



Precious in His Sight

The Transforming Power of Seeing
Yourself through Jesus' Eyes

THERESA INGRAM



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Introduction

A Way of Seeing

I had just fed and tucked in my six-month-old twin boys. It was a cold and dreary night—typical for February in West Virginia—and my husband wasn’t home yet. He often worked late, so I wasn’t worried. Until the phone rang.

I recognized the voice of an acquaintance on the line.

“We had some friends over to our house this evening,” she said. “I felt compelled to call and let you know that your husband was here with another woman.”

I could hardly believe what she was saying, but I could hear the conviction in her voice. She believed my husband was being deceitful, and she just wanted

to help. She went on to explain that he and his date had left to go to a popular bar in town.

As I began to process what I had just heard, I gave in to an impulse to take action. Without thinking of the possible consequences, I called a neighbor to stay with my boys and went to the bar to see for myself. I walked into a smoke-filled room and looked around. My heart sank. The man I loved, the man I promised to spend my life with, the father of my children, was sitting at one of the tables with a woman he worked with.

I could tell, when I boldly walked up to the table to confront him, that I was the last person he expected to see. He told me to go home. He had been caught. I was heartbroken. I left wondering how long my husband had been lying to me.

He came home a few days later to gather his clothes and belongings and then moved in with the other woman. It became clear over time that he had no intention of trying to reconcile and repair our marriage. He deserted me and left me with no means of financial support.

I felt so lost, abandoned, unloved, and afraid. In that moment, it seemed that I had never been loved. This tragic turn of events confirmed to me that I wasn't. I became convinced that I was unwanted—not pretty or smart enough to have a successful, happy life.

This feeling of being unworthy had deep roots in my life. My alcoholic father had made it clear that if I didn't measure up to his standards, I was a failure. And being a failure at one thing meant being a failure at everything. If I made a mistake or fell short of his expectations, I deserved punishment.

My father never held or hugged me when I was a child. He never played with me or expressed any love. He never told me I was pretty or complimented me

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about anything. I learned very early to keep working harder and harder to gain his approval. But I never measured up.

I loved my dad, of course. I tried to please him as much as I could. I don't blame him now; he was a very troubled man. He faced harsh circumstances in his childhood, in the Great Depression, and then in World War II. But regardless of the reasons for my sense of unworthiness, my upbringing left deep wounds.

Not surprisingly, I developed a fear of my father and felt very intimidated by men in authority.

I am the middle child. I have two wonderful sisters. In our adulthood, we each have struggled with the lies we learned to believe about ourselves. We each spent years as prisoners of our thoughts and beliefs about who we were. We each were miserable, never able to fully enjoy life because of the lies that distorted our self-perceptions.

We were all lost sheep until we met our Shepherd.

Jesus told a parable about a shepherd who lost one of His sheep:

What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

{ L U K E 15 : 4 - 7 }

I was that lost sheep—one who had strayed, a sinner living far from God. I can look back now and recognize times when He was pursuing me, but at the time, I just ran further from Him. I could not believe He was real or that He would help me.

But the harder I ran, the more His love pursued me.

I used to read Margaret Wise Brown's *The Runaway Bunny* to my children. They loved it, and so did I. I've found that God has all kinds of ways to pursue those He loves, and He pursued me through that book.

The story begins with a bunny who told his mother he wanted to run away. His mother said that if he ran away, she would always come after him because he was her little bunny. He imagined all kinds of ways to run away—turning into a fish so he could swim away or becoming a rock on a mountain or a sailboat on a sea—but his mother said she would always find a way. She would become a fisherman or a mountain climber or a cloud to pursue her little one. No matter what he became, she would never stop trying to find him.

God spoke to me in that sweet story as I read it to my children. He told me about His loving pursuit of me. Regardless of my background, my sins and mistakes, or any other weakness or shortcoming, He wanted me. He loved me, and He wasn't going to give up.

Just as the shepherd in Jesus's parable found his lost sheep, and just as the mother in *The Runaway Bunny* relentlessly pursued and found her little one, God pursued and found me. The phone call on that cold West Virginia night brought indescribable heartache and struggle into my life. But it also brought the opportunity to see beyond my circumstances and pain. I learned to see the one who truly loved me and wanted me as His own.

He would give me a hope and a future beyond my dreams.

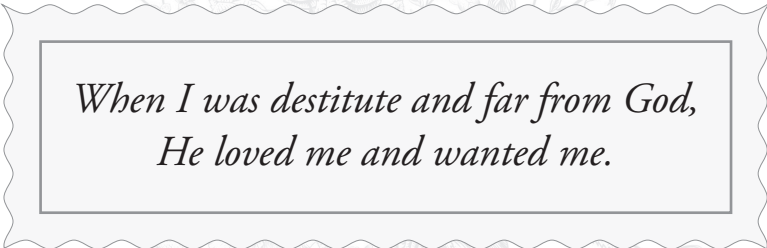
When God Found Me

Surely goodness and lovingkindness
will follow me all the days of my life,

And I will dwell in the house of the

LORD forever.

