sense of identity. In comparing myself to these other women, I found myself falling short in just about every category.

I wasn't popular enough. My posts weren't pithy enough. I needed to engage my audience more. Showing my vulnerability? I wasn't doing that either. (I discovered that followers light up the "like" button when the poster seems frail, authentic, or vulnerable.) And as far as friends go—well, I was hundreds of followers behind this woman or that woman!

Here I was measuring my success by how many Facebook followers I had. Whatever the number, it was lower than hers, so it wasn't high enough. My level of self-awareness was at an all-time high, and my sense of value was at an all-time low. By this point, I was completely discouraged and feeling like an uninteresting, droopy-eyebrowed, saggy-kneed, unpopular, has-been woman.

Compared to everyone else, I felt invisible.

I hadn't thought about myself this much for this long in years, and I was miserable. The more I looked at me to find me, the less I could see who I was.

Now, you may think that someone like me who is often in the spotlight has no reason to be so whiny! I know, I know. I'm not proud of what I just shared with you. You may also think I would—or should—never feel this type of insecurity. You may wonder how

someone who is seen and heard by so many people could ever feel insecure, inadequate, or invisible. But I want to be gut-honest with you right here at the start of this book. Sometimes the spotlight can accent, point out, and advertise every insecurity you have—even insecurities you didn't know you had! And the more people you have staring at you, the more invisible you can feel. We are all the same, whether we stand in the spotlight or feel like we live in the shadows. We all long to be seen, known, and accepted.

Now, I could explain my momentary identity crisis by saying, *See what media will do to a woman?* I could recommend we all turn off the television, retire the radio, and stay off social media. I could suggest that we eliminate all forms of advertising from our lives and thus avoid those evil marketers whose goal is to make you feel like a loser so you will purchase their products. I could rant and rave that Facebook and Twitter will do nothing but pulverize your self-esteem. But media isn't the problem. Media simply reveals the problem.

On that August day, the media merely served as a spotlight shining on the issue that was already there. I was having a walking, talking, Facebook-stalking identity crisis!

But wait a minute. How could this happen? After all, I was a Christian, for heaven's sake! I knew that God loved me and that I was valuable to Him no matter how many Facebook friends I had. I also knew that my identity was in Christ. So how could an identity crisis hit me—and hit me hard? My identity was in Him, right? But why didn't that *feel* right?

Isn't who I am based on who He is? And if it is, then why was I trying to find myself?

If I really believed that God sees me, why did I feel invisible?

If I am in Christ, why am I in crisis?

I know why—it's because I am prone to wander.

I am always one errant thought away from rejecting the truth that God accepts me and, instead, adopting the lie that He accepts everyone *except* me. I am bent on turning toward myself to find myself, gazing into my own eyes to find my identity, and basing who I am on how I feel.

It's my human nature. It's all of our natures. Like everyone else on planet Earth, I am prone to wander. I am bent on turning toward myself, being the first and biggest thing on my mind, obsessing about me, myself, and I—and straying from God.

What about you? Have you found yourself wondering why you don't measure up to your own—or somebody else's—ideals? Have you wasted time comparing yourself to others? Have you looked in the mirror and thought, *I'll never be good enough*?

As you consider your answers, I'd like to introduce you to a woman who had an identity crisis of biblical proportions. Loved beyond belief, this woman should have been able to rest secure in her identity. But she made the fatal mistake of wondering...and then she started wandering.

“Hosear” and “Goma”

I first heard this story from my dad, who was a master storyteller. Growing up, I loved the way he wove together tales that blended a lot of God's truth, a little bit of imagination, and a whole lot of Southern drawl! In fact, sometimes I couldn't quite make out the characters' names because they were lost in Dad's sweet, slow Southern twang. When he told me the story I'm about to tell you—a love story about a very unlikely couple—I honestly

thought the characters were named “Hosear” and “Goma”! As far as I was concerned, those were their real names until I realized years later that not everyone talked with my dad’s “Jimmy Carter” accent.

