

the
PROVERBS 31
MINISTRIES
podcast

Biblical truth for any girl in any season.

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Lynn Cowell: You know, as I was writing my last book, it gets me thinking back to that time period in my life, and in particular I was thinking of a specific evening in my life. I was performing yet again in my high school choir, and I just wanted to see one thing, and that was my dad in the audience. And so, while I was on the risers my eyes were scanning the crowd looking for his face and it was something I never really knew every time I performed or did something, whether he would be there, or he wouldn't be there. And it wasn't that I didn't think my dad loved me. I knew he did, or at least I thought I knew because he worked literally day and night to provide for me and my very large family of 10. Yeah, I'm number seven of eight kids.

Kaley Olson: I didn't know that about you. I thought I had a big family. I come from six. But 10 is...

LC: We got to beat.

KO: You're taking it up a level.

LC: So, you know, surely the fact that he worked day and night to provide for us proved that he loved us, or at least I hoped so. But that night as my eyes, and literally my heart, searched from the risers I wondered was my performance enough to make him not work that night. Was my performance enough to make him come and show me how much he loved me because I wanted proof. I wanted the proof that I was loved. And if he didn't show up, well then would I still believe that he loved me. And so, I find that even today, that there are times that I struggle to scan the circumstances of my everyday life for proof that I'm loved, and looking for that approval in what I do, and sometimes it can look like wondering if my husband will remember that even though my job is really different, it still requires a lot. Or will I get a thank you from helping my elderly mom with her needs? Or will my adult children who live in three different states make time for me even though they have their own busy lives? And I'm thinking that I'm not the only one who looks for proof that they're loved.

Kaley and Meredith, do you ever find yourselves doing that in one way or another, like searching or looking for that?

Meredith Brock: Of course? I mean, I think it I think it's part of the human condition to long. I don't know. I mean, I guess we could really go back to the garden, you know, and take a look in that moment where we felt shame. Was that shame connected to feeling like, oh, I don't have the approval of others and now I have to prove myself again. I don't know. You know, I think we could probably mine some

pretty great things there. But I know I certainly feel the need to prove myself for sure. What about you, Kaley?

KO: Yeah, well, I mean, I just think about what like, like you said, the garden and my first thought was God creating us and saying we are good. But like, whenever we don't rest in the fact that we believe what He says about us, and then I'm constantly going to look for it in other areas.

LC: Yeah. Well clearly none of us are young girls still scanning a crowd looking for a parent, well, at least not that age.

Many of us are still looking to the crowd, whoever our crowd is. Our crowd might be our little people in our kitchen, our crowd might be still our parents, our crowd might be whatever our careers are. We're still looking for that crowd and we're still looking and longing for acceptance. And so, it's also that deep knowing that I'm loved just as I am, that even if I don't change anything about me, I'm loved. Well, I'll still admit I do still struggle, and my personality type is described as the success-oriented pragmatic type, and so for me personally, that description might as well say approval seeking. I've been driven by the motivation to be approved of. And since my father passed away when I was your age, Kaley, I was just 30, it's not possible for me to get that approval from my father, that father, anymore.

So how does this play out for a gal like me and maybe a gal like you who's been loving and living for Jesus for many, many years, and yet sometimes still wrestling with wanting to be loved, accepted and well thought of by others, especially God. Now, I know that sounds kind of strange. It sounds strange for me to say it, and yet I know what's true that often I'm looking for the approval of God in my life. And for sure, there's more days now that I'm successful, there's more days now where truth is winning over in my life, but sometimes I'm still wrestling with this.

You know, when I first began getting counseling for this, I was 19 and I was completely stunned when my counselor gave me a list of verses to look up and focus on that week. And I was shocked because the topic written across the top of the paper was pride. Hmmm, I mean, pride, but wait, I mean, I just told you I struggle with thinking that people don't like me, that they don't approve of me, they don't accept me. And yet she said, pride was exactly what I needed to understand because the issue I was wrestling with had to do with the person I was focusing on, me.

So, you know, Kaley and Meredith, have you ever had a problem that you wanted someone to help you solve but when it came right down to it, the problem was actually you.

MB: Never.

LC: You know, I was just so shocked, because I expected her to, you know, give me all the pats on the back and say, oh, tough childhood you had. And while those contribute, at that stage in my early adult life, she was pointing to me. And so well, obviously God and I started this process a really long time ago but He's still working on this thing in me. In fact, in the last two weeks the topic of pride, it just keeps coming up. It's been in the sermons I listened to, it's in the book I'm reading, it's an issue that Father keeps working on in me.

