



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Identity 911

When I got married, I went from being Kari Kubiszyn to Kari Kampakis. Transitioning from one odd name to another was easy. Figuring out who this new person was, however, launched an identity crisis I didn't expect.

I was thrilled to finally live in the same city as Harry, but moving to Huntsville from Birmingham meant leaving my friends, my family and a job I adored. In Birmingham everything clicked for me, but in Huntsville I couldn't catch a groove, much less find work. Everyone I knew was working, and being home alone, with no one to talk to except the postman, allowed me too much time to think.

Who was I with my slate wiped clean? Why did I feel so small and insignificant with nothing special to say about myself except that I'd just gotten married?

For 26 years, I'd been known for *something* — good grades, credentials, a promising career — but with those things in my past, they weren't relevant anymore. My new identity, *Kari Kampakis*, had no tagline, nothing to make me stand out from the zillions of other folks in this world.

It was then I realized a painful truth: My self-esteem was tied to my achievements. And when I wasn't achieving, my self-esteem suffered.

And whereas I'd like to say I turned to God, immediately found my identity in Christ, it would be years before I fully embraced that truth.

Instead, I did what came naturally and looked for another mountain to climb. My husband had just decided to go back to school for an MBA. When the program director suggested I join him, I applied.

It was a weekend program, but I studied full-time, all the while working in freelance writing jobs to pay my tuition. With every "A" I made, my self-esteem slowly crept back up, and by the time we graduated, I felt like my old self again. Only this time there was a difference.

This time I was aware that accomplishments don't define me. *This time* I knew not to get too attached to bullet points on my resume because in the long run they don't matter. The only way to never lose my self-esteem again, I realized, was to start finding value in who I am, not what I've done.

I've grown up a lot since then, and while I'm still a girl-in-progress, I now understand what

my problem was. I had built my identity on quicksand, defined myself by things that could change overnight. And when they did change, I was lost.

But when I define myself as a child of God, I find the foundation I crave. Because He's permanent, so is my status in Him. It's a relief to have a title I can count on, a rock-solid identity no one can take away. This world can strip me of everything I have, but my identity in God and His son Christ Jesus is mine to keep.

At some point in time, we all face an identity crisis. We wonder who we are, what our life means, and what we have to show for it. But before we hit the panic button, let us first breathe and remember it's not our credentials that give us worth. It's not our family, our bank account or material possessions. You and I are worthy *because we exist*. Believe it or not, that's enough.

And while the birth of Jesus represents big news for our salvation, it also represents big news for our time on earth. Through Jesus we can cope with worldly pressures to chase money, fame and success. We can stop buying into lies that we're only as good as our latest achievement.

When we find our identity in Jesus, we're free. We're free to win and fail, to rise and fall, to do what we're called to do with loving abandon because whether we thrive or stumble it doesn't change who we are. Our identity stays firm.

This Christmas season, let's think about what we put our faith in. Let's reflect on how we define ourselves and whether our identity is built on quicksand. Most of all, let's remember why a Savior came to save sinners, of whom I am the first.

By making Jesus our 911, we can survive any crisis. We can stand confidently in any circumstance, secure in the knowledge that the Son of God is our foundation, unshakable, steady and ever-dependable.

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