Oman's Secret for Confident Living

KAROL LADD



EUGENE, OREGON

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A WOMAN'S SECRET FOR CONFIDENT LIVING

Copyright © 2011 by Karol Ladd Published by Harvest House Publishers Eugene, Oregon 97402 www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ladd, Karol.

A woman's secret for confident living / Karol Ladd.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7369-2965-3 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-4217-1 (eBook)

1. Christian women—Religious life—Textbooks. 2. Confidence—Religious aspects—Christianity—Textbooks. 3. Bible. N.T. Colossians—Textbooks. I. Title.

BV4527.L2535 2011 248.8'43—dc22

2010051945

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Printed in the United States of America

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 / VP-SK / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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here in the World Is Truth?



"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Romans 12:2

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

A.W. Tozer

hen our daughter told us she wanted to major in philosophy at college, I was a bit concerned. Philosophy? What does a person do in life with a philosophy degree? I pictured men with long hair and beards sitting around on stone benches discussing the meaning of life. Having never taken a philosophy class in all of my years of schooling, I wasn't quite sure what a degree in philosophy really looked like, so I went to the bookstore and picked up a few books on the topic. *Philosophy for Dummies* was actually my favorite—quite an insightful read and very helpful in my incredibly intellectual pursuit of understanding

philosophy. Unfortunately, the books I read never did answer the question about what a person does in life with a philosophy degree, but at least I was able to carry on a slightly coherent conversation about the Socratic method with my daughter.

I do want you to know that our daughter's college experience had a positive outcome. During her years of study at Baylor University, she became increasingly sensitive toward the needs of the impoverished families in the city of Waco. More importantly, she recognized the common condition of the poverty of the soul (I think that's a philosophical term), and so she began to reach out and serve the children in her community through the connection of visual arts. She went on to start Waco Arts Initiative, an afterschool art program for the kids living in the government housing projects. There you have it—there's one perfectly wonderful thing you can do with a philosophy degree!

So what is the study of philosophy all about anyway? The term philosophy actually means the love of wisdom and knowledge. The Greek root word *philos* means loving and *sophos* means wise. In a broad sense, philosophy is an investigation into the principles and laws that regulate the universe. More specifically it refers to a system of belief or doctrine about truth, existence, natural laws, theology, and morality. Our personal philosophy colors the way we understand the world, how we think about ourselves and, most importantly, what we believe about God.

Thousands of years ago Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle made philosophical waves in their own community, and the ripple effects of their ideas are still felt today. Throughout the ages, philosophers concerned themselves with the existence of God and His influence on creation. In our postmodern culture it may seem like philosophy is distant and irrelevant, but the significance of knowing what we believe and why we believe it has never diminished. Our pursuit of wisdom and knowledge must be grounded in truth and not in the winds of current trends or popular ways of thinking. As we dive into Colossians, we find that the believers were battling the influence of popular philosophies of their day, and Paul was deeply concerned about their knowledge of the truth. He wanted them to know with certainty the truth about Christ. Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians in order to strengthen

their understanding and philosophy of life based on Christ and the truth of God's Word. We too need to establish who we are and what we believe in order to develop a foundation for our confidence.

Colossal Confusion

Recently for my fiftieth birthday (and I can't believe I just told you my age) my husband, Curt, decided to take me on a celebration trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Have you ever been there? It is quite a cross section of people and beliefs. Although Christianity seems to have a strong presence, with several beautiful cathedrals in the square, New Age mysticism and Native American traditions also dominate the culture. The city is what I would call a bouillabaisse of philosophies and ideas. Now my friends always laugh at me when I use the word *bouillabaisse* because it's not a term people use every day. I perhaps overuse the word to describe anything filled with variety. Bouillabaisse is actually a French word that describes a stew or chowder made with several different kinds of fish. It's the perfect word to describe different concepts and ideas blended together in one place.

