

Part One: Establishing Identity



“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

John 14:18 NIV

“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.”

1 Peter 2:2 NIV

The Vessel

The Bible says that we have these treasures hidden in jars of clay (2 Corinthians 4:7-9). We are meant to be vessels that carry the glory and power and presence of the Lord. But I find, especially when it comes to identity, many of us have cracks and chips in those vessels due to circumstances that left us broken. Because we are this way, we feel we cannot carry what we were meant to and that whatever gets poured into us flows back out. This first part of the book is dedicated to assessing our vessels to see where we are at. We'll look first at the story of the woman with the issue of blood, told in an imaginative way similar to Biblical fiction novels.

Isn't it interesting that the woman's issue was that she could not contain what was meant to remain in her, to give her life and sustenance? What are the issues that plague you and affect how you see yourself and the foundational identity of your life? You may have been a believer for many years and have operated in fullness and abundance, but over time the things you've walked through have left some cracks that you were unaware of. Or maybe the shiny veneer you were once coated in has lost its luster. Or perhaps you have been through such traumatic experiences that you don't even feel like a whole vessel any longer, just a pile of broken pieces cast on the ground. The good news is that no matter where you are or what state you are in, the Lord has something to speak to you and remind you of concerning who you are in Him. And even when you feel like you can no longer be used because of your brokenness, the Lord scoops you up in His hand, sets you up on the potter's wheel, lovingly forming you back from the beginning. Repairing those broken places into who He has always meant for you to be.

Her Moment for Identity

The Woman with the Issue of Blood (Biblical Accounts found in Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34, Luke 8:43-48)

I could hear the noise of a multitude outside of my modest home. This was unusual. My neighbors usually weren't that loud, especially near my house. Most tiptoed around and spoke in whispers as they passed, as if the sound of their voices would affect my condition. Or maybe they were afraid to even breath around my abode, lest the state of my body poison them like a contagious sickness. I was indeed sick. There was no doubt about that. But it was only mine to bare, only mine to carry. My loneliness told me that plainly, day after day.

I wrapped a garment around me as I peered out the window. From what I could see there was something, or maybe someone, causing a stir within the community. As I looked further, I saw a moving mass of people, growing larger by the seconds. And as the sounds of commotion carried to me, the name they called out sent a shiver up my spine.

Jesus.

Jesus! He was here again! Other times, when I was able to make out conversations or the few times I willed myself to venture out, I overheard the stories of a rabbi that brought healing wherever He went. I felt then the lingering ripple of curiosity and excitement in the air every time He came through. Twelve years ago, I would have laughed at how ridiculous it seemed. But now...now I was willing to try anything to be cured of my issue. I would do anything to free myself of the filthy rags that were my constant companion, catching a flow that never stopped. Leaking from me all my energy and strength. Seeping away the life that I should have been living. There should be more to my life than this!

A sob was at the verge of breaking through, breaking me down again. But all of a sudden, something else entirely burst in my heart and I clutched my garment to my chest, almost overcome by this new emotion. I had long forgotten hope. It was stolen away in the pockets of physicians and in the sacrifices placed on more altars than I could count. But here it was, staring me in the face, beckoning me to take a chance and go. Alluring me with a small possibility, but possibility none the less. Before I knew it, sandals were on my feet, my shawl positioned over my head and face. I was stepping outside of my home. I left my place of isolation and made my way carefully towards the crowd surrounding this Jesus. The source of my shaky hope.

The crowd moved like a river's current. People swirling around and in and out, trying to get

close, trying to see. I felt their curiosity and hunger and even some anger. But all I could think of was my need and how I could get to Him. I didn't know what His usual protocol was or how one even got close enough to ask. But all I knew was that I couldn't let this chance pass me. I could not go on this way forever and maybe He could be the one to make it stop. I pushed and squeezed the best I could, covering my face, cowering low so as not to alarm anyone. I didn't need to be recognized.

I was almost out of breath, almost about to falter and then the crowd was no longer moving. Everyone stopped as an important man fell on his knees in front of the One we followed. It was as if all eternity froze in this instant and what I dreaded became a possible reality. Past disappointment threatened to topple my hope. It had taken all my energy and will just to approach, just to push past the stream of humanity, just to make it close to Jesus without being trampled. And now we were stopped. If I wasn't careful someone would notice me. They would call me out of hiding and demand that I return home. Or worse. It was a huge risk, I know.

I know.

I placed my head in my hands, catching my breath and trying to steady my shaky resolve. If I was caught the consequences would be unfathomable. I would affect everyone and place on them what had become my identifying name now. Unclean. Unclean they would whisper. Unclean they would yell. Unclean was the cry that I had to release every time I ventured out just to take in fresh air. I was a woman unclean for so long.

