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# 13 REASONS WHY YOU ARE LOVABLE AND CAPABLE

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A 13-day Bible study

*by Rev. Anne Russ*

# IALAC

We all start our day with an invisible sign around our necks—one that says, I AM Lovable and Capable (IALAC). We head out in to the world believing that it is a new day, anything can happen and we will be able to handle anything that comes our way. But as the day wears on, we encounter people who put us down, situations that bring us down and problems that knock us down. Each of those interactions tears away a little piece of our IALAC sign, and (on some days) leaves our sign and our self-worth in tatters. Those are the days we come home feeling like we need a drink, a giant piece of cake, something to hit or just to crawl in bed, pull the covers over our head and never come out again.

Lovable and Capable Bible study is 13 days of scripture and study to remind you of who you are and Whose you are. Look to God's word to affirm that you are valuable and worthy and lovable--not because of what you've done, what other people think or how well your day has gone, but because you are a beloved children of God, wonderfully and fearfully made. It's a radical, counter-culture kind of way to live, but it is definitely the life God calls us to.



**“It says on your résumé that you were created in God’s image. Very impressive.”**

# Reason #1

## You are created in God's own image

### Genesis 1:26-31

We are created in God’s own image, in Latin, the *imago dei*. But what does that mean? How can we fully embrace that we are created in God’s own image if we have no idea what God looks like?

Truthfully, it is hard to understand how we are made in the likeness of God when we don’t fully understand God. And, because we are not God (something we fail to remember from time to time), coming to a full understanding of our Creator is not something that will happen in this lifetime.

So what do we do? We who are created in God’s image. How can we better grasp what that means? One way is to look to the creation story to see what it reveals to us about God and God’s creation, and, therefore, us.

There is no need to debate creationism and evolution in order to glean the richness of the creation story. To call the creation story true does not have to contradict science (Darwin is actually buried in Westminster Abbey). Stories can often get us to a deeper, richer place than science can take us all by itself.

As the late, great New Testament scholar Marcus Borg put it, the creation story is "strikingly world-affirming." "Against all world-denying theologies and philosophies," he writes, "Genesis affirms the world as the good creation of the good God. All that is, is good."

All that is, is good.

We are part of a good creation, created by a good God who declared us—after looking at all creation—good. We are good. Despite the best efforts of the world and our own minds to convince us otherwise, we are good.

So claim it. Claim your goodness. Name (out loud or on paper) how you see the image of God reflected in you.



## Reason #2

### You Are Created by God

Genesis 1:27-31

When we talk about creating, we often think of art and arty kinds of things--painters, sculptors, designers. But we are all creators. It doesn't have to be a work of art, it could be a room you designed or a rebuilt car engine, a fabulously successful event or a good meal, a beautiful garden or brand new program Take a moment to think about something you have created that you are proud of.

For me, it's the ottoman pictured above. I made it at the Arts, Recreation and Worship Conference at Montreat (a PCUSA conference center) in North Carolina. I've attended this conference for years, but lean toward the recreation and worship part, because, after all, I'm not very arty or crafty.

But this year, I decided to do something that didn't come easily to me. Like most people, I really don't like things I'm not good at, so I tend to avoid them.

Everyone is different, but for me, an endeavor that requires exact measurements and straight lines is extremely challenging. I was exhausted after every class, but in the end I had this great game cube ottoman (with storage inside!). Not only do I love it, but it is a tangible reminder to me of what can happen when I move beyond what I am good at and comfortable with.

Think about something you have created. It could be something recent, something made a while back or even something you created as a kid.

Consider how you feel about your creation.

Go on.

Consider.

Now multiply that by about eleventy billion times. That's how God feels about you. It's a little overwhelming when we think about it that way, but we should be overwhelmed by how much God loves us.

You are God's fabulous creation.

Like Brad Hamilton said: Learn it. Love it. Live it. (if you don't get that reference, you can Google it)

# Reason #3

## You Are a Promise

Jeremiah 29:4-14

When I was growing up in a Presbyterian church in Hot Springs, Arkansas, I was a member of our children's choir, the Genesis Singers. We had this infectious enthusiastic volunteer choir director named Candy, and a spitfire octogenarian piano player we called Miss Ruby. We sang a lot of different songs, but our go-to was a Bill Gaither song called *I am a Promise*.

*I am a promise*

*I am a possibility*

*I am a promise*

*With a capital P*

*I am a great big bundle of*

*Potentiality*

*And I am learning to hear God's voice*

*And I am trying to make the right choices*

*I'm a promise to be*

*Anything God wants me to be.*

In our passage today, God is speaking directly to the future prophet Jeremiah, but I believe God speaks this to all of us.

The good news is that God has plans for us...and the better news is that they are not plans for disaster!

Jeremiah was living in exile. People in exile don't have a lot of hope. It's really hard to see that there is something better ahead.