Interestingly, the city of Colossae back in Paul's day had some similarities to modern-day Santa Fe, as both cities seem to be Meccas of merging ideas. Oddly, both cities were known for their merging roads as well as their merging ideas. In its early years, Santa Fe served as a crossroads for two major trading thoroughfares: the Santa Fe trail, extending from Missouri to Santa Fe, and El Camino Real, which was a supply route from Mexico City. In a similar way, in the fifth century BC the city of Colossae was significantly situated at the junction of the main trade routes in Asia going east-west and north-south. By the time Paul came on the scene, the main roads had been rerouted to the nearby city of Laodicea, which led to the gradual decline of Colossae. The Colossians lost most of their commerce and industry, yet they still remained at the crossroads of philosophical ideas.

It's All About What You Believe

So what in the world does philosophy have to do with you and me and our lives today? It comes down to this—what we believe about

God affects how we function in this world. If we think of God as an angry and demanding dictator, then we function as fretful and hopeless slaves. If we see Him as a careless Creator who keeps His hands off what happens in our world, then we tend to see life as purposeless and haphazard, and ourselves as insignificant. Yet if we recognize God our Father as the High King of heaven and Creator of all, the One who cares about the details of our lives and sent His only Son to give His life on our behalf, then we value our lives as holy and dearly loved children. We also value the lives of other people as well.

If we want to live with confident hope, then we must be firmly established in our philosophy of God. We must know what we believe about Him. Typically, I'm not a big watcher of television reality shows, but one show recently caught my interest. The premise of the show is built around the CEO or president or head honcho of a major corporation working incognito in the lower ranks of their business. Picture this: the CEO of a national waste management company cleaning out porta-potties with the service guys, or a president of a popular hamburger chain flipping burgers at the restaurant. Usually the boss returns to the corporate offices with a great appreciation for what the workers do day in and day out, and they also begin to implement changes and improvements in the field.

My favorite part of the show is at the very end, when the field personnel are called into the corporate offices and are told the truth about the identity of their mysterious co-worker. The employees are usually shocked because they had imagined the upper-level management to be a bunch of stuffy, distant slavedrivers who didn't understand them. But once they got to know the head of the company, they felt differently about working for them. Suddenly they felt like they had hope, and that their daily challenges were recognized. They felt understood, and they realized the leadership of the company wasn't so bad after all.

It makes all the difference when you know the one at the top. It changes everything! In the reality show, hopeless employees were transformed into hope-filled employees who were proud to work for their company. In a similar way, the apostle Paul desired nothing more than for believers to know the God of all the universe in a personal way. He

wanted them to know Christ—not just know *about* Him, but to really *know* Him. Paul recognized that as the Colossians grew to know Christ, their lives would be transformed from hopeless followers of popular ideas and beliefs to hope-filled followers of Christ. We too have the opportunity to get to know the God of all creation. As we come to know Christ personally our lives can be transformed with a confident hope.

Simply Radiant

When I first met Ellen, I was struck by her radiant smile. At first I didn't notice her cane, but as she gracefully made her way over to meet me I could see that she walked with a slight limp. Ellen told me that she had been diagnosed with spina bifida at birth. Yet she was able to walk, and she was still thriving at 70 years of age. Ellen is literally a walking miracle because back then most children with spina bifida were not expected to live into adulthood. Ellen was able to be the recipient of a very experimental procedure at a young age, which enabled her to walk. When I told Ellen I wanted to write her story she said, "Well, make it all about Jesus, not about me."

Ellen's focus is not on herself; it is on the God who loves and cares for her and continues to shine His light through her. Ellen views her physical limitations from a positive perspective. She recognizes that her challenges offer her an opportunity to reach out and serve other women who have disabilities...and we all have disabilities of some sort. Ellen is a beauty consultant and uses the platform of makeup and outward beauty to talk about the importance of the inner beauty that comes from knowing the Lord. Here's her mission statement:

Making a DIFFERENCE in women whose lives have been touched by disability, assisting with their choice for their eternal destiny, one lipstick at a time!

Ellen realizes that no one is perfect, and our imperfections lead us to a perfect God. It is in Him that we experience strength and joy in life. Ellen's understanding of who God is makes a significant difference in her life. One more thing I must tell you about Ellen is that she loves to pray. She looks to the Lord as her strength day by day, moment by

moment, as she visits with Him through prayer. Several times as I was engaged in conversation with Ellen she stopped to say, "Let's go to the Father in prayer about this." Right then and there she prayed. And what a beautiful prayer it was, filled with love and trust and joy in her heavenly Father. Ellen is an example of a woman who lives with a confident hope in the Lord. She lives with a perspective of thankfulness for the opportunity to serve God with her disability. She also lives with a heavenly focus, knowing that this world is not her home and that one day her earthly body will be transformed into a glorious one.