Twelve years ago, what should have been a normal process that came and went each month continued on abnormally. Days passed into weeks, weeks ran into months and soon gone were the years and so was everything I owned. I presented myself to the priests, made my sacrifices, prayed for healing, felt the sympathy and then disdain of my neighbors. Soon the hands that promised to help, pointed at me in blame. As if I had asked for this. As if I caused this outflow myself. With every drop of blood that spilled from my body, my own blood, my family, grew farther and farther away. At first I understood it. I was the aunt that could not hold or cherish my nieces and nephews. I could no longer embrace my mother or sisters or brothers. And the marriage that could have been arranged for me, well, that was not meant to be anymore. Each rejection dug a deeper hole in me but when my father turned away...

No. I could not think of these things anymore. I would not think of those who were meant to always love me who were no longer there. The grief threatened to drown me within its dark waters. I was a woman who could hold nothing. Life itself streamed from my womb. I wanted to kneel in the dust and never get up, but I could not let the rabbi go by without getting what I'd come for. I looked up again. The leader of the synagogue who had just approached the teacher finished

His desperate request and everyone resumed their journey. The teacher was headed in the direction the man led Him. He was being led away from me.

No, I couldn't bare it. I couldn't wait a moment longer. I had heard the stories about what this Jesus could do. I had to take the chance that somehow, He could heal me too. I didn't want to make Him unclean. I would not embarrass Him in front of the crowd and have this malady laid upon Him. I remembered what I learned as a young girl and moved to my hands and knees. My energy is almost gone but I give everything I have to reach for one of the tassels at the end of His tallit. I've given everything to others to be healed and I give everything now with one reach of my arm. I will receive my healing from Him if He is who they say He is. I will agree with the authority and power that He carries and take just a little, oh just a little for myself. If not, I will die here in the dust.

My fingers grab hold of one little string from His garment and I am laid out in the ground from the effort. And as if in one accord the crowd stops again. I can barely hear a voice above the roar in my head. It is as if fire has been lit in me, licking up the blood and water and in that instant, I know. I am healed! In this pause, this pregnant moment of interruption I see everything, feel every emotion I had encountered for the past twelve years. There is so much loss, so much I wish still remained but regardless of the pain of the past, the pain of my ailment is gone. Gone! I want to laugh out loud but I need to get away as quickly as possible so no one will notice me here.

The voice speaks again and breaks through my wonder. "Who touched me?" He says. I look up long enough to see one of the men closest to Him whisper something. But Jesus puts a hand on His shoulder and shakes His head. He scans the crowd and says, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." The tears that I had tried to keep in during this ordeal break loose and the dust mingles with the water pouring out of my eyes. I close them wishing the ground would swallow me up, but I know that I cannot go away unnoticed any longer. I was that someone, not just another person in the crowd. Not just a woman hidden away in her house, alone with her issue. I just received what I had been so desperate for all these years. This someone owed Him a response.

I made my way up with strength I did not know still existed in my body. It grew stronger and stronger until I was shaking from the power coursing through me. I got close to Him and as I looked into His tender gaze I fell at His feet. I could not stand before Him and it was not because of my former condition. The obvious love in His expression was breaking me. His look had swept over and through me. How long had it been since someone really looked at me? And how long had it been since that gaze didn't hold surface sympathy or veiled disgust? I was in the presence of power, pure beautiful loving power. And I was not worthy. But I did my best to speak, with everyone

watching. I told Him, with my face to the ground, why I had touched Him and what happened to me. Before I could go on to explain myself further, I felt His hand touch my head and with another He lifted my chin until I was looking into His face. He had knelt down to get close to me. It felt like He was as close as my next breath.

“Daughter.” He said, with the smile and compassion of an adoring father and brother and friend all mixed in one. “Your faith has healed you. Go in peace.” The words swept over me like a cleansing rushing river. His healing in my body had been like fire but His words now were soothing to my parched and weary soul. I felt shame and fear lift from me and the hole in my heart that I never expected to be made whole was mended. Made new. In that instant I saw my memories again, but through a different filter. The filter of His love and compassion and His peace. I may have been rejected by others, but I was fully accepted by Him. He called me daughter. Daughter!

And just as quickly, He was gone. The crowd moved with Him as He continued on with the synagogue leader, a servant bringing more news. But I didn’t hear the words they said. And I don’t know how long I sat there in the road, in the dust, more healed and whole than I’d ever been in my entire life. The lingering sweetness of the man called Jesus sweeping around me. He had noticed me. He called me daughter.

Chapter One: The Sweetness of the Savior



I have been in numerous services, sessions and gatherings throughout my time knowing Christ. I have experienced Jesus among the crowd and in the hidden places of my life. There are moments when I'm swept away by worship and it's as if I could fly right out of my body. And then there are times when I cannot get low enough because of how undone the Lord has made me in His presence. It's as if His love is melting all the words and resistance in me and I am being poured out, becoming the vial of worship over His feet. In all of these times one of the most profound realizations to me is how *sweet* Jesus is. Many times, the words that come from my lips after a moving encounter with the Lord are, "Jesus, you are so sweet. Thank you for how sweet you are to me."

