

WITHOUT RIVAL

Embrace Your Identity and Purpose
in an Age of Confusion
and Comparison

LISA BEVERE



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Lisa Bevere, *Without Rival*
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Dearest one,

You are a daughter loved by a Father without rival, entrusted with a message and promise beyond compare, in a time without precedent. You have been chosen for this moment that is at once great and terrible. For this very reason, you must love fearlessly . . . believe outrageously . . . and hope without measure.

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An Identity without Rival

Our chief want is someone who will inspire us
to be what we know we could be.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Have you ever had a rival?
I don't mean a bit of friendly competition in
sports. Nor am I referring to toddlers who compete
for the attention and affection of their parents.

I'm thinking in terms of a more consistent detractor. A
rival certainly does not feel like a friend or like family. When
rivalry comes into play, its goal is not so much to win the
game as it is to remove you from the field.

But what if you discovered that the life you have always
wanted was outside the realm of competition? What if you
learned you did not have to lose to opt out of the game?
What if you discovered you *couldn't* lose? What if you could

not only think outside of the box but also choose to *live* outside of it?

Decades ago I read a book that suggested that the end of the world as we know it would be brought about by widespread alienation (rather than an alien invasion). It theorized that the time would come when the world would be divided into two opposing camps or trains of thought. When this climate of widespread division existed, then it would be a small thing to incite opposing factions into attacking one another until we experienced a full-blown apocalypse.

Any systematic division this extensive would start on a much more intimate scale. It can begin close to home where divided houses are filled with wounded people with divided hearts. There are very real forces that whisper lying innuendos that assault your mind, your will, and your emotions in the hope of causing you to turn on yourself and then to turn on others.

It is hard to escape the messages and messengers that tell us we are not good enough, young enough, smart enough, fast enough, and rich enough. We are bombarded in the hope that we will shrink to their expectations. It is only human nature that we would want to deflect this incessant bullying that implies we are never enough. When this harassment reaches a critical point, some will yield by conforming and copying, while others will rebel as they sling back accusations of their own.

We judge when we feel judged.

We shame when we feel shame.

We hate when we dislike ourselves.

When we've been bankrupted, it is not long before we want to rob others. It is a cycle in which everyone loses and nobody wins. But what if the words of Paul were true?

But godliness with contentment is great gain. (1 Tim. 6:6)

Godliness is the ability to adopt God's vantage point. This means just as we acknowledge how he sees others, we embrace how he sees us.

Contentment and being truly comfortable in your own skin won't breed complacency; they will release creativity! Turn away from all the detractors and distractions. He has his eyes on us so we can lift our eyes to him.

What then?

Rather than compete for what was never meant for you . . . you would have the energy to discover what is yours.

I pray this book brings clarity to what the unwholesome everyday muddies. Rather than striving to win a competition that gains you nothing, I want you positioned to win the war. There is a very real battle going on for the strength of your soul. It is time you took *your* place in this world. Let's expose the lies and distractions and find out who you really are.

Lost and Found

I love dogs. Recently, while I was far from home on a trip to South Korea, our beloved dog, Tia, was impounded. Apparently, a workman left the front door of our home open, and Tia left behind the warmth of our house in an attempt to brave the streets of a subzero Colorado winter. For whatever reason, she didn't find her way home that night. A yet unidentified neighbor was kind enough to take her in overnight and then drop her off the next day at the animal shelter.

Tia had a tag on, but it was next to useless because the phone number on the tag was no longer connected to our

house. Then add into this mix the fact that her dog license had expired (sorry, I thought it was a onetime process) and you have a much-loved dog with a home but with no voice or identity markers to help her find it.

In Seoul, Korea, I was oblivious. My sons had wisely chosen to hide Tia's misadventure from me, but no doubt there was panic on the home front. They looked and looked but couldn't find the dog anywhere. They feared the coyotes had gotten her. As a last resort, almost on a lark, they followed someone's suggestion and called the dog pound.

When Austin arrived at the shelter and saw Tia, he wasn't sure she was our dog. The ordeal had so completely changed her demeanor that she appeared depressed rather than excited to see him. She remained in the corner of the cage, shaking and cowering. After Austin paid the equivalent of a night in a fine hotel and some hefty fines (apparently an expired license is severely frowned upon), she was ours to bring home once again.

When I returned home and learned of the whole story, I was a little hurt. Not by my sons but by my dog. Tia had been our dog for more than a decade, and this was the first time she had ever wandered away and not returned on her own. I was concerned . . . why now? Were her cataracts affecting her vision? Had her advanced age disoriented her? Was she looking for me?