In Galatians 2:20 it tells us, *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”* The beginning of my life, the beginning of living a life that truly counts and matters, the life I now live, starts with being crucified. Not literally crucified but putting to death my old way of living and thinking. And so, for me, this is a death to the continual craving to be affirmed and to be approved of. It's death to the old way, the way of pride. And the approval that I'm craving from others is exactly the opposite of what I truly need. Approval from others is resuscitating the old me that needs to die. So how does this old me die so that I can truly live? How do I get past this craving, this need of people's approval, so that I can move on to living the life, the abundant and full life that Jesus has promised me, promised us? I move on, as I truly understand that I am madly, wildly and unconditionally loved by love Himself.

Do you remember that verse in Mark 12:31 when Jesus says, *“The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There's no greater commandment than these.”* This verse is a follow up to the verse before it, the first command that Jesus spoke, where He's answering the question of which command is most important. *“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength.”* That's Mark 12:30.

So, I've been reading a super old book, and when I say super old, I'm not talking like C.S. Lewis old, I'm talking like 1666 old. And the words are taken from conversations with a monk who spent all his days working in a kitchen. Can we just say poor man? That's how I would see it. I cook, well it's not because I love to, it's because I love the man I'm cooking for. So, we'll just make that clear here.

MB: Real good friends with Lee Stouffer's microwave dinners, I'll just go ahead and say it.

LC: Well, this monk's name was Brother Lawrence, and the book is called *The Practice of the Presence of God*. So, the book is written from a series of letters that Brother Lawrence wrote, and all the letters boiled down to one topic. Brother Lawrence, knowing God and loving God as he did a job it appears he wasn't particularly fond of, working in a kitchen every single day, all day. So, in the first written conversation, Brother Lawrence notes that he joined a monastery to correct himself of all his faults. Hmm, must have my personality type.

He assumed that living a life of continual sacrifice and the displeasure it would bring him would fix him as we would say. The author of the book, which is the fellow he was writing to, said that while the monk thought he would sacrifice his pleasures and fix his faults in the work of the monastery, God had disappointed him. Brother Lawrence said that he experienced nothing but satisfaction. How in the world do you experience satisfaction from working in a kitchen all day?

Brother Lawrence became a monk to correct all of his faults, assuming it would be a life of continual sacrifice and displeasure, but what did he find? The more he focused on God Himself, and the immense love that God had for him, it wasn't a sacrifice at all. He said that feeding and nourishing our souls with high notions of God yielded great joy in being devoted to Him. It seems to me that Brother Lawrence experienced Galatians 2:20 in the most amazing way. So, let's look at Galatians 2:20 again, *“I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* So, I Lynn, I've been

crucified with Christ. This death to me, this death to my pride, this death to my approval-seeking, people-pleasing self. This death is where life begins.

When you and I see these, let's call them what they are sins, for what they are, and we call them what they are, that's when we can die to them and find life. Well, hallelujah, because that life of being me-focused isn't that great. In fact, it's absolutely exhausting. When I'm living from that place, I find myself continually disappointed, because either I didn't get the approval I wanted, or when I did, it didn't stick. It didn't stay. It didn't give me what I truly needed. The words, the accolades, the approval I craved, when I got it, the pleasure I received faded way too fast. It kind of reminds me of me and my daughter in our attic last month. She's preparing to move across the country. And so, we decided it was time to go through her things that have been in the attic. And I watched as she put into our garbage pile her awards from high school, her cords from her college graduation, all the things that she worked so hard for just a few short years ago are now going into the garbage can. And it caused me to think and to check, what am I living for? Whose approval am I living for? Is it approval that ends up not mattering on this side of eternity?

But if you're a gal like me, and you've tried and tried to not care about what people think, sometimes it's just not that easy. You've said the words, you've tried the behavior modifications, and nothing works, so we go back to the words of Jesus. In the second half of Galatians 2:20b, *“And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”*

When I find myself craving that approval, wanting so much to be seen, it's time to ask myself again, what am I living for? Who am I living for? You know, I think that so often we say in our heads that we're living for Jesus, we're doing this for Jesus. But we're not always, you know, I mean, it's, I'm embarrassed to admit it but sometimes we're living for someone to say, good job. I don't want to live that way anymore.

