

Book Review: *Accepted in the Beloved*

By Leslie Ann McKinney (*House of Prisca and Aquila Series, Wipf & Stock, 2008*)

REVIEWED BY ELIZABETH W. McLAUGHLIN

Pastor Leslie Ann McKinney passionately believes that God loves and accepts his daughters and has created *Accepted in the Beloved: A Devotional Bible Study for Women on Finding Healing and Wholeness in God's Love* to help women know and experience this love for themselves. The book is suitable for individual and group studies, but it is also a helpful resource for spiritual directors and other mentors who work with women who have been wounded in their relationships or in their faith communities.

McKinney, pastor of community at Pilgrim Church of Beverly, Massachusetts, addresses “all God’s daughters who have suffered from any form of abuse and who long to know and experience the intimate love and acceptance of God” (xi). In six short lessons and fifty-five pages, readers are led through individual chapters, whose topics include how we are chosen in love, created in God’s image, how we are to understand God’s nature, express emotion, live in freedom, and discover our calling in life. In each chapter, readers are directed through a fill-in-the-blank conversation with the author through a process of encountering key scriptures (“learning God’s truth”), practical application and journaling exercises (“experiencing God’s love”), and a call to help someone else (“sharing God’s love”). The study skillfully weaves scriptural truth together with a focused process of reflection.

Instead of just reading this book, I decided to experience it firsthand over several weeks and to put its principles into practice. McKinney’s conversational style works well in this format, and she effectively acknowledges that her readers may have experienced some kind of abuse while avoiding the rhetoric of bitterness or victimization. “Perhaps you have experienced repeated rejection or abuse from your spouse, a close friend, or significant other, and this has hindered you from believing that you are precious, valuable, and fully acceptable to God” (2). McKinney’s focus is on guiding her readers into an encounter with the living God through a gentle confrontation with

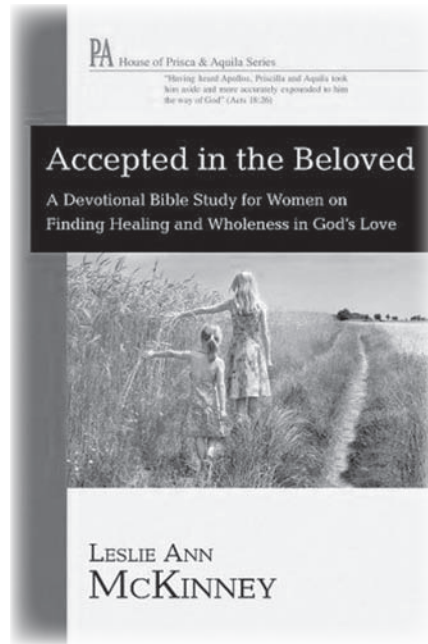
violations of the past that can distort our present perceptions about God and ourselves.

Theologically, the author selects key biblical passages that emphasize the love of God and then walks the reader through specific applications to redefine a more biblical image of God and to help heal a wounded identity. The book introduces extended passages and then includes them for further questioning and meditation. Without being too confessional, McKinney offers stories from her own experience to illustrate the disconnection and faulty perception that arise from abusive events, and how these affected her relationship to God. In turn, she applies scriptural truths and shares the books and spiritual disciplines she uses to aid in the healing process over time. She writes, “In my own life, the greatest tool God has used to grow me in his love is simply being with him in silence and solitude” (9).

As one who teaches and mentors young women at a Christian college, and one who has had a very difficult time accepting the love of God, I found this book to be balanced and realistic in the tension between biblical information about God’s love and the lived experience of feeling accepted and comfortable in one’s own skin. I found the chapter on expressing God-given emotions to be particularly helpful.

After asking, “Do you want to learn more about yourself in relationship to your emotions and learn to express them in healthy, constructive, and life-sustaining ways?” (29), McKinney walks her readers through a helpful process to acknowledge, control, and work through negative emotions using an experience of her own. Instead of focusing on some mind trick of self-control, she advocates taking control over emotions by turning them over to God: “My security is rooted in God and not in another human being” (36). Through this practice, and regular spiritual disciplines, a stable emotional life is possible. She wisely recommends counseling for deep-seated issues.

This book is a useful resource for pastors, youth workers, spiritual directors, and others who work with Christian women who have experienced any kind of abuse—including church abuse—that makes them feel unacceptable to God. For those committed to biblical equality, *Accepted* will help address the very real pain some women have experienced in relationships that encouraged their silence. I left the book wanting more—space to journal, exercises and reflection, and time to absorb—everything that this powerful book has to offer. I also left the study with a deeper knowledge that I, too, am accepted in the Beloved.



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