It's really hard to imagine that you could have a greater purpose than being a stranger forced to stay in a strange land. But then here God comes, promising that there are, indeed, plans for Jeremiah to do great things.

And if Jeremiah could believe those words, then surely we can. We are a people of promise, created by God who keeps promises.

No matter where we are in life, we are full of potentiality.

The trick is that living into that potential requires some growth and growth takes time. And we are not a patient people. We want to be more faithful, more prayerful, more loving, more better... and we want it right now!

Jeremiah didn't receive this promise and magically get whisked out of captivity and back to his homeland. It took a minute. In fact, Jeremiah's people are told to settle down--literally! For 70 years!

So in addition to believing that God has plans for us, we have to be prepared for the journey of living into those plans and a timetable that may be different from our own. But all the while, we can know that God sees something in us. God sees our potential. God has hope in us and for us. God has plans for us.

Today, take some time to think about where your potential lies...or where you would like to be growing as a person of faith. Maybe even go a little crazy and spend some time in prayer about it. What steps are you willing to take to live in to your potential?



# Reason #4

## You Are Called

Isaiah 6:1-8

Yes, you. Yes, you are. You are called.

Isaiah was a prophet of the 8th century BCE, and he was a person of privilege. His high-brow, poetic style of writing outs him as one the intellectually elite of the day. The prophet Isaiah saw the corruption that surrounded him among the elite in his community. He was a man with “unclean lips” living in the midst of other unclean-lipped people.

And yet, God called him.

And he answered.

Isaiah was an unclean person in a sea of unclean people.

And yet, he was able to speak to them and offer God to them.

We are people of unclean lips

We live with unclean-lipped people

And yet, God calls us.

Will we answer?

It can seem more than a bit daunting. Called. By. God. It seems ominous. But God didn't call Isaiah to single-handedly save the world. God called Isaiah to speak for God to the people Isaiah knew and understood. To speak God's word in a way that people would understand.

When God calls us, it is never to a starring role. God is always the main actor in the story—we are just called on and called in to play our part. So when we answer the call, we aren't saying, "I can do it!" We're saying God can do it, and I am willing to play my part.

And that doesn't sound nearly as scary.

Where are you feeling called these days?



# Reason #5

## You are allowed to lament

Pslam 142

Why are we talking lament in the midst of 13 Reasons Why We are Lovable and Capable? We're supposed to feel good about this, and lament just doesn't seem like a feel-good kind of thing to talk about.

But we're talking about it, because in order to live as people who know that we are lovable and capable, we can't ignore that there are times when life is painful. We can't God's-got-this our way through grief and loss or gloss over trials and tragedies by proclaiming ourselves "too blessed to be stressed."

So God gifts us with a way to express our hurt. To cry out in anger, in sorrow and in pain. Lament. It's totally Biblical. Jeremiah. Hosea. Hannah. Job. Even Jesus himself cried out the beginning of a Psalm of lament (22) when he was on the cross. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Part of truly, madly, deeply knowing that we are loved by God is knowing that we can be angry with God, and God will still love us. Let that really sink in. It's pretty amazing. We can let God have it—unload all of our nastiest stuff and reveal the ugliest parts of ourselves without even having autocorrect clean up our vocabulary (God knows what “ducking” really means)—and God still loves us, truly, madly and deeply. God accepts us at our most broken and then sets about to put us back together.

Wow. That is so cool. And saying "it is so cool" is so not even close to expressing how amazing it is.

Plus there's that whole thing about lament being one of the most faithful things you'll ever do. When you cry out to God in anguish, it means you believe that there is a God who is listening.

So go ahead and cry out. Write it in a journal, throw it up on our FB page or just scream out loud in the privacy of your own home.

God can take it.



# Reason #6

## You Are Seen

Genesis 16

This is not a fun story. It doesn't make Sarah, Abraham or even God come off looking very good. Hagar, the oppressed concubine pregnant with her master's son, is the hero of the story.

We've all had bad days, but I think we can agree that Hagar's bad day is one of the worst. And it is on this day that she encounters God...a God who doesn't even tell her what she wants to hear. Go back to the place she had just fled? Really, God?

But Hagar recognizes that she is experiencing the divine presence of God. She is the only person in all of the Bible who refers to God as El Roi (the one who sees). In the midst of her struggle, her attempt to escape her circumstances, her seemingly hopeless situation, she feels seen. The well where it happened came to be called Beer-lahai-roi, or the well of the one who sees me.

It is a prequel to the much later story of another woman at another well, who calls on her friends to "come and see this man who knows everything about me." Come and see this man who really sees me.

If total outcasts like Hagar and that unnamed woman at the well can recognize that our God is a God who sees them, surely we can, too. Even on days when we feel alone and not seen at all.