Perspective is everything, and it is a choice. We can view our frustrations and our disappointing circumstances with anger toward God, believing that this life is all we have. Or we can view difficulties from the perspective of "Lord, my eyes are on You. Use me in these circumstances for Your glory. Help me and give me strength along the way." With an eternal perspective we can live with confidence, knowing that this life isn't *it*. We can look forward with confident hope toward heaven and place our confident hope in the God who will care for us here. Ellen is a radiant woman with an eternal perspective. I want to view the world like Ellen!

What's Your Worldview?

One of the big in-vogue words today is *worldview*. The term worldview in some ways comes down to our own personal philosophy in life, meaning the way we view the world in terms of the nature of God, man, morality, knowledge, and even death. For believers in Christ it is important to be aware of other people's worldviews, but what is most important is to know our own personal worldview. Pastor John Piper wrote, "Wimpy worldviews make wimpy Christians. And wimpy Christians won't survive the days ahead." I want to be a confident Christian, not a wimpy one. How about you? Churchleader.net described the importance of our worldview in this way:

Worldviews act somewhat like eyeglasses or contact lenses. That is, a worldview should provide the correct "prescription" for making sense of the world just as wearing the correct prescription for your eyes brings things into focus.

And, in either example, an incorrect prescription can be dangerous, even life threatening. We are faced with a smorgasbord of worldviews, all of which make claims concerning truth.²

It may not be on the top of your to-do list this week, but it is important to consider your personal worldview. What do you believe about God and how He interacts with creation? Have you considered what your purpose is in this world and what God has created you to do? Have you considered where you go from here? Just as the early philosophers began their speculations of life with their view of God, so our journey to significance begins with our view of God. We must seek the truth about Him.

I believe the truth about God is revealed in the Bible. In this matchless book we not only discover the attributes of God, but we also learn how He deals with mankind and what His relationship is with creation. My worldview begins with the Bible. I have a biblical worldview, which means I see the world through the lens of what God revealed in His Word. The Bible is a rock-solid foundation to stand on when it comes to seeking knowledge about life and God. As a young girl I memorized a short verse in the Bible that said, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." Philosophies, religions, and cultural beliefs will come and go, but not the precepts of the Bible. It has stood the test of time and will stand as a sure foundation for a worldview throughout all generations.

From the Old Testament we can sense David's biblical worldview:

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

A Woman's Secret for Confident Living

The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.

They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.

By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.⁴

If you are seeking wisdom and knowledge; if you hope to find meaning and truth; if you desire to know who God is and how he wants you to live—begin with the Bible. It will light your path and lead you along your journey in life. Paul wrote to Timothy, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." 5

The philosopher Immanuel Kant is quoted as saying, "All the interests of my reason, speculative as well as practical, combine in the three following questions:

- 1. What can I know?
- 2. What ought I to do?
- 3. What may I hope?"6

The Bible firmly answers each of those questions. What can I know? In the Bible I learn the truth about God and how He relates to His creation. I know I am loved and have a purpose in this world. What ought I to do? In the Bible, I learn how God wants me to live, and how He wants me to relate to others. I learn I ought to love Him with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love my neighbor as myself. I learn that if I want to be great in God's kingdom, I must learn to be the servant of all. What may I hope? This question is addressed throughout the Bible. I have hope for a glorious future in heaven one day. I

have hope that a God who loves me will give me strength and comfort as I walk through the challenges of life. I have hope that He will never leave me alone. I have hope that He knows my needs and hears my prayers.

The Bible answers a lot of questions, doesn't it? So what about you—do you have a biblical worldview? I like how Myrtle Grove Christian School in Wilmington, North Carolina, describes their worldview:

One of our chief aims at Myrtle Grove Christian School is to instill in students a biblical worldview that is based wholly upon God's Word, the Bible. By worldview, we mean a person's mental framework for understanding the "big picture" of reality, based upon conscious and unconscious assumptions about God, creation, humanity, morality, and purpose.