Is it really the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me, or have I forgotten that Christ lives in me? That Christ loves me? Christ loved me so much that He didn't applaud the last time I did something right. He didn't pat me on the back and say, I see you Lynn, good job. He didn't give me a raise or more benefits. He didn't even say something at all. He did something. He gave himself for me. He died for me. Jesus has approved and affirmed me already. And Jesus has affirmed you. In His affirmation, His recognition, approval and encouragement, it is enough. By His death for you and me, He stated and asserted with His actions, that His love for us is true. His love for you is true. And the more I focus on His love, not my need or my desire for love and affirmation, but on His meeting that love for me, I'm filled with the love I'm craving. The more I focus on how much He loves me, the more I will love Him in return.

I don't know if you're a visual learner, I am totally a visual person and maybe you are too. So, if you are, grab a pencil and a piece of paper real close and draw a triangle on it. So, at the top of that triangle write Jesus. So, Jesus loves us and directs that love toward us. That's the straight line down to the right. It's like an arrow of love and write your name on the right-hand vertices. I just have to tell you, I'm horrible at math so I had to look up what that word was. I want to call it a corner. I knew it wasn't a corner, so I googled it. Google told me it's a vertices.

MB: Corner is great too.

LC: Okay, that's great. Thank you. So here in this place where Jesus' love is directed toward me, I take in the love He has for me and I love myself. That's the love your neighbor as yourself part. Now, if you haven't already, draw a line straight from your name to the left for the next arm of the triangle and write my neighbor on the left-hand vertices. This is when the fun stuff starts. Because now the love we've received is going out. Because I've soaked in all this love and now love myself, I can love my neighbor because I'm not stuck on getting what I need. Because I'm not focused on getting the approval, the affirmation and the applause I need, I can come alongside of another and point her to love so that she gets what she needs. Then my neighbor begins to understand the love that Jesus has for her and begins directing her love to Jesus, which we can go right back, and He draws His love to her.

So, it's all right, right? Fixed, set, good to go?

I like to think that because Jesus has affirmed me, all my selfish desires for look for proof that I'm loved shut up and vanish, right? I mean, I'm just, I'm not changed. I'm 53 years old, I should be past this by now. I wish it was true, but sometimes I forget how deeply He loves me, and that Christ lives in me, and sometimes I begin looking for the love I need from people again. I focus on the love that I want to receive from people and that's when I resuscitate the old me. You see, as long as we're on this side of heaven, our flesh will fight to come back to life and take over, it'll fight to push us back to the way we used to do things, looking to other people for what we need instead of looking to Jesus and remembering that He lives in us. So, we need to remember that our dying to ourself isn't a one-time decision, but a daily, and I have to admit a moment-by-moment decision for me. Every day I must settle my soul that I am deeply loved and forever cherished. I must remember that the Spirit of Christ who lives in me is bigger than my flesh that wants to look for proof that I'm loved and good enough in every situation. I have to direct my heart and mind day after day, sometimes minute by minute, back to the unconditional and perfect love of the Father, because that is truly what my heart is craving.

When I waste my energy and time searching for love, I can be a conduit for His love, His purpose and His life to flow through me to others. So, you and I, we can stop searching the crowd. Father loves us. He proved it not just once and for all through the death and resurrection of Jesus, but He proves it daily through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit living in us. Cultivate that relationship with the Holy Spirit. As Brother Lawrence said, we can practice the presence of God by speaking to Him often throughout the day, thinking of Him and in His love for us. And as you're thanking Him, your heart and mind will hear, and it will stir up joy in your heart and that need for approval and love will be met. Yes, Christ loves us and lives in us. We can stop looking for approval. We already have it.

KO: So good. So good. Lynn. Well, one of the first things I thought about, what Meredith what you said earlier, about how Lynn is speaking to us now but she's also speaking to those teen and tween girls who need to hear this, how formative it is in that season of life. But then also Lynn, I totally identify with you where it, sometimes it's a daily struggle where when I take my mind off of who God is and who He is in me, I'm going to start looking for approval or looking for other people to kind of fill my cup and so I'm curious about your experience in this and just how you practice out that in that moment when you have recognized, wait a minute, I fallen off.

LC: I'm in the approval trap.

KO: I'm in approval trap. What do you do? What do you do in that moment?