No matter how bad your day is, no matter how alone, unappreciated, unnoticed, ineffective and invisible you may feel at times, you are seen. Seen by the God who created you and loves you deeply.

What do you think God sees in you that other people might not?

# Reason #7

You Are Forgiven--Really.

It's true. You Are.

Luke 7:36-50

After acknowledging that we are seen and thinking about all the good, bad and the ugly that God sees in us, we need to re-affirm that we are forgiven.

Because as much as we say it and wear it on our t-shirts:

Not perfect, just forgiven.

TGIF--Thank God I'm Forgiven

Forgiven and Free!

1 Cross + 3 Nails = 4-given

we don't always live like we believe it. Because grace (the "of God and Christ" variety through which we are forgiven) doesn't come naturally to us. We like for things to be fair, and grace is anything but. We like cause and effect relationships. Karma (the idea you get what you deserve) appeals to us when we're talking about other people and scares us when we're thinking about our own lives.

It is SO important that we really do believe and live like we believe we are forgiven---not just for our own sake, but for the sake of others and the world.

This is not one of the standard stories or verses one generally turns to when talking about forgiveness. It's no 70 X 7 or command to forgive one another, but a story that demonstrates how extravagant love and forgiveness are connected.



The un-named woman is a hot mess. Crashing a dinner party, shamelessly falling at the feet of someone she shouldn't even be touching, ugly crying in front of everybody. And much to the chagrin of the Pharisees, Jesus not only doesn't rebuke her, he forgives her!

There are some translations that say: her sins are forgiven "because" or "for" her love was so great. But that is some jacked up theology. We aren't forgiven because we've demonstrated extravagant love.

But the Greek word used is *oti*. It's a word used throughout the Bible and is also used to say "therefore" or "so." Ahhh, that makes more sense. Her sins are forgiven, therefore her love is so great.

In other words, the love of this woman did not come to try to wrangle forgiveness out of Jesus with her dramatic show of devotion. They are acts of gratitude for forgiveness she already realized. How? We don't know. Maybe she had encountered Jesus on his way to this dinner. Maybe she had heard about him from others and believed. But her actions as a response to forgiveness rather than in an effort to garner the favor of Jesus is much more likely and much more in line with how the Bible tells us forgiveness and grace work. They aren't things we earn. They are things we receive with gratitude.

This story is critical to the journey of remembering who we are and Whose we are and living in to the belief that we are, indeed, lovable and capable. Because if we don't believe that we are truly forgiven, then we constantly try to be good enough to merit it. We become our own errant translation and are constantly throwing ourselves at Jesus feet in order to curry favor. But when we really believe we are forgiven, we live our lives in loving and grateful response. That is a whole different kind of life.

So, do you live as someone who really believes in forgiveness? Who really believes that you are forgiven?

And if you don't, what steps do you need to take to move in that direction?



# Reason #8

## You Are More than a Dog

**Mark 7:24-30**

This may seem like a weird scripture to choose for this particular study. Jesus is just so...un-Jesus-y. And in a weird twist for a Bible study, we're not going to talk so much about Jesus, but about the Syrophenician woman. This is a woman who knows who she is.

In spite of what the world has told her and even what (shockingly) Jesus tells her, she knows that she is good enough. Not someone who is entitled to something. Not someone who has done something to deserve something. But someone who has access to the compassion and mercy and healing of God through Jesus Christ.

The Syrophenician somehow understands what the rest of us have so much trouble believing—God's compassion is not something we achieve, it's something we receive (why yes, I did work on that rhyme). You might try to chalk up her bold move to a desperate mother making one last ditch effort to save her child, but I think there is something more here. This is woman who gets who Jesus is and who she is in light of that.

And so often we don't.

Because if we really believe that God is God, and that we are created in God's image. If we really believe that we are loved so much that God became one of us and died for us and beat back death for us, then we have to believe that we are special—not unique (because God created all of us and Christ died for all of us)--but special and loved and lovingly made. If God created us and saves us and loves us, how can we do anything less than treat ourselves with compassion? How can we do anything less than love ourselves? How can we even begin to respond to God's amazing love if we can't love ourselves, knowing that we are made in God's image?

Now the world will tell us that we don't deserve it.

The world will tell us that we didn't earn it

The world will tell us that we can't possibly receive what we don't achieve

But the world told the same thing to the Syrophenician woman

She didn't believe them

Neither should you.

You are a beloved child of God.

So what will do to counter the voices that tell you otherwise?

In what area of your life are you the hardest on yourself?

How will you show more compassion to yourself in the days and weeks to come?

# Reason #9

## You Are Found

Luke 15

Depression is a destructive and very clever liar. It makes a brain believe that--even if there is much evidence to the contrary--that a person is alone, lost and without hope. Scripture is no cure for depression, but it can be an excellent tool in the arsenal of those who battle it.