We believe that the Bible describes the world as it really is. In other words, the Bible answers not only man's religious questions but also the major philosophical questions for which man has always sought answers. The student with a biblical worldview has a system of thought that is unified, logically consistent, and relevant to every area of life. The propositions below provide a brief description of a biblical worldview.

GOD

There is one triune God who is eternally existent in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is infinite, personal, sovereign, all powerful, all knowing, and perfect in love, justice and mercy. God is not silent but has revealed Himself to mankind through the Bible, creation, and the person of Jesus Christ.

CREATION

All things were created by God and are sustained by God. Creation consists of a physical realm and a spiritual realm. All of creation was originally good but is now in a fallen state due to the sin of man.

HUMANITY

Humans were created by God in His image and likeness. Consequently, all human life has intrinsic value. At the same time, man lives in a fallen state as a result of sin. Man's sinful condition alienates him from God and renders him unable to worship God properly, live righteously, understand spiritual things, and recognize that all truth in creation reveals the Creator. People can be restored to relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

MORALITY

Morality is based upon the character and nature of God, not upon the consensus of society or culture. It is absolute, not relative. God's moral law is revealed in Scripture, and God commands our compliance with that law.

PURPOSE

God has commanded mankind to have dominion over the earth. Believers are to seek for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven and are to be witnesses of Christ to their culture. History is linear, not cyclical, such that humans have only one life to live, and their decisions in that life will affect their eternal destiny.⁷

Now there's a school that knows what they believe! I applaud them for stating it clearly and boldly. Despite the plethora of philosophies rolling around in our culture today, we too can have a clear foundation of what we believe. We must examine everything and hold it up to the light of God's Word to separate God's truth from man's ideas. Just as the Colossians faced the intriguing influences of their culture, so it is tempting to buy into the religious concepts du jour. What's on the menu today?

One of the prevalent schools of thought in Colossae during Paul's day was the early forms of Gnosticism, which emphasized a special, secret knowledge that only a few elite intellectuals possessed. (The Greek work *gnosis* means "to know.") Those who followed the early

stages of Gnosticism believed that God was good, but all matter was evil. They didn't believe that Jesus was God, because all created forms are evil, so they declared that Jesus was merely one of a series of emanations descending from God. In their belief system, Jesus must be less than God. They believed in a secret and higher knowledge above the Scriptures. We see similar belief systems in our culture today, yet knowing the God of the Bible can bring clarity to our lives. As you study Colossians, you will grow to know what you believe and be able to walk in a confident knowledge of who you are in Christ.

Paul challenged the Colossians to live lovingly and boldly, and to reflect Christ in what they did and said. I think we could stand to have that reminder as well! All in all, Paul wanted the early Christians to be set apart by their sure faith and unwavering hope in Christ alone. I'm going to make an assumption here, but I'm pretty sure you don't want to lead an empty life based on meaningless philosophies and ideas. I'm guessing you want to live a fulfilled and purposeful life based on truth, God's truth. That's one of the many important lessons we will glean as we journey through this book together. Religious relativism leads us only on an endless search for hope and purpose, but the foundational truths of Christ and His Word lead us to the true source of hope and purpose.

-Confident Steps

ADDITIONAL READING: Psalm 119—The transforming power of God's Word

BATTLE FOR THE TRUTH:

Confidence Defeater—I have no absolute truth on which to base my life.

Confidence Builder—Confidence is established when we base our worldview on the sure foundation of the Bible.

CHOICES:

- Seek the truth about God in the Bible, not in current philosophies.
- Examine what you hear and read and hold it up against the light of Scripture.
- Be alert and aware of cultural influences that tend to do battle with your confidence.
- Discover who you are, by getting to know Christ and what He did for you on the cross.
- Live with a heavenly perspective.
- Know your own worldview and what you believe.

Deliberate Plan: Write out your worldview.

Take some time to reflect on your own worldview. Consider the worldview provided in this chapter and write your own statement of belief below.

What I believe about:

God-

Where in the World Is Truth?

| Creation— | | |
|-----------|--|--|
| Humanity— | | |
| Morality— | | |
| Purpose— | | |