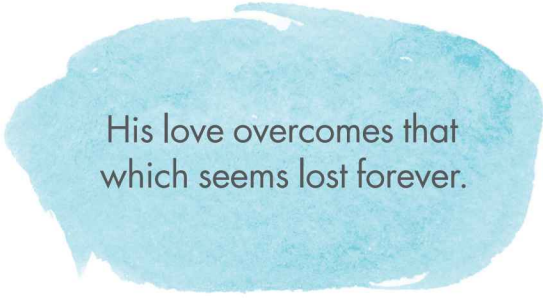
Hosea (not Hosear!) was a young preacher—a prophet, really—who lived at a time when religious people weren’t interested in hearing his message. Instead of listening to God, the Israelites were more interested in living life on their own terms. (Sound familiar?) They were, as the hymn goes, “Prone to wander...prone to leave the God I love.”

Then, one day, God surprised Hosea with a memorable message: Hosea’s bachelor days were up! But the good news came with some bad news. Yes, Hosea would get married to a beautiful woman named Gomer (not Goma!), whom he loved. But his wife would break his heart. She would love him and leave him—leave him betrayed, bewildered, and brokenhearted.

Yet this would not be the end of the story. Not by a long shot! God would help Hosea pick himself up, dust himself off, and then do the unthinkable—bring his wandering wife back home. And he’d actually have to pay money to get her back. He would have to redeem her.

At this point, Hosea must have cried out to God, “Redeem my wife? She’s thrown my love away! Why should I have to buy back what is already mine?”

But he did. Hosea walked up to the slave block and saved the unfaithful Gomer, proving that love can overcome that which seems lost forever.



His love overcomes that
which seems lost forever.

The story of Hosea and Gomer is a love story from ancient times. It's also the story of God's love for Israel. But beyond that, did you know that it's also your story and my story? It's a story about finding your identity in the perfect love of God, returning to the truth of who you are, and finding out that you are never invisible. You *do* matter.

Prone to wander, Gomer was bent on turning from her husband's love. So she set out in search of something more in her life—something more exciting, more gratifying, more daring. Hosea's love should have satisfied her, but a combination of factors—the culture of the time, Gomer's own family background, and her human tendencies—put her on the dangerous path of considering only herself.

The book of Hosea uses some strong words to describe Gomer's—and Israel's—tendency to turn away. Get ready—this could be harsh! The Bible uses words like *adulterer*, *harlot*, and *prostitute*. Ugly, right? I'd never want to be called any of those names. Would you? I'm sure that even Gomer wouldn't want any of those words describing her on her Facebook profile—even if some of the men of her time “liked” her status! No way!

Because I don't like those words—and because I feel so far removed from them—it's easy for me to keep Gomer at arm's length. I can view her from the tippy-top of my ivory tower, shake

my head, point my finger, and murmur, “Tsk, tsk, Gomer.” I can refuse to identify with her at all and cop an attitude that communicates I would never do that, so I could never be her.

But I have more in common with Gomer than I might think. In fact, we all have something in common with her.

So instead of labeling Gomer and distancing ourselves from her questionable past and lousy choices, let’s look at the root of her problem to see if we can better identify with it—and with her.

Prone to Wander

In Hosea 11:7, God sums up the wayward or adulterous tendency—Gomer’s, Israel’s, and ours—with one statement: “My people are determined to turn from me.”

Now, you probably wouldn’t identify yourself as a harlot or an adulterer, but do you consider yourself “prone to wander”? You may have had a much better upbringing than Gomer had or made better life choices than she did, but what about your tendency to wander away from your true identity in the Lord and search for your identity elsewhere—like I did at the lake when I found myself Facebook stalking?

So, how prone to wander *are* you? Let’s do a little exercise to find out. Grab a pen and, on the scale below, circle how prone you think you are to wander away from God.

(Not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Extremely)

If you marked anything below 5, let me clue you in to something you may not really understand about yourself and your Gomer tendencies. The prophet Isaiah (who, by the way, served the Southern Kingdom of Judah at the same time Hosea served the

Northern Kingdom of Israel) will tell you for me. Isaiah 53:6 says, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way.” Like sheep, we all have a tendency to wander and turn away. Really, all of us should circle 10 on the prone-to-wander scale!