Even if we don't suffer from depression, we all have times when we feel alone and lost and hopeless. The whole chapter of Luke 15 is about how God will never leave us alone and always seek us out. It tells us that we can never get so lost that God cannot find us. Our God is a God who is not willing to let us go. *You Will Be Found* is a song from the much celebrated and accoladed musical Dear Evan Hansen is the rallying cry for a community in the wake of a teen suicide. A call to let people know that they are not alone. That people will be there for them.

Even when the dark comes crashing through  
When you need someone to carry you  
When you're broken on the ground  
You will be found

I believe that one of our goals as Christians is not to be assured that we will be found, but to realize that we already are. Found by a God who loved us enough to become one of us in order to show us the Way. Even in those times when we feel lost, we are never out of God's sight.

# Reason #10

## You Are Brave

Joshua 1:7-9

You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem and smarter than you think. --A.A. Milne (aka Winnie the Pooh)

You are brave. You are!

And the reason I know you are brave is because I've told you. Now that you know, you should have no trouble. You should never again be afraid or discouraged.

Of course, it doesn't work that way, does it? You could make the last bit of this passage your mantra, repeating over and over again: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go, and you still would have days (and maybe even entire seasons) when you are afraid or discouraged.

The key is that, in those times when you are afraid and you are discouraged, you can move past those feelings because you know you are not operating solely on your own strength. The Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Winnie the Pooh was right: you have much more in you than you believe or are willing to admit. Because it's never just you against the world. The Lord Your God is with you wherever you go.

How does knowing that God is by your side make you braver? Or to borrow from author Cheryl Strayed, brave enough to live life fully?

# ADOPTED BY GOD

## Reason #11

### You Are Adopted (You Belong)

**Romans 8:14-17**

**Galatians 4:4-7**

We are all part of a family. Most of us are part of more than one family. There are birth families, adoptive families, friends that have become family, church families, work families--families of all shapes and sizes. Family determines so much of who we are, through both nature and nurture, the family that we came from and the people we had chosen to call family. The people we call family have helped shape us--for better or worse (and usually a little of both).

We are all part of a family, but not everyone belongs to a family.

People have been told they don't belong for a number of reasons from deeply held beliefs to definitely ridiculous notions :

Too liberal  
Too conservative  
Too feminist  
Too redneck  
Too loud  
Too gay  
Too promiscuous  
Too prudish  
Too many tattoos  
Too few handbags

And then there are times, when we just feel (through no fault of of anyone else) that we just don't belong. No one understands me. No one has ever felt like this. No one has an inkling of what I am going through. No matter what kind of families we do or do not have, we've all been there in one way, shape or form.

But even when others tell us we don't belong, even when we feel like we don't belong, we are still part of God's family. We have been adopted. Claimed by God. And that's even better than being created. As an adopted friend of mine used to say to kids who teased her about being adopted: your parents just had you, mine chose me.

Not only did God create us, even after we had screwed up so much, God still decided to send God's only son and then make us heirs to the kingdom along with the fully human/fully divine Jesus Christ.

We are co-heirs with Jesus! We have been adopted into the family of God. And no one can tell us we don't belong.

# Reason #12

## You are Saved

Romans 3:21-26

For many people the term "saved" brings all sorts of baggage with it. From people knocking on your door or handing you a tract at the beach and asking, "Are you saved?" Or having to be able to come up with an exact time and place answer to the question, "When were you saved?" The term has come to be associated with the idea that salvation is something you earn...something that you have done in order to be saved.

But salvation is not a right or a privilege to be earned by being "good enough." No one of us is good enough on our own. Salvation isn't about how good we are, but about how good our God is. From the most faithful, front-pew sitting church goer to the most apathetic serial sinner, we are all saved by the grace of God.

For it was through Jesus (not through us) that sin was defeated. That's how we are saved, not through our own doing, but through what God has done through Jesus Christ. How we respond to this incredibly amazing gift is up to us.

So we need to reclaim this term and use it proudly, because we are, indeed, saved. Thanks be to God!



# Reason #13

## You Are Beloved

### 1 John 3:1

We launched this study with the 1970s pop psychology-based premise that we all start the day with a sign that says I Am Lovable and Capable (IALAC) around our necks. But as the day goes on, choices we make, people we encounter and situations we have to deal with tear away little pieces of that sign and on some days, we arrive home with our sign, our self-worth and our outlook shredded to pieces.

On days when our IALAC sign really takes a beating, we need to be able to remember who we are and Whose we are. Hopefully these Bible verses and reflections can be transforming for us on those days when life has pretty much trampled us.

Remember that you are:

1. created in God's image
2. God's special creation
3. a promise
4. called
5. allowed to lament
6. seen
7. forgiven
8. more than a dog
9. found
10. brave
11. adopted (you belong)
12. saved

and

13. you are a beloved child of God.

Peace be with you all.