Ultimately, the reason she left did not matter. She belonged to our family and her inability to find her own way home did not negate this fact. The search was made, the fine was paid, the license was renewed, and she was pulled out of her cage of shame and returned to her place on our bed at my feet. One errant night was not cause enough for us to disown her.

You probably know where I'm going with this. If we (imperfect pet owners that we so obviously are) would do this much for a dog, what would our heavenly Father do for us? Your first step in knowing your identity is found in who you are to him. First John 3:1 gives us a window into how God sees us.

What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we're called children of God! That's who we really are. But that's also why the world doesn't recognize us or take us seriously, because it has no idea who he is or what he's up to. (Message)

Let's talk about just how marvelous God's love is. It is awe inspiring, spectacular, and over-the-top. It is the very opposite of mundane or ordinary. Its depth is enough to cause us to marvel. And this marvelous love is an extension, kind of like a gift with a purchase but better, because this is a gift with a gift. We were gifted salvation. God saw us in our wretched, caged state, cowering in the corner of some religious humane society, and paid the price to save us. But he didn't stop there. He drew us close, renewed our license, and identified us as his own. (All before we'd even had a bath!) You really are his. And he loves all of his children marvelously. But he loves them uniquely.

Equal or Unique?

Often in our human attempts to make all things fair, we are tempted to think that God loves us all the same. As good as this may initially sound, *same* just isn't big enough. The

word *same* implies that we might be somehow replaceable or interchangeable. Like, “Oh no, I broke one of the purple glasses I bought at Target last week; I hope they still have the same ones in stock.” Or using my current example, “The dog I loved for more than a decade wandered off the grid. That’s okay; I’ll just buy another one to replace her and I will love it just the same.”

This doesn’t work for me, and I don’t believe it works for God either—and I will tell you why.

One afternoon I took a nap. The problem was I was on my laptop and not my bed when I fell asleep. As my head bobbed forward, I abruptly woke up to discover eight pages of the letter “t.”

At which point I felt I really should go and take a real nap. So I picked up the dog at my feet and wandered off to my bedroom. As I was dozing off, I heard the Holy Spirit whisper, “I do not love my children equally.”

Shocked, I sat straight up in my bed. Where did this blasphemous thought come from? I blurted out, “You have to love us the same or else it wouldn’t be fair.”

My protest was answered with, “I don’t. *Equal* implies my love can be measured, and I assure you . . . it cannot. *Same* would mean my children are replaceable or interchangeable, and they are not. My heart is not divided into compartments. No one could take the place of or displace another in my heart. For you see, I don’t love my children equally, I love them uniquely.”

Take a deep breath and listen. *God loves us uniquely rather than equally.* Believe me, *unique* is better.



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If you have more than one child, you probably already understand this. When that second, third, or later child was born, your love was not divided. It was multiplied in ways that were immeasurable. You couldn't quantify your love for each child even if you tried. How can you measure the pull on your heart? Your love for each child is unique. Each one awakens your parental love in a different manner. Interestingly, you may love something unique about one child that is the opposite trait of something you love in another. For example, I have a feisty granddaughter who is a whirlwind. She is the sister of my firstborn grandson, who is intentional and gentle. I don't compare them. I love, enjoy, and appreciate their very different approaches to life. I would not want them to act the same for the world. Neither one of them occupies more of the real estate of my heart; I love both of them completely, but uniquely.

Equal also implies God's love is measured or measurable, and it is neither. It's infinite. *Unique* carries so much more depth. There is only one like you! St. Augustine said it best: "God loves each of us as if there was only one of us."

Our Father's love cannot be likened to a pan of brownies or a cherry pie that is painstakingly cut by a loving parent into equal portions so that no child feels slighted. His marvelous love is not subject to portion control. Do you understand he loved you before there was a beginning, and his love for you knows no end? You can turn from him, run away, and make your bed in hell, but your actions will not stop his love. (Seriously, though, who'd want to sleep in hell?)

Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord said this about his love: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (Jer. 31:3).

Notice the tense here. It is past. His love is a settled matter. He loved you, the real you, the unique you, with an everlasting, never-ending, it doesn't matter how old or how young, how thin or how heavy you are kind of love. He loved you when you were young and foolish. He loves me more mature and random. God is love. Our Father does not *have love* for you . . . he *is love* for you.

Our Father's marvelous love for us is infinite, intimate, and unique. And you are uniquely loved because you were uniquely created.

Unique means "the sole example of, prototype or only one," and my favorite definition, "*without equal or rival.*" Our Father God stands alone without rival, so we shouldn't be surprised that in his eyes we are daughters without rival, which eliminates every reason that we should ever compete with one another.