LC: If at all possible, I literally take a step back. So, sometimes I'll go to my room, if I'm not in a situation I'll escape in the bathroom, you know, and shut the door. But I guess I recognize the trigger so much now in my heart, that, that I'm starting to go there, that I just literally kind of try to stop myself and get to a place where I can think clearly. Because often, you know, this, this approval that we have, I think this need can come depending on where we have felt like we've missed it in our life. So currently, in my life, the place I'm struggling with is still with my mom. And I'm like I said, I'm 53 years old, do you think we should be past this, but it's like, our hearts still crave that no matter how old we get and so what I'll do is on the drive over to my mom's, I talk to Jesus the whole way. And one thing, I've been using this phrase over and over again as I drive down the road, Jesus make me love. Jesus, make me love, not make me love as in make me love my mom, but literally transform Lynn into love. And so, when I'm in her presence, may I be so overflowing and so concerned with loving on my mom, I'm not so concerned with her loving on me. And it's been, it's been a really, it's been a thing, it's just, I'm just going to say it's been a thing.

MB: That's beautiful Lynn. Really, really beautiful. To allow your expectations of what you're going to get in a relationship to be flipped upside down, you know, and to be in that relationship for a completely different reason than what you can receive, you know. As you were teaching, I was writing all kinds of notes, because I, I think there's probably a few folks out there who come at this conversation about approval and proving to people that they're good, or to proving that they're worthy of acceptance, probably processes a little bit more like me, which is a bit sad if you look at it, because it very much comes from my childhood, but I don't necessarily, people, if you were to ask people close to me they would say, does Meredith need your approval? And 99% of people would be like, no, no. I just don't, I'm not driven by other people approving of me. Now, right now you might my friends aren't listening might be like, oh, good for you, you've really, you've really arrived, Meredith. No, actually, it's much darker than that. I have a much deeper, scarier sin that sneaks around inside of my heart, which is in in my childhood, I didn't ever think it was an option for my dad to show up. Like, that wasn't even a possibility that my dad might actually show up to something, or that my mom would actually care. And so instead, I slipped into this place of I'm trash, like, I'm trash, and nobody loves me. And so, the only person that matters is me. And so, I'm going to protect me. And my approval of me is all that matters. And so instead of chasing other people's approval, I chased my own approval. And y'all that is a vacuum. You can never feel, like you can never ever feel, I'll never be able to make myself feel okay about myself, like ever. And so, when I first became a believer, I had to, and I had this amazing mentor couple that walked alongside me for a season, and they would hear me say things like, Meredith, you're so stupid, like, oh my gosh, of course, that's what I would do. I'm such a moron. You know, things like that. And they would stop me and say, hold on, you just called God a liar.

And I would have to go, like, no, I didn't. Like, no, I didn't, like I just, that was stupid. What I did was stupid. When I realized, to your point Lynn, I, my pride was, I'm smarter than God. I can evaluate myself better than He can. And they would point me back to Scripture and saying, oh, Scripture says, you are wonderfully made. That's the truth. So, your assessment of yourself is that your trash, so then you're telling God that you're smarter than Him? And that you're saying you're a liar God, you know, and so I had to in that triangle, really deal with the when you said, you know God, Jesus pours His love out on us first, there was a disconnect for me there, I couldn't receive it, I didn't believe it. I was like,

nope, I am going, I am trash, and I will never be able to be loved because of that. So, I'm not even going to try to get the approval of other people, because they, they'll never approve of me, I need to approve of myself.

And so, it was like this vacuum for many, many years for me, and still is sometimes. I still chase that self-approval thing more than I even want to have God approve of me, you know, and knowing that God has already approved of me, when I was still a sinner, He went to the cross for me, you know. And so, I want to speak to my sisters who I think we all come at this approval thing in different ways, based upon your own life experience and the way God uniquely knit you together, that there is somewhere due to let's go back to the beginning of this whole episode, right, due to what happened in Genesis. Due to what happened in the garden that fall. We all seek approval for something outside of God, whether it's ourselves or others, or, you know, who knows, it could be a million different things to try to fill the vacuum in our hearts that only God can fill. And we have to go back to him, the source, to fill that. You know, I would love to know Lynn for you, as you, you've been in this ministry to teens and tweens, I'm going to I'm going to turn this a little bit for our moms out there. You know how, I want to know, I've got a little girl she's six, heaven help us, y'all. I know the years are coming. And I can already see it. Like, especially because I think they're exposed to being in the public eye way too early now. My little girl, when I turn on, flip out my phone to take a picture, she is posing like nobody's business. And there's part of me that my heart just breaks because I'm like, no, sweetheart. You know, like, you don't have to pose for me just be you. I love you just like you are, you know, but also, it's cute and funny at the same time. And so, talk to our moms out here, how do we help our girls process this? As like, as a mother to a daughter how do we help them see, you don't have to prove yourself, you're fully approved of already?