{ P S A L M 23 : 6 }

A decorative border with a scalloped edge, containing a light purple rectangular box. Inside the box is the text "When I was destitute and far from God, He loved me and wanted me." The border is adorned with faint, stylized floral and leaf patterns.

*When I was destitute and far from God,
He loved me and wanted me.*

That's my story. When I was destitute and far from God, He loved me and wanted me. When I was troubled and alone, He was with me.

I grew up desperately searching for that love. Like every human being, I longed to be wanted. I needed to feel significant. I dreamed of hearing a man tell me, "You are mine forever." Then I would be secure.

But there was a problem with that plan: I wanted to find all these things in a world that was broken, and I was longing for a man without realizing that no man could ever fulfill these dreams.

God wanted something much better for me. He wanted me to see Him for who He truly is. He also wanted me to see myself for who I truly am: His forever Valentine. He's the one who would say to me, "Theresa, you are loved, and you are Mine forever."

That happened in a small country church in West Virginia when I placed my faith in Jesus as my Savior, my two baby boys at my side. It began a journey of faith that continues today. It didn't end my difficulties or challenges, of course. There were still many obstacles to overcome. But it was an important beginning.

It didn't take long to learn that in many Christian circles, being divorced meant not being fully accepted as a redeemed or useful child of God. Although the grounds for my divorce was my husband's marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 19) and being abandoned by a nonbeliever (1 Corinthians 7), in some people's minds, being divorced meant I was "damaged seed" and therefore limited on what I could do and how God could use me. In fact, I kept getting so many mixed messages from people I looked up to that I started to wonder whether I was really saved or not. For somebody who already had negative beliefs about herself, these messages just confirmed the idea that I was still an unworthy person.

So I continued to store up every negative word spoken to me, every negative situation, and every

negative thought. I allowed all those thoughts and beliefs, including other people's opinions, to define who I was.

But God didn't stop pursuing me when I accepted Christ. He continued to show me His unfailing love. In His own timing, He blessed me with a loving and godly husband. Chip adopted my two sons, and we moved from West Virginia to Dallas for Chip to go to seminary. This unworthy, insecure, fearful divorced woman was going to be in full-time ministry.

That was a very intimidating thought. I'm the one who never measured up. I'm the one who had made so many bad decisions in life that I was wondering if I was even saved. I was still a new believer and learning the basics of God's truth. I didn't even like myself and was convinced that others didn't like me either. And I had no ministry experience.

Now I was going to be in ministry with my seminary-trained husband?

"Yes," God said. "This is the plan I have for you, and you will learn and know and live by My truth.

My truth will set you free.” So as a new believer in my midtwenties, I began to read the Bible for the first time in my life.

The only other time I had tried to read the Bible was when I was in middle school. My grandmother had given me a Bible, and I would sit on my bed at night, open it up, and try to read it. But each time, I’d realize it made no sense to me.

Now when I opened it up, it seemed as if God had written it just for me. I could see myself everywhere in those pages—all my insecurities, fears, mistakes, and sin. The path I had been on and the decisions that had turned my life into a mess were laid out in those pages. I saw my need for a Savior.

I also saw a Heavenly Father who loves His children unconditionally and wants to be close to them all the time. I saw a Shepherd who would never desert or reject His sheep. I became convinced of a Father who loved and wanted *me*.

That was life-changing. I started to see myself more clearly because I could see *God* more clearly. I began to see Him as He really is.

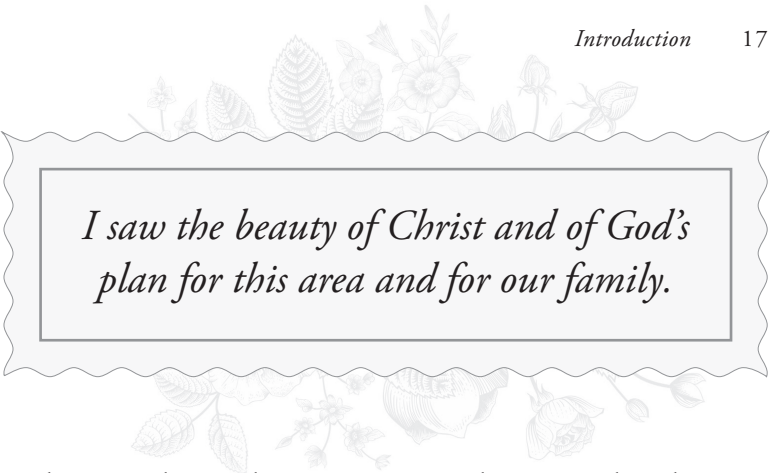
Seeing Myself Through God's Eyes

Years later, Chip accepted the senior pastor position at a church on the central California coast. By then, we had a house full of children: two fifteen-year-olds, a nine-year-old, and a three-year-old. I had become very content where we had been living in Texas: a small town where our church was thriving and our children were doing well. I was not enthusiastic about this move to a new state and a very different culture.