I honestly didn’t think I was a 10. After all, I had never left God, renounced my faith, or done anything so radical as to make it appear that I had turned away. But I finally realized where I stood on that August day at the lake. Maybe my mouth preached that I believed. Maybe my written words showed my strong faith. But in reality, my heart had strayed. I was looking for validation outside of God. I was determined to be somebody—as modern-day culture defines *somebody*. I was trying to find myself in all the wrong places, just like Gomer.

Of course, Gomer’s actions weren’t my actions, and they probably aren’t yours either. But wandering from God doesn’t have to happen on the grand Gomer scale for it to be real and dangerous. We begin to wander when we look away from God and look to others for approval. We start to stray when we are tempted to search for something that gives us a bigger buzz than God does. That’s what I was doing on my iPhone that August day.

When our thoughts wander from God, we begin to wonder who we are. And when we wonder who we are, our actions will start to wander. We’ll venture farther from God to find out who we are. We’ll head away from Him and pursue other people and places, seeking our identity. And that’s when we find ourselves feeling totally invisible—right in the middle of an identity crisis.

When we leave our Source of self, we lose our sense of self.

Isn't it refreshing to know that you're not the only one who struggles with your identity? As we look at Gomer's life and consider our own, please join me in thinking through these questions:

- What is my identity?
- What is my identity based on?
- Do I identify with my identity?
- Do I accept myself?
- Do I think God accepts me?
- Do I feel invisible?

From Identity Crisis to Identity in Christ

There is a “me” in GoMEr—and there is a “you” in Gomer too. It's the part in all of us that is prone to wander and stray from God. It's the part in all of us that loses our God-given identity as we search for who we are in the world and forget about God. The funny thing is when we forget God, we can't remember who we are.

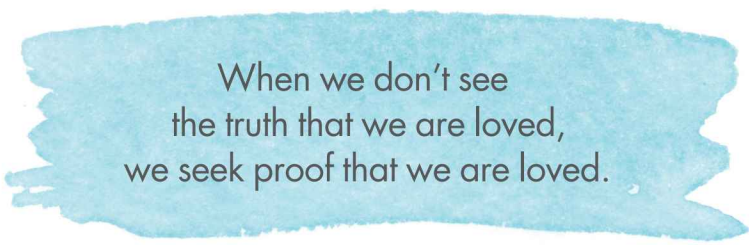
Like Gomer, we wander off to other lovers of acceptance, significance, and approval because we aren't secure in our identity.

When we don't accept who we are in Christ, we seek acceptance from those "other lovers" to discover or validate who we are.

And our culture—like Gomer's—makes it easy for us to do this. All we need to start the downward spiral is to compare our "likes" to someone else's.

Oh, girl, just like Gomer, many women don't live like God's beloved. We don't internalize that His love has made us lovely. We don't rest in the reality that His sufficiency has made us good enough. We don't identify with our identity. We don't accept that God has accepted us.

We're often quick to see our own weaknesses and flaws. But we're also quick to overlook what God sees in us. What God sees in us is what Hosea saw in Gomer, but she didn't see it in herself, and that's part of the reason she felt invisible and wandered. And my guess is it's part of the reason we wander too.



When we don't see
the truth that we are loved,
we seek proof that we are loved.

God chose you and me as His beloved. And when we, like Gomer, turn away from Him and proceed down the path of wandering, He is always ready for us to return to Him, to regain our rightful identity as His beloved.

I've been Gomer, confused and stuck in chains of insecurity that I thought would certainly choke me. I've stood in her shoes, unable to free myself—unable, really, to even like myself. But God didn't just see where I was—He saw who I was, and He sees who you are too. You are never invisible to Him.

Have you been striving for acceptance? God can free you to accept who you truly are.

Have you been stuck in an identity crisis? God can reveal your real identity—one that you can smile at.