This may not seem impactful to you or like a huge revelation. The last few years we as the body of Christ have received more and more teaching on the goodness of God and I am so thankful that hearts are turning in that direction. Our God is definitely so good. He is so faithful. He is so loving. So merciful, so compassionate, so incredible. And there is a special sweetness I find in His presence that is overwhelming. He is so specific and intentional when it comes to His children.

When I am overwhelmed in those moments with Him it's because He has pinpointed something in me that maybe I was not able to see or fathom on my own. Whether its encouragement or correction, a kiss or a kick, ha, I am always so grateful. Because like a loving Father, He presses past the surface and places attention on the inner parts of me. All because He loves me. As He loves you.

I believe this is a season where the Lord wants to intentionally lavish His love on you. He wants to woo and make whole His church, His beloved Bride. Not so that we can turn inward in what we receive but so that we are filled to overflowing and can't help but change the atmosphere wherever we go. He wants women who will saturate their surroundings with His presence, women who ooze His extravagant love to others. Women who know how to love supernaturally. Women who have tasted the sweet honey of His goodness and can't help but stir up hunger for more of Christ in themselves and those they encounter.

How will others taste and see that the Lord is good if we ourselves have not tasted of His goodness? This can't happen if we are leaky vessels. We get pummeled by situations and circumstances, by our experiences and upbringing and many times don't realize the deep damage that has been done. All we know is that in all the things that we do for relief, we can't ever seem to get beyond a temporary solution. We get filled up only to have it all seep out after the church service, the Bible Study, the time of prayer and on and on.

Was this not the case of the woman with the issue of blood? This woman who goes unnamed is mentioned in three out of the four gospels. We are not given too much of her backstory, only that she had been bleeding for twelve years. She was physically unable to function normally in society because of this issue but worse yet, she was considered unclean by Jewish law. And because of that she was to remain isolated from others. I can't imagine that life, being betrayed by your own body. The process that is supposed to be a sign of life to come, a signal that you are able to carry life as a woman, backfiring on you. Your source of posterity becomes your prison. This woman had issues upon issues, physical, spiritual, relational, and so on. She spent all her money on a cure for her disease but after twelve years even a doctor's remedy was not enough for her. Her need was too great, her disease too significant to be touched by any worldly means or methods.

We must understand that if there is a hole or wound somewhere within us, what gets poured into us will get lost within those hurts, disappointments, frustrations, pride, insecurities and failures. Those hidden wounds become cancers eating away at our inner being. This is not life in abundance. This is not the milk and honey that was promised to flow. And oh, dear one, there is so much for you to flow with. When the Lord comes, He is not just on the scene to empower you. He also has all authority and ability to bring healing to you through His resurrection power.

The healing comes not just in how much we love Jesus but in truly receiving and coming into agreement with how much He loves us. Because we love Jesus, we do for Him. But listen to this. Because Jesus loves us, He does for us. Rather He did, He does, and He will continue to do. My doing for Him is limited and nothing compared to what He has already accomplished for me. But Jesus moves with all authority, power, majesty, ability, love...do you get the picture?

Some time ago my husband and I attended a healing conference at a church in Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland (more on our Iceland journey later). A man named Chris Gore was there to teach the sessions. Chris is the director of the healing rooms at Bethel church in Redding. Instead of coming with methods and steps for healing He came with a totally different perspective than I expected. What He said has stuck with me even as I look at my own life and the circumstances that surround me at times. He said that the healing part is easy. It's the healing of our hearts, the changing of our mindsets that must happen in order for us to come into agreement with what Jesus has done for us and how He feels about us.

Nothing is too hard or impossible for Jesus to accomplish in our lives. We are so dearly loved. And it is this sweet knowledge that allows us to operate from a place of confidence and motivation. We love because He first loved us. It was because of His great love for us that He came to earth, became one of us and died in our place. We must start at this beginning for there is no other. The Father is the source of everything that we are and there is no other way to Him except through Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Jesus. How worthy you are. There is truly no one like you and no one compares to you. Thank you for enduring the cross for us. For considering it joy to see us joined to the Father. So much so that you gave up everything and carried all of our sins to pay the ultimate price for our freedom. And in the same moment you brought about our salvation, you made a way for our healing. You bore wounds on your back in order for us not to bear wounds in our body and mind. You did a complete work on the cross in order for us to be complete people. Words are not enough to tell our gratitude. As we go further into this book, we ask that you go with us. Would you cover every revelation, every step and every process? We want to walk this out with you. And we are thankful for the alignment that will come in this journey, equipping us to overflow with your milk and honey in our land of promise. In Jesus name, Amen.

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