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REVIEW OF MOCK, M. S. *WORTHY: FINDING YOURSELF IN A WORLD EXPECTING SOMEONE ELSE*, (HERALD PRESS, 2018).

JESSICA KERSHNER

The Christian message should be a simple one. God loves us. We accept that love and then are able in return to love God and the world. God loves, we accept and then love in return. “What does the Lord require of us but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.” So why does it have to be so complex?

In Melanie Springer Mock’s book, *Worthy*, she dives in to many different ways Christian culture, literature, family and church expectations, and even sometimes our own messages about God, get in the way of the first step in this process of seeing ourselves as worthy of God’s love so that we can accept that love and see ourselves as wonderfully and beautifully made in God’s image. When we accept who God made us to be we can then deeply search for the ways God wants us to be faithful in the world. But there are so many ways that we as Christians, as the church, as families, and as individuals can get in the way of this acceptance of God’s love and of ourselves.

In *Worthy*, Mock questions the messages that get in our way of being who God is calling us to be. If you have had any experience with Christian culture you are bound to find one, if not many, of these topics that you can relate to personally, or that may help you open your mind about how you have inadvertently contributed to making someone else feel less than worthy.

Mock also tells beautiful stories about her own life. She is a talented writer and I feel almost like I have had the chance to get to know her through this book.

Mock challenges those implicit messages that suggest that we all need to fit into the same mold to be worthy of God’s love or the love of our communities. All our journeys and stories are important and they don’t all need to look the same. She gives the example of being a student at a Christian college and finding that she did not have the big conversion story that others often told, even to the point that she felt so pressured she made

up a story with big enough sins to show God's redemptive work in her life. This is just the first of many examples of how we often feel that we need to fit a certain mold to fit into this community of believers.

While Mock's book has implications for a person no matter what their gender identity, many of Mock's examples spring from her experience as a woman in an evangelical Christian world. For example, Mock challenges the notion that Christians find their worthiness through marriage, motherhood, busy-ness and even physical beauty. Not that these can't be great parts of life but a person doesn't need to fit into a certain mold to be worthy of God's love. Talking about being single throughout her 20s, Mock says,

If only I could have said no to... the narrative that told me I had to march down a long aisle in a wedding dress to truly be happy and that I needed a spouse to be blessed. If only we could do this for one another, tearing up the script and allowing each other to pursue our own unique paths or accept with more peace a life journey we could not have anticipated walking (107).

In my favorite chapter of the book, "What's the Matter with being Blessed," Mock not only tackles the issue of the prosperity gospel and how its followers have "distorted the idea of blessing" (185), and examines how this idea of blessing is used in harmful ways in contemporary Christian culture. "And while I would argue that all of us are blessed because we are formed in God's image," Mock writes, "too often the language of blessing has been used to establish expectations for how we walk through the world....affirming that some people are more worthy of God's blessing than others" (185). Mock challenges us to ask deeper questions about what it really means to have received God's blessing.

Further in this chapter she also challenges the notion of blueprint theology, "the idea that everything happens according to God's plan" (189). When people are facing tragedy in their lives these words are often uttered in an attempt to comfort, but when really broken down can be problematic, diminishing the reality of suffering and even driving some away from the faith. Mock references a book by Jessica Kelley who tells the story of her four year old son who died of an aggressive brain tumor. The sentiments that bad things happen because God is trying to teach us something, or tragic events are all part of a bigger plan, seem to fall short in such cases of real sorrow and loss. Mock suggests that rather than causing our suffering "God works and weeps alongside those who suffer, a holy partnership bringing good in a

world that desperately needs it” (191). This is such a powerful chapter and, again, Mock beautifully shares her own experiences of suffering through the loss of a friend and her own stories of how God redeems our experiences of loss and suffering, continually coming back to her main message that “we are worthy of the love that God offers and that we offer each other” (198).

There are many powerful messages in this book. It leaves me asking questions about the ways I am letting the messages of culture (Christian and otherwise) get in the way of loving the person God created me to be. How can I better live out my unique giftedness as a part of God’s creation and find ways to let others be the person/people God is calling them to be? Mock goes even further into looking at questions of justice for those who have been told by our culture that they aren’t worthy or enough. She challenges us by saying “real justice work acknowledges this worthiness, then goes about destroying barriers that keep people from being who God created them to be” (241).

This work is lovely. Mock’s stories are amazing and she challenges so many messages that try to limit who we are as Christians and how we live out the calling of being who God created us to be. I recommend this book for everyone, especially those who want to reflect on the implicit messages that shape how one perceives one’s self.