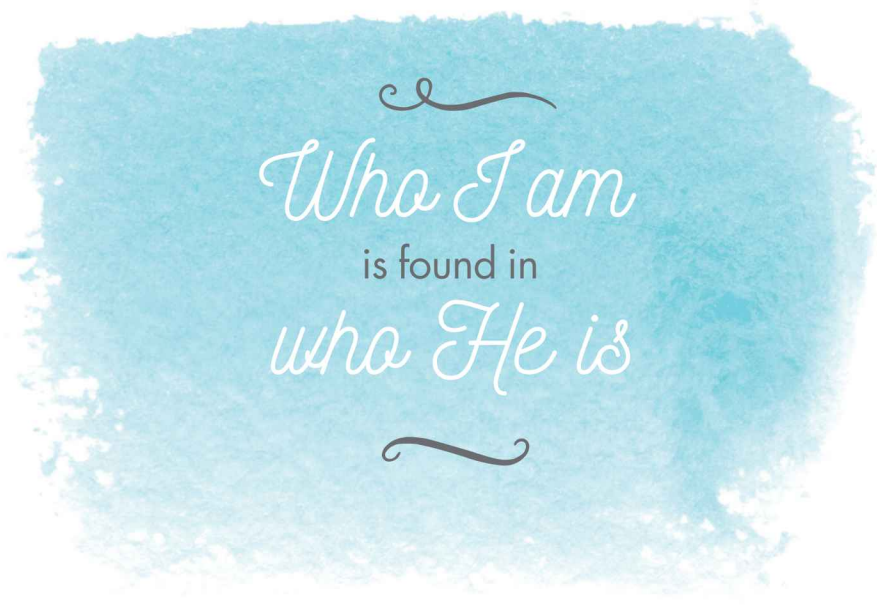
Have you felt overlooked, inadequate, or invisible? God can show you once and for all that how you feel is not who you are!

Oh, girl, are you ready to come with me on this journey?

I promise you I'll walk with you through every page of this book so you can get to a place where your feelings won't dictate your identity, your past won't determine your future, and lies won't dominate your thinking.

We can get there—or stumble there—together!

Instead of constantly striving for acceptance, you will be free to accept the you that God accepts. Instead of being perpetually stuck in an identity crisis, you will rediscover your worth. Instead of feeling overlooked or undervalued, you will discover that you have never, ever—no, not ever—been invisible to God.



Who I am
is found in
who He is

#TheInvisibleBook

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The Wedding

*When the LORD first spoke through
Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take
to yourself a wife of harlotry and have
children of harlotry; for the land commits
flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD.”*

HOSEA 1:2 NASB

She greeted me as I entered the cafeteria on Parents’ Day. Our oldest son, Clayton, was a freshman at Baylor University, and this was the first time after dropping him off at college that we’d been back to visit. We had met faculty members, the resident director of his dorm, and lots of his new friends. So when this woman greeted me, I politely asked, “Now, tell me who you are?”

The woman hesitated. Her pause made me wonder if I had said something wrong. Maybe she wasn’t accustomed to being asked this question. *Maybe*, I thought, *I should know who she is*. I imagine she looked down and saw my white cane and realized I couldn’t

see her, and that may be why she answered in a warm voice, “Oh, ma’am, I’m nobody. I just clean tables.”

I reached toward her and found her hand. “You are not a nobody! You are not *just* a table cleaner!” I told her. “My name is Jennifer. What’s yours?” She laughed and told me her name. As I told her goodbye and walked with my son to our table, I thought, *Nobody is a nobody!*

And it’s true, isn’t it? Nobody is a nobody, and nobody is *just* a table cleaner. Or *just* a mom. Or *just* a clerk. Or *just* an...anything! But we often find ourselves in places or seasons of life where we feel like a nobody. It can be hard to see our own value if we are feeling constantly overlooked or we associate our value with our virtue. You know, if we are good, we are worthy of being acknowledged. If we behave, we merit attention.

I have a feeling that our girl Gomer might have felt that way. After all, if she’d been asked, “Tell me who are you?” she’d probably say, “Oh, I’m nobody.”

But her answer should have been, “I am Gomer.”

I know, I know—what a name! Not pretty, but I bet she was.

She lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the mid-800s BC. All we know about her is written in the book of Hosea, and when the book opens, she is a single gal! I imagine, though, that she doesn’t lack for dates. She’s never home on the weekends, and she apparently has quite a reputation. Her dresses are a little tight, her skirts somewhat short, and her blouses a bit low. Let’s just say that men really enjoy her company.