You are the only example of you!

You are the beginning and the end of you. There is not a designer sample scheduled for mass production. In his lineage, there are no copies, or same, and no equal. There is no rival for the way you express his love to others or for how he expresses his love to you. No one can do *you* like *you*!

God uniquely created your DNA and knit your frame in secret so he could surprise the world. He authored how your heart expresses itself; he was the architect of your smile and the melody of your voice; he made all of your features with the fondest thoughts of only you in mind. He celebrated along with your parents your first smile and watched with affection your first steps.

Because of this tender, intentional care, there are multiple facets of your life that express and reflect his love uniquely.

He wove all these exceptional aspects and specific talents into the package of you, his daughter. He knew each attribute would be expressed best through your feminine form.

He knew you would represent and relate to him best as a daughter. This is the very reason he chose female for your gender. There is a very tender bond between fathers and daughters.

He didn't have another daughter in mind when he fashioned you . . . you are his delight.

This means you wouldn't do it better if you were taller, shorter, blacker, or whiter.

This also means you would not be a better carrier of the love he has entrusted to you if you were a male. God does not love sons more and daughters less. Nor does he love each gender equally. He loves male and female uniquely. Perhaps as you grew up you heard whispers, or even shouts, that your father or mother wished you'd been born a son. Maybe there was a time you wished you'd been born a male too. But know this . . . God never did.

Our Father rejoiced when you drew your first breath, and as the years unfolded, the angels of heaven rejoiced with him when you were reborn as his Spirit-quicken daughter.

Marvelously loved one, there is absolutely nothing accidental about you.

A Daughter without Rival

So what does all this mean? It means there is more than enough immeasurable, inexhaustible love for us all. You don't have to fight for your place at the table or win his love. No one can take you out or replace you . . . you have no rival.

But friends, that's exactly who we are: children of God. And that's only the beginning. Who knows how we'll end up! What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we'll see him—and in seeing him, become like him. All of us who look forward to his Coming stay ready, with the glistening purity of Jesus' life as a model for our own. (1 John 3:2–3 Message)

Together we're going to discover how to be our full selves—not someone else in an attempt to earn the love and acceptance of others. We're going to stop comparing ourselves with others because comparison is not inspiration. Comparison is cheating us and this earth of who we truly are. Where is the need for comparison or competition if our value and identity are ultimately tied to our innate uniqueness? We will only exhaust ourselves. You are a daughter without rival carrying a light without equal equipped to fight a battle without rival—uniquely.

So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't. (Rom. 12:5–6 Message)

This passage of Scripture reveals the two main detractors from a life without rival: pride and envy. The description of *unique*, a daughter without rival, does not mean you've arrived. What it does mean is there is a journey, and a piece of the puzzle, and a function in the body that is yours to contribute.

Pride disconnects us from the body when it whispers imaginations that exalt us beyond measure and tease us into say-

ing, “My part is the most important part. I stand alone, self-sufficient, self-important, arrogant, and exalted.”

On the other hand, *envy* tempts us to neglect our individual God-given roles in this world when it demeans our assignments. Envy says, *I don't value my role or my part, because I want you out of the way so I can have yours.*

Both of these are two edges of a deadly sword designed to take individuals out and separate related groups of people from their function and place. Sometimes the enemy pits both ends against the middle as he attacks men in the body of Christ with rivalry and a distortion of gender pride while the women fall prey to gender envy.

Be a true friend to all of us by being an authentic you. It is time God's daughters celebrated “unique” and stopped settling for the “same” or competing for “more.” You actually give others permission to disrespect you when you do not express your true self. People can always discern a counterfeit or copy from the original. Even if they don't see it, they will feel and hear it in the hollowness of your words, actions, and appearance. There is a vast difference between following an example and copying. This is one reason why you are so frustrated when you try to be someone else. Life is like a multiple-choice test, and the only wrong answers are the ones you do not choose for yourself.

We slight the designation of our Father's love when we deny our unique self-expression. And please understand that what you look like should be the least of your concerns. So



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many people think they express their uniqueness through their taste in clothing, hair, jewelry, and makeup. These outward expressions are accessories. They are far from the most profound revelation of who you are.

The truth is you can look different and still not understand unique.

Let's stop wasting our time looking around and allowing constantly changing public opinion to imprint its copycat image or ideas on us. Let's confidently embrace all that God created us to uniquely reflect.

Whom Do You Belong To?