When we first visited the church in Santa Cruz, we saw how everyone who lived in the area loved it. They thought it was one of the most beautiful places on earth. But I couldn't see it. I saw only fog, sixties-era hippies still living as hippies, a very strange culture, cold ocean water, and coffee so strong I could hardly drink it.

But if this was where God was leading my husband, I wanted to respect his calling and honor his walk with God. So I prayed that on the next trip to visit the church, God would give me new eyes to see the place in new ways. I wanted to see it as He saw it.

When we arrived in Santa Cruz the second time, I saw it completely differently. I'll never forget it

A decorative border featuring various flowers and leaves, including roses and lilies, framing the central text box.

*I saw the beauty of Christ and of God's
plan for this area and for our family.*

because the revelation was so vivid. I saw a church full of people who loved the Lord and wanted to have an impact for Christ on this crazy culture. I saw the beauty of the coast and the mountains, the flowers, and the trees. I saw the beauty of Christ and of God's plan for this area and for our family. I'm convinced I saw it through God's eyes.

How we see makes a huge difference in our lives. That applies in many areas of our experience but nowhere more significantly than in how we see God and ourselves. We need to see Him more clearly, and when we do, we begin to see ourselves as He does.

As with my original view of Santa Cruz, I had always seen myself as unworthy and unloved. But that's not how God saw me at all. A passage in

Isaiah 43 helped me see how He feels about me and who I truly am in His eyes:

Thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob,
And He who formed you, O Israel,
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are Mine!
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched,
Nor will the flame burn you.
For I am the LORD your God,
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;
I have given Egypt as your ransom,
Cush and Seba in your place.
Since you are precious in My sight,
Since you are honored and I love you,
I will give other men in your place and other peoples in
exchange for your life.

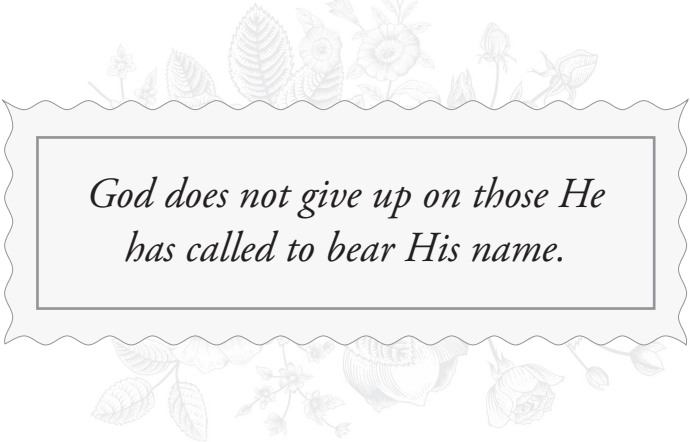
Do not fear, for I am with you;
 I will bring your offspring from the east,
 And gather you from the west.
 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!'

And to the south, 'Do not hold them back.'
 Bring My sons from afar
 And My daughters from the ends of the earth,
 Everyone who is called by My name,
 And whom I have created for My glory,
 Whom I have formed, even whom I have made."

{ I S A I A H 43 : 1 - 7 }

emphasis added

God promised to redeem His people and be
 with them through every trial they might ever face.
 He would go through floods and fire for them. He
 would regather them when they were scattered. He
 would make enormous sacrifices for them. Why?
 Because He called them by His own name and
 created them for His glory.



*God does not give up on those He
has called to bear His name.*

God does not give up on those He has called to bear His name. In this passage, He not only told His people how much they meant to Him but also promised that a Savior would come to redeem them and restore them back to a relationship with Him.

When I read this as a young single mother, I knew God was speaking to more than Israel. He was speaking to me. He was opening my eyes to His truth.

Here are the truths I saw in the passage:

- God is my Creator. He made me Himself.
He formed my body just as He wanted it to be.
- He knows my name.
- He redeemed me.
- He is my Protector and Provider.

- He sees me as precious to Him.
- He honors me and loves me.
- He will watch over my children and bring them to safety.
- He created me to bring glory to Him.
- He is always with me.
- He tells me that I belong to Him. I am His.

These truths have become foundational for my life. They are like a rudder. As I rest in God's promises and His unfailing love for me, I can walk through life with confidence, peace, and hope. Regardless of any circumstances, He has me in His hands and will never let me go. Ever!