We don’t know tons about Gomer, but we do know that her father’s name was Diblaim (Hosea 1:3). Like many biblical names,

the meaning of her father's name is significant. It means "double portion of raisin cakes." Now, raisin cakes were like an aphrodisiac in Gomer's time. So Diblaim's name implied a lot about his character. It's safe to say that he probably lived up to his name. He was likely so into his own lust that he valued his own satisfaction more than he valued his daughter. So it could be that the only time Gomer got attention from her father was when... Well, you can imagine. I'm guessing she saw much more than a little girl should see. Her innocence was probably stolen from her and replaced with a knowing that no girl should have. Likely Gomer was a teenager whose innocence was so far in her rearview mirror that she couldn't even remember it.

So what's a girl to do? She either withers up in shame or fear, or she just goes with it. Gomer went with it—and became quite a mess. She partied and went for men who reinforced what she thought of herself. To get attention from a man—even the wrong kind of man—was what she wanted, and she did whatever it took to get that attention. She got around and had quite the reputation. She wasn't the kind of woman a man wanted to marry. She was the kind of woman a man wanted to... Well, use your imagination. Let's just say that Gomer was known as easy and available. There were whispers around Israel that she was actually a prostitute.

Gomer was probably stuck in painful self-awareness, lost in insecurity, and longing to be accepted for who she was, not for what she could do. Her shaky upbringing probably was part of the reason she made the choices she did when she grew up. Of course, I'm using my imagination based on a few facts from Scripture because all we really know of her family is the name of her father

and the lifestyle she lived as an adult. But names meant something in the Bible, so dear old Dad's name represented who he was. And Gomer's name? It meant "completion," as in the filling up of the measure of idolatry or fully-ripened wickedness. From her name we can gather that Gomer's lifestyle was the fully-ripened effect of her father's selfish and sinful choices.

The Bible doesn't say anything about Gomer's mother. But because she is silent in Scripture, let's have her be silent in this story too. I suppose she might have been one of those mothers who acted like nothing wrong or inappropriate was going on. Gomer probably didn't know if it was powerlessness, denial, ignorance, or apathy, but her mom may as well have been absent. As a grown-up, though, I bet Gomer understood her mother a little better. She was as enslaved as Gomer was—just for different reasons.

Overlooked and undervalued, Gomer likely felt unworthy—like a nobody.

Now, here's where the story gets really interesting. Even though she saw herself as invisible, as least likely to stand out in a good way, Hosea saw her. And he chose her.

Who, Me?

It's really hard to imagine Hosea—a preacher, a prophet—marrying a woman like Gomer. That just doesn't happen! And because it's so beyond our realm of imagination, we could dismiss it as simply something cultural and miss out on the power of this story. So let's yank Gomer's story out of history and bring it into our own backyard.

Think of the most godly, spiritual man you can imagine. He's charming, handsome, and...single! Pretend he ministers at a

church. How about your church? Hey, let's make him your pastor—your single, most-eligible-bachelor pastor! People listen to him Sunday after Sunday as he teaches God's Word. All the old ladies in the church try to set him up with their granddaughters. The single women are secretly wishing he would ask them out. But he doesn't date—ever. And then out of the blue, he starts seeing someone.

She attends one Sunday morning, and though nobody has ever seen her before, every man in the sanctuary is trying his best not to stare at her. And you know why. She is wearing a rather tight dress. She has that way about her—you know, that sexy thing going on. It's in the way she walks and shifts her eyes and moves her mouth. She's pretty, you have to admit, and she does have a very nice figure. She certainly doesn't have saggy knees or even an ounce of that hard-to-lose belly fat! In fact, you're feeling the urge to shove a dozen donuts down her throat to fatten her up, but you behave.

Beyond anything else, though, you're just plain shocked that the pastor of your church—the bachelor who everyone has been trying to set up with a sweet, piano-playing, Christian young woman—has brought *this* woman to church. Trying to adjust your thinking, you tell yourself that he probably brought her in off the street just to share God's love. Completely harmless!

But then she returns Sunday after Sunday. You think, *Our minister is missionary dating!* And you start to see Facebook pictures of them together. She isn't dressed quite as revealing—okay, trashy—as she was the first time you saw her, but she still has that look about her.

One Sunday morning your pastor stands up at the front of the church and awkwardly proclaims, "Uh...I have an announcement."

He clears his throat, fidgets with his tie, and continues. “Many of you have met my friend Gomer. Well, uh...I believe God has told me to marry her.”