LC: Um, I think actually, Meredith, you and I might have had this conversation before but when I was a mom, your age, and my little people were little people, I had this concept that if you did it right in quotes, you know, like one plus one equals two. And so, I started writing to girls, and I did small groups with girls, when my girls were little, and I, I did everything that I thought that a mom is supposed to do. And I would do it again and I believe in it again. But also, I think it's important for us to recognize that we do what we do and then we trust God with what He does. And so, I know this doesn't really answer the question that you're asking but I just want to encourage you mom, there isn't a formula. You don't have to work so hard to figure out the formula because the creator made your daughter, and as you rely on Him, He will, if you're talking to the Holy Spirit on a daily basis all the time, He'll give you the words to say, when she comes home from school and she's been made fun of. He'll give you the words to say when that boy busted her heart, and you want to bust him for doing. I've been there a few times.

So, I just kind of wanted to start with that by, we can't do any particular thing to make our kids in quotes turn out, right. That's not our job. Why God gave you to your girl, to your son, is for you to pour truth in. One time I was reading something, I don't know if it's a parenting book or an article, but the author gave me this picture, and again since I'm visual, it has stuck with me and I still, you know, live this out with my adult children.

Think of truth as a suitcase. You fill up this suitcase and you stick the suitcase in the trunk of your child your child's car, and you just keep putting in this, you keep putting in their trunk what they need. Now they're taken off and they're driving, and they maybe don't care about what's in the trunk right now. But

at some point in their life, when God intersects the way He will and draws them to Himself, because that is His job. I read that yesterday in John when I was reading my Bible and Jesus said, I will draw all men to myself and I'm like, thank You, Jesus that it's not my job. It's not my job to draw them to you. That's your job and thank you for doing your job well. But at some point in the life of our children, they're going to need Jesus. And let's just admit it most of the time, that's not a great place of when they need Him. But when they do that truth that you have poured into their life of what God's Word says that truth will be there, and then the Holy Spirit can draw that truth out. So, Mama, pour it in, you know, the thing I used to do, is I made our kids show up to breakfast every morning, and we ate breakfast together, and I read the Bible to them as they as they ate their breakfast. My high schooler hated it. My elementary school, you know, person was, you know, probably sleep and half sleeping. But you know, why not that long ago, the three adults, they were laughing in the kitchen about the songs they could remember growing up, and the different things that came back to them. And here they are, you know, 29, 26 and 23, singing these crazy songs that their mom made them sing. So, it's going in there.

MB: I love that, Lynn. I wrote something down when you were saying that, as you said, as you rely on Him, yes, He will give you what you need to be the mom for that daughter. And it just made me realize like you, you can't take someone somewhere you haven't been. And so, Mama, you've got to if you're trying to make your daughter realize how approved she is, how loved she is, you can't take her there until you've gone there first. You know, so get whole, get healthy. Maybe you need to do that alongside your daughter, you know, and maybe that's the journey that the Lord has for you. But starting out by relying on Him to fill you up I think is where we all have to start. Right. So good.

Lynn, thank you so much for coming on the show today. If you guys are in a season of life where you're raising tween girls in that in between season, you need to check out Lynn's most recent devotional resource, *Loved and Cherished*. You can check it out at P31bookstore.com. I believe the book is written for the tweens not for the mamas, right?

LC: Yes, it was written to 8- to 12-year-olds and I think that's been one of my greatest surprises, is getting emails from moms saying you wrote this for my daughter, but as I'm reading it to my daughter, I realize it's for me.

MB: Again, it's that right there. Like walk with your daughters, you know, in this journey. You know, Lynn, you're in your 50s, you're still journeying through this approval thing, this identity thing. You know, I'm about to be in my 40s and a couple of where we are, I am and you too Kaley, you know, and our daughters will be too so let's walk this road together.

KO: Absolutely, and we want to take a couple of seconds and equip you with a few more resources you can use now if you feel like you want to dig a little deeper, and so two things that you can look up right now on the show notes at Proverbs31.org/listen are, number one, *Chosen, Called and Confident: Five days of believing God can use you*. This is going to come through your email, it's by Lysa TerKeurst. And the second thing that you can get your hands on is *Truths for When you Question Who You Are*, this is a free download. Again, you can access those on our show notes at Proverbs31.org/listen. Well, that is it for today friends. At Proverbs31 our mission is to help you know the truth and live the truth of God's Word because we really believe that when you do, it will change everything.