I don't need to know who it is you hang around with. I don't need the name of your parents, school, or employer. I want to know the name of the one who gave his life to purchase you. And yet you are missing out on so much if you imagine the reach of his sacrifice stops there. When he found you, he didn't brush you off and put you back where you were before. He raised you. And graced you with his righteousness.

Say it now, even if it is but a whisper of your heart: *I am his and he is mine.*

Your eternal Father is the only one who has the right to define you. Your mother conceived, carried, and cared for you, but your heavenly Father conceptualized, created, and spoke you into existence. When you were lost, he redeemed you so he could once again call you his own. The day will come when time as we know it ends; then he will regenerate each of us, and we will realize this earth life was but a seed, and there in heaven we will blossom into our truest form.

I don't know where life has placed you right now, but please understand that locations, seasons, and circumstances are constantly changing. What really matters in the midst of all the ebb and flow is who you are and to whom you belong.

At the beginning of this chapter I placed a favorite quote of mine by Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be." God is that someone. Everything he is and everything he does inspires. The Creator masterfully crafted all that we see, hear, and know as creation to reconnect us with our divine identity. He sent his Son to reestablish our relationship with him.

With this great reconnection to our true identity in place, far too many are content to allow the shallow confines of *what they do* or *what they have* or even *who they love* to define them. But it is foolish to tie your identity to something that could be so easily taken away from you. Jobs change and skills can be lost and things can be stolen. Even important relationships can be stripped from us. What you have and what you do and who surrounds you can change, but it is vitally important that you never lose who you are and the Creator to whom you belong.

If you only know where you are going, you run the risk of losing yourself along the way. If you only know what you are called to do, you may compromise yourself to achieve your goal.

And thus the age-old question, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

Knowing *who you are* is vastly more important than knowing where you are going or even what you can do. Because he is your Creator, God has quite a bit to say to you about

who you are. And who you truly are carries within it the revelation of what you could be.

Who Are You?

You don't have to look at what you've done or even what you've been through. Don't describe yourself by what you do. You won't need to reference your relational status—single, divorced, married, or dating. This isn't a Facebook status update. This isn't for me or even for them.

I want *you* to know who you are.

Before we go any further, pick up a pen, close your eyes, and ask your Creator to whisper his unique designations over you. Don't be afraid that you are making up words of love and value. These words are really how he sees you. Be still a moment and know. I challenge you to write down three words or phrases that he whispers over you. When you have finished this exercise, look at the words you heard when you were able to push aside everyone else's definitions of you and hear what God was whispering over your life. Are you even a little surprised with your list? Has it been awhile since you considered this perspective on yourself?

I want to assure you that God will never speak something that is contrary to his Word. *The Holy Spirit animates what God's Word outlines*. But because we have a Bible in our possession, should we only read and cease to listen? The Message translation of Hebrews 12:28 assures us that "God is not an indifferent bystander." I believe the ethereal question raised seven times in the book of Revelation remains an invitation to us today:

Are your ears awake? Listen. Listen to the Wind Words, the Spirit blowing through the churches. (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22 Message)

The fact that this question is repeated *seven times* in the span of one book of the Bible cannot help but underscore its prominence . . . and makes me realize I can be awake while my ears remain asleep. It is my very urgent hope that this book awakens your ears to hear.

We can yet turn and hear the voice of God. What might happen if we invite the Holy Spirit to speak into the very places of our lives that we have declared him silent? Will you let him speak to you one-on-one? Is God allowed to speak specifically into your friendships, marriage, and family? In so many ways it is our habit to turn a deaf ear to the warnings of God, and in the process we miss out on other things he longs to impart. Hearing corporately as a body begins with individuals who decide to listen. Do we dare awaken our ears to hear?

We cannot afford to doubt our God-assigned, unique destiny. If we do, we will undermine with hesitancy, fear, or anger all that has been entrusted to us. God wants to redeem, restore, and change your identity so that there is no incident, season, or name from your past left to define you. Yes, seasons, criticisms, and events can refine you—they have the potential to shape the mettle of your life, but they are not the substance of your life . . . God is.

You were sincerely sought because you are uniquely loved and are a unique expression of God's love to others. All that this identity as children of God means is just beginning to be expressed as each of his children becomes who he created

them to be. In a world in which everyone is trying to discover or remake themselves, he is finishing what he authored. This book is an invitation to pursue him . . . that he might reveal you!

Discussion Questions

1. Why is knowing who you *are* more important than even knowing *where* you are going?
2. Discuss why unique is better than equal or same.
3. What are a few of the rivals that have detracted from your ability to embrace your identity and receive God's love?
4. Do you find it difficult to describe yourself outside of what you do? If so, why?
5. What does God whisper over you?