You gasp. Everyone around you is visibly shocked. People try to hide their surprise—and disappointment. But no one in that building is more shocked than Gomer.

She sits up a little straighter as the pastor continues, “Uh, Gomer...” He leaves the pulpit and walks to the first row of pews where she is seated, then kneels before her, and says, “I believe you are the woman God has chosen for me. Will you marry me?”

Gomer is absolutely shocked. Is this for real? Does he really love her this much? After all, he knows who she truly is, doesn't he? Her eyes well up with tears, and all she can do is nod yes. He lifts her hand to his lips and kisses it. You are dumbfounded, and as soon as the service has ended, you and your friend rush out to the parking lot to talk. “Can you believe it? Has he lost his mind?” you ask her. “She's not good enough for him! He deserves better. Of all the good, pure, lovely girls he could have chosen, why did he choose her?”

Soon the wedding day arrives. You sit in the same pew you were sitting in when the radical proposal occurred. The music begins. Hosea's not-so-proud mama slinks down the aisle, eyes staring into the ugly green carpet. And then the wedding march begins.

Gomer's parents aren't at the wedding. No surprise there, considering they've been emotionally absent her entire life. So Gomer walks down the aisle alone. You scrutinize her and have to admit she's a pretty bride. After all, isn't every bride beautiful on her wedding day? You notice a slight change in her. She looks a little less confident, a little less sexy, a little softer. Is that a glow you detect? Her eyes dart back and forth as if she is the most surprised woman

in the church. Though veiled in lace, she doesn't look completely sure-footed. In fact, she looks a little bit nervous. She is wearing a wedding gown, but she looks more like a girl playing dress-up than a bride. The whole scene is so surreal that you try to dismiss your thoughts and focus on the wedding cake to follow. *Hmmm...I wonder if the frosting will be whipped cream or buttercream?*

Hosea and Gomer both say "I do," and in no time, the wedding is over, rice has been thrown, and the happy couple has headed off on their honeymoon.

"He married *her*?" It's the question everyone at the reception is asking. "Why would he marry *her*?"

And that's the same thing I'm asking centuries later. *Why did he marry her?* Okay, I know the right answer—the Bible answer. Hosea married Gomer, who would be unfaithful to him, as a picture of God's love for the unfaithful nation of Israel. But let's get back to right here, right now. If this happened in my church, I would wonder big time, wouldn't you?

And do you know why I'd wonder? Because deep down, I believe that Gomer is not good enough for Hosea. She is dirty. He is clean. She is full of flaws. He is fabulous. She is not trustworthy. He is too trusting. She is a nobody. He is a somebody.

She does not deserve his attention—or his love.

How would you feel if you were in that church on their wedding day? Would you feel that Gomer deserved to be married to a man like Hosea? Now transfer that to the picture of God and Israel or, closer to home, God and you.

Jesus said, "God never overlooks a single [canary]. And he pays even greater attention to you, down to the last detail—even numbering the hairs on your head!" (Luke 12:6-7 MSG).

God never overlooks you! Why does God love you like that? Why does He accept the imperfect you? After all, compared to His purity, aren't you dirty? So what is God's love for you based on? Why in the world does He choose you, accept you, and love you?

God's Love Is Scandalous

Hosea's love for Gomer surely created a stir around Israel. It was simply scandalous that a prophet would court—and then marry—a woman with her reputation. A situation like this would have made some folks—religious folks, especially—question Hosea's character, wouldn't it?

If Hosea's love for Gomer is a picture of God's love for Israel and for us, what does that say about God? What does that say about us? How did this scandalous love come to be? Did God see Israel—and us—and become filled with pity that turned to love? This passage from the book of Deuteronomy answers that last question:

For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 NASB

God clearly chose and loved Israel. The love was a “just because” kind of love. It wasn’t because they were especially loyal or lovely. God simply chose them and loved them.

God chooses you and loves you too (see John 15:16). It isn’t because you are especially loyal or lovely either. He loves you with that same “just because” kind of love He had for Israel.

So when did that love happen? When did God start loving you? After all, you—unlike the nation of Israel—don’t have your own private verse in the Bible documenting it! Was it on the day you said “I do” that His love for you began? Or did His love for you start on the same day He made you, created you, and gave you life?

