**Starting-Over Guidesheet #8**

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**How Significant Are You?**

***Judith Couchman***

My mother always beamed when she repeated this story from my oldest sister’s childhood. It varied a bit with each telling, but the message remained constant. Whenever Shirley returned home from kindergarten or another outing without Mom, she marched into the house and yelled, “I’m here!” This announcement signaled my mother’s part in the routine: she fawned over her daughter’s presence.

Mom had no trouble with her role in the performance. This young child issued from her blood; this Shirley Temple look-alike sprang from her loving procreation. How could she not delight in her daughter’s existence? Any other response would have been unthinkable. Until she died, Mother felt this joy for her children and grandchildren. Though she encouraged and reveled in our accomplishments, more than anything Mom loved us just because we belonged to her.

This, too, is the way of God the Father. He declares to his children, “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3). He draws us to himself for the sheer pleasure of it. He loves us not for who we are, or what we do, or who we can or will be. He loves us because he created us, because we belong to him.

It is a profoundly simple reality.

It is especially difficult to own this reality for ourselves, even if we are blessed with parents exceedingly talented at loving. We base our significance on doing and hope the activity will verify our value and lovability. We do not easily understand that just being a person created by God makes us deeply significant.

However, when we’re willing to wrestle with our disbelief and eventually embrace this significance, when we push beyond an intellectual understanding into the knowledge of the heart, it poignantly influences how we view ourselves and manage our lives. Instead of questioning our worth and berating our perfections, we can consider ourselves magnificent works of art in progress, filled with meaning and the freedom to be whom God created us to be.

**Works of Art in Progress**

We can be like the beautiful work of art that sits in my living room, the kind that beckons attention, evokes emotion, and lingers in the mind. It is an exquisite piece of pottery that woos and teases passersby. Half vase because of its small pedestal bottom and half pot due to its wide girth and mouth, this creation embodies the word *unique.* On one side the wavy edged mouth dips into a slit, creating a feminine, slightly sexy effect enhanced by the pot’s muted peach, tan, and white colors.

I would admire this intriguing artwork no matter what, but it’s especially meaningful because my friend Pat thoughtfully shaped the piece and presented it to me as a birthday gift. It serves as a monument to our friendship. A narrow-eyed pragmatist might examine this creation and question, “What good is it? It doesn’t do anything.” And yes, I could fill the pot with pine cones or tennis balls or jewelry or whatever—just to assign it something to do—but that would detract from its intrinsic beauty. All things considered, I value the pot’s form more than its function.

This is how God feels about us. We are his beautiful and thoughtful creation. Like one-of-a-kind pottery, above all else he treasures our innate worth. We are immensely significant, and our value does not depend on anything we do, think, say, feel, earn, inherit, or look like. It is because we exist as God's creation. *Finis.* Nothing more.

**Living in a Broken World**

Because we live in imperfect bodies in a broken world, our work, whether domestic or in the marketplace, will meet with opposition and disappointment. So embracing our significance protects us from shattering when our occupation changes or dissipates. That is, when God allows circumstances to point our life journey in a direction that we do not want, plan, or expect, our inner security doesn’t crumble. We focus on him first, then everything else falls into perspective.

This means that whatever life serves us—times of productivity or seasons of fallowness, Olympian flexibility or confinement to a wheelchair, personal and professional highs or lows—we define ourselves by our significance to God rather than by what we do.

Take time to examine your significance to God. Your belief about this significance can enhance or hinder your starting-over process.

1. What is your initial, not-thinking-about-it response to this statement? “You are deeply significant because God created you.”
2. Do you really believe you are significant? Why, or why not? How is this evident in your life?
3. How has life not turned out as you expected?
4. How could embracing your significance to God affect your unwanted circumstances?
5. How could grasping your significance affect your starting-over process?
6. Write a statement about your significance to God. Each day this week, read it aloud, allowing it to affect your thoughts and actions.

 *—Adapted from Designing a Woman’s Life, copyright 1997 by Judy (Judith) C. Couchman*