These truths are challenged by lies throughout our lives. During our first year at seminary, Chip and I were introduced to ways we could train our minds to combat the lies and pull down the strongholds the enemy had been filling our heads with for years. I am so grateful to the professor who taught us these things. It helped me begin a new journey of discovering the lies I've believed about

both God and myself and replacing them with the truth of Scripture.

This doesn't happen automatically. It's something to be intentional about, and it takes practice and persistence. For me, it took a lot of focus, prayer, and letting the power of God's Spirit and Word work in me. But I'm a changed woman now. I will never again think that I'm not worthy, wanted, or loved.

I still hear the lies sometimes. I still have doubts. But whenever these old thoughts come up, I know to run to God's truth and cry out to Him in prayer. Because I'm His and He loves and wants me, He is always quick to remind me of the truth. And it's the truth that sets us free.

That's the subject of the rest of this book: the truth that sets us free. In the following pages, I'll highlight some of the truths that have been instrumental as I've retrained my mind. I served in pastoral ministry with my husband for more than four decades, and I've met thousands of women and men who desperately struggle with believing how much God loves them and that He is *for* them.

Whether because of past sins or lies about their identity, multitudes of people don't like themselves, feel inadequate, and see themselves as unworthy to be used by God. They need to encounter the God who transforms lives.

God is a master of transformation. If He can use a girl from a "nowhere" place who has "nothing" good to give and feels like a "nobody," He can use anyone. He has designed all His children to bring glory to Him in amazing ways.

He says He can, I believe He can, and my life proves that He can.

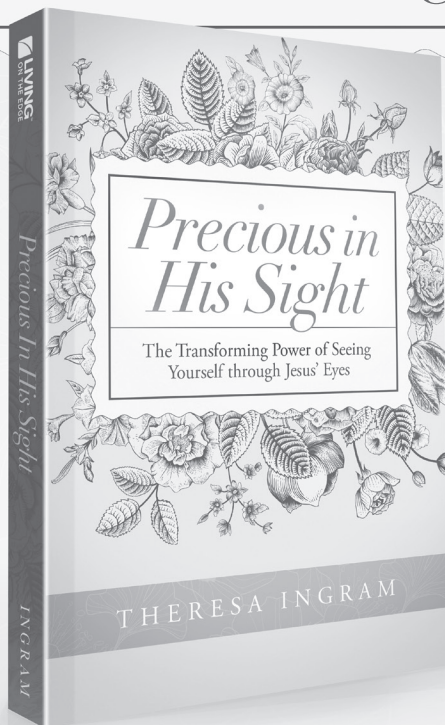
Yours can too.



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Precious in His Sight



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In Theresa's new book, *Precious In His Sight*, you'll find powerful and practical ways to take all your negative thinking captive in Christ. God wants you to believe that you are wanted and wonderfully made, designed for a purpose, and *precious in His sight*.

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AFFIRMATION CARDS

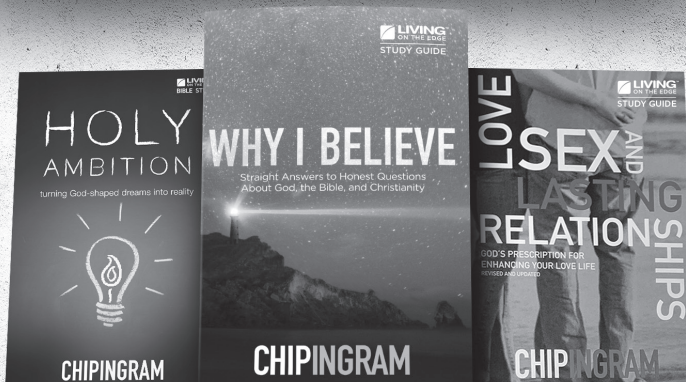


Are you a woman who doubts God's love for you? Start seeing yourself the way God sees you. Use these *Precious In His Sight* affirmation cards to confront your misbeliefs and replace them with God's truth.

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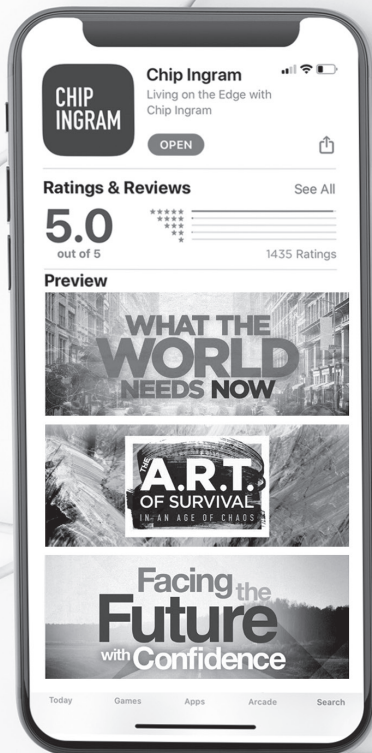
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