Have you ever thought, *How could a pure, perfect God accept me or even love me? If He places His affection on me, doesn’t that diminish Him? Isn’t He above loving me?* I have struggled with these very thoughts!

The more I try to see the *me* in Gomer, the more I have to honestly deal with these questions. Over and over, I see this God—this long-suffering, emotional God who loves me no matter what. To me that is scandalous.

So let’s just deal with it, okay?

To even begin to grasp the magnitude of God’s love toward us, we need to *shift our focus*. We need to focus on Him and His nature—and His nature is love.

God says that He has loved us with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3). When did “everlasting” begin? And when does it end?

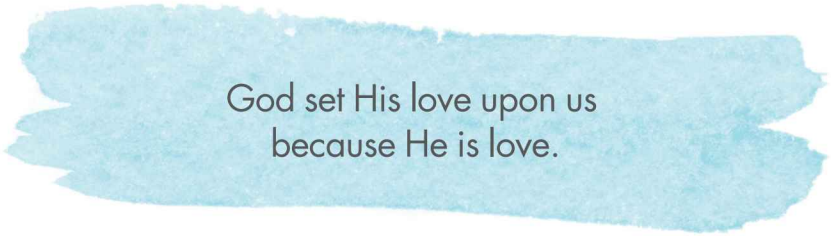
God’s love never had a starting date. Because He is eternal, self-existent, so is His love. And if He never started to love, He cannot cease to love.

Love like this is hard to grasp, isn’t it? I can’t seem to wrap my little

brain around that big truth, but I have held it in my arms. All moms have. When our first son, Clayton, was born, something fell out of my heart that I didn't know was in there. When I held those eight pounds, twelve ounces of wonder, I loved him. I didn't start to love him—I already loved him. Before I cradled him, I loved him. Before he cried, I loved his voice. Before he could hold my hand, I held him in my heart. My love for Clayton didn't begin when the cord was cut; it was already there. It's just that when he was finally born, I got to give it to him completely. Ten years later the same thing happened when Connor was born—as if it were the first time all over again.

I love my boys because they are a part of me.

God not only loves you because you are a part of Him, He also loves you because He is love. First John 4:8 states it plain and simple: God is love. He gives us His love because He is love. Nothing external provokes Him to love, and nothing external prohibits His love. He is love. His love is an expression of His nature. When God is hurt, He bleeds love because He is love.



God set His love upon us
because He is love.

God didn't wring His hands, furrow His brow, and attempt to analyze if you would qualify for His love. In many ways He didn't make a decision to love you or not to love you. His essence is love,

so for Him to know you is to love you. For Him to see you is to love you. But God knew we would look in the mirror and see our flawed, imperfect, wandering selves and question if He really could love us. So He proved it:

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1 John 4:9-10

Jesus is the proof of God's love.

You are loved because God is love. It is that simple, that deep, that profound. That scandalous!

God's love is something you humbly accept by faith, for to reject His love is to reject Him. To say you are not worthy of His love is to say He is not worthy of being love. To say you are not good enough for His love is to say He is not good enough. To deny that God's love applies to you is to reduce the sacrifice of Christ and dismiss part of the character of God. Oh, Gomer girl, I know you don't think about all that when you start feeling unloved or invisible, but perhaps considering those thoughts will help you begin to receive God's love because of who He is, regardless of how you feel.

Watching Gomer walk down the aisle, it's easy to think that she is just not worthy of Hosea's love—duty, maybe, but not love. She was not, is not, and will never be the object of his love. Yet if we reject Gomer's acceptability, we reject our own. If we can't believe that Gomer is loved, we probably won't believe that we too are loved.

If we cop the pose of low spiritual self-esteem, we are not only reducing our own worth, we are also diminishing God. I know you don't *mean* to do that when you take on the “not me, not-good-enough” mindset. Of course not! That's never my intention either. But that's what I was doing during my media mania at the lake. And that's what I'm doing whenever I compare myself to others and find myself stuck in an identity crisis.

I'm making a big deal about God's love because it *is* a big deal. It's the biggest deal ever!

Because God is love, we are loved.
We are God's beloved.

Think about this: You are God's beloved. That is your identity.

Can you just say that out loud? And if someone is around, whisper it if you need to: “I am loved because God is love.” Good! Now say it again: “I am loved because God is love.”

That is true, my fellow Gomer. We are loved because God is love. We are His beloved.

I would like to announce right here, right now, that you actually do have your very own private verse documenting God's love for you. It reminds you that you are God's beloved, and He's crazy about you:

I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me.

Song of Solomon 7:10 NASB

God's desire is for you. His eye is on you. The greatest gift of love you could ever receive is His attention. That's why when you feel invisible, it's so painful. We have such a desire to be seen, to be noticed, to be acknowledged. But, remember, you are never overlooked by God. He loves you, and His desire is for you. You are His beloved.

That's who is reading this book right now—God's chosen and beloved. I am honored!

His Love Makes Us Lovely

Let's pop back to the church where Gomer and Hosea pledged their wedding vows. Months have passed, and you notice Gomer—the new Mrs. Hosea—walk by you in the hallway. She has a radiance about her that she didn't used to have. She seems lovely—no longer sexy, but lovely. *How sweet*, you think as you pass by the table of donuts and coffee and head into the sanctuary.

You sit in church, trying to pay attention to the sermon but unable to think about anything except Gomer. You wonder if she looked that lovely when she was dating Hosea. No, you remember that even on her wedding day, she did not radiate the loveliness she radiated today. She was pretty, but in a clumsy sort of way. But now there's no denying that she is truly lovely. Why is that? And you tear up when it hits you—Hosea's love is what made her lovely.

It is God's love that makes us lovely.

Gomer isn't the woman she once was. She has been made new. She is pure. You realize that you no longer think of her as "that woman"—the one you wanted to force-feed donuts to and shield your husband's eyes from. You no longer think of her as trashy. Instead, she's beautiful...new...lovely.

It was his love—his love made her lovely.

Just like Gomer, you are loved. God chose you. He loved you while you were still dirty. The Bible says He loved you while you were still a sinner (see Romans 5:8). God didn't choose to love you because you were already lovely; He loved you and *then* you became lovely. Your value comes from His inherent value.

Just like Hosea chose to love Gomer, and God chose to love Israel, God chooses to love you—the real you, the imperfect you. Look into the mirror of your soul and see Gomer reflected back at you. She was the beloved bride, and so are you. You're already loved, so you just need to embrace how God sees you. Yet how do you do this—especially on those days when you feel like you don't measure up?

Let's begin by acknowledging something very important: You are not your current failures or your past mistakes. You are not your successes or your virtues. You are not what you do, what you did, what you haven't done, what you should have done, or what

you wish you'd done. You are not what you have gone through. You are not what someone else has said about you. You are not a nobody! You are a chosen, loved woman whom God calls His beloved.

His beloved—that is who God sees when He looks at you. Can you begin to accept the you who God sees?

Here's an assignment for you—one that will help you start seeing yourself as God sees you. Grab a pen and write down the following statements on Post-it notes and stick them everywhere! Or go buy some cheap lipstick from the Dollar Store and use it to write these truths on your bathroom mirror or your windshield. Come on! I dare you! Read them over and over and recite them to yourself so you can start identifying with the *you* God sees:

- God loves me, and His love makes me lovely.
- I am loved because God is love.
- I am not the be-tolerated; I am the beloved!

Yes! You are God's beloved, and so am I. Let's both try to trust God more with our feelings when it comes to this, okay? You may not feel loved or accepted, but how you feel does not define who you are. You may feel invisible, but you are not. You are seen and loved and appreciated.

So when you start to feel like a nobody—unlovable, rejected, unaccepted, or invisible—remember that your opinion is not the final word on this matter. Trust God's opinion on this one, sister! Say those three truths out loud over and over. Say them so often that if anyone says to you, "Tell me who you are?" you'll completely forget to mention your name as you shout out, "I am loved

because God is love!” and “I am not the be-tolerated; I am the beloved!” and “God’s love makes me lovely!”

You won’t see yourself as the woman who cleaned tables in the Baylor cafeteria saw herself—a nobody, someone not worth getting to know. You’ll see yourself as a somebody—God’s lovely somebody.

Nice to meet you, you lovely thing!