TRANSCRIPT

Sonja van Rossen & Lexy Bourne, *Hosts*

Episode : “Interview with Tatiana Overduin on Finding Myself in the Identity of Christ”

Tatiana lives in Adelaide, South Australia and works as a teacher at a Catholic school. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Theology from the Australian Lutheran College and is passionate about theology, especially the topic of our identity in Christ.

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Lexy: In today's episode, we are chatting with Tatiana Overduin. Tatiana is a school teacher in Adelaide and today she will be sharing her story and talking about the very important topic of our identity in Christ. Tatiana, welcome to our podcast and thank

you so much for coming on and being willing to talk with us.

Tatiana: It's an honour to be invited. Thank you very much.

Lexy: Let's begin by just finding out a little bit about your story and where you've come from. So you live in Adelaide?

Tatiana: That's correct.

Lexy: And you're a school teacher?

Tatiana: Also correct.

Lexy: Yes, so tell us a little bit about your family.

Tatiana: Okay, a little bit about my family. Well, I have two children. I am married, I suppose I should start with that first, get the right order, married to Jim Overduin and we have two children, Anna and Peter. Anna is in Queensland. Her husband is Luke Spilsbury and he is school pastor at Good Shepherd in the Noosa region and they have four children, Isabelle, Ava, Sophie and Joshua. I was very fortunate to recently go and visit them during the school holidays, so that was lovely. I'm very close with my daughter. She means so much to me. So it's terrific with the technology, isn't it? We stay in touch regularly. That's really precious to me. And as are the children and our son Peter, he lives in Adelaide and he also has two children, Lily and Isaac. It's great to be able to catch up with them more regularly.

Lexy: Where do you go to church in Adelaide?

Tatiana: My husband and I are members at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in the city; Flinders Street. We're regular attendees there; weekly. We try to go every week and mainly attend the 7:00 p.m service, but I'm also involved in the 11:00 a.m. service with the music roster there. So I really enjoy that, being part of that; part of being able to serve through music.

Lexy: Did you grow up Lutheran?

Tatiana: No, I didn't. My national background is Ukrainian; from the Ukrainian heritage. So my parents were born in Ukraine and traveled to Australia post Second World War and met here, so I'm born here in Adelaide. I grew up in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.
Recently, actually, my father only just very recently, he passed away at 93 years old. So we're currently in the process of preparing for his funeral and it is a very sad time for our family; losing him and he's the last of our parents to pass away. But we're very grateful. I myself am very grateful to God for the rich life and the blessed life that God gave to my father.
Growing up in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was quite different to becoming a Lutheran. And I did enter into the Lutheran Church when I met my husband and we were dating and his father was Dr. Daniel Overduin. And so that was a wonderful opportunity to learn and grow about Lutheran doctrine and just what it meant to be a Lutheran. And I actually became confirmed a Lutheran through my father in law. That led me to also go in and study at ALC. So I did a Bachelor of Arts in Theology at ALC, graduating, I think it was 2009. No, it wasn't 2009. Sorry. It was 1999. I'm going to check my parchment here...1996. Way back!

Lexy: Okay, 1996. That's 27 years ago, yes, about 27 years ago.

Tatiana: That's right. And that's what led me into teaching. So having a Bachelor of Arts in Theology, which was a great course, and I really loved studying there, particularly doing Hebrew and Greek and coming from a Ukrainian background, I speak the language fluently, so doing languages was something I really enjoyed and just the whole course was fantastic. And that's what's led me into doing my Graduate Diploma of Education.

Lexy: I suppose you would use your theology and what you learned in that course in your teaching as well?

Tatiana: Very much so. I'm fortunate to be employed at a Catholic college, and so we do lunchtime prayers and other masses, and the culture of the school is,I have that freedom to be able to talk about faith issues in my job, which I value very much.

Lexy: Just going back to you growing up in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, was it a hard move into the Lutheran Church? Was it challenging?

Tatiana: I'm really having to think back now because it was a long time ago. Initially, yes. It was very different for me, just simply firstly, that the service was in English and not in Ukrainian. And of course, the liturgy of the service was very different to what I had grown up with up till that point. But now it's not a problem at all whatsoever, obviously, over so many years. But there was some adjustment for me. But I loved it right from the start.

Sonja: Other than the English language difference, what were other differences?

Tatiana: Thinking back, Well, I had to learn everything brand new, really, as a young adult. Would have been about 19, 20 years old then. The hymns, they were new to me and the order of service. Everything was new, but it resonated with me. I was comfortable. And also, like I said before, having Jim's father very much involved in the Lutheran Church, there were many discussions around the dinner table so it was easy in that sense to be able to ask questions and understand better. I suppose it led me into my study as well, there at ALC.

Lexy: You had someone that you could talk to and ask questions and just wrestle with theological things?

Tatiana: Absolutely.

Lexy: That's so important. That's really important, having someone like that. How did you find study at ALC?

Tatiana: I really enjoyed it. It was terrific. It's funny because I was often the only female in a class in those days, but that didn't bother me at all. And Jim was also studying at the same time, doing his pastoral ministry course of study. And we lived on campus, so it was easy to attend lectures. And I really enjoyed doing the academic work and getting everything in for assignments. It was a time that I was really thriving, I think. And I still to this day, enjoy reading theological books and continue to nurture my faith that way.

Lexy: The study that you did there would also have really impacted you throughout

your life and just that theological knowledge and knowledge of the Bible.

Tatiana: Very much so. I've been at my current place of employment for, it'll be 20 years next year, so you can imagine that. And there were places before that as well that I had worked at as a school teacher. But being in this one location, I wanted to say that certainly working in a school environment with young people can have its challenges. So, for me, I start my day with a morning devotion. I like to use the LCA daily devotions, and that sets my tone. I can really feel God's presence with me, putting God first. That practice stems from my past study and just being involved in the church. So that's the way that I start my day and it gives me great comfort as challenges may present themselves during the day. It's lovely to know that I've been affirmed with God's Word at the start of my day. That's my daily practice.

Lexy: Yes, daily bread.

Tatiana: Absolutely.

Lexy: Can I ask what inspired you to actually go and get a theological degree?

Tatiana: I remember when I was presented the opportunity to live on campus. With Jim already a student there, the opportunity presented itself to study at ALC and it just felt completely right. That was the course that I really wanted to do because of my curiosity and that thirst to learn more about what, how and all those five "W" questions of where I fit into understanding what God's purpose was for me in my life.

Lexy: Yes, and that would have stayed with you through the hard times and the tribulations and whatever trials you've faced throughout your life?

Tatiana: Very much so. There have been times in my life that I've had really literally I've felt like I've had very little else. But at some points in my life, I have felt that thread of hope has absolutely and completely been the knowledge that God loves me and that my identity is in Him.

Lexy: Yes, and our identity in Christ is something that can't be taken away because He holds that in his hands.

Tatiana: And he promises that for us, doesn't He?

Lexy: He does. So this would be a really good time to actually start digging into that topic a bit more. Some of our listeners may be asking, well, what is our identity in Christ? What does this actually mean?

Tatiana: I thought about this question and I was really challenged by this during a time where my husband and I actually had a period of separation. And it was the point that I really struggled with my identity because in marriage, specifically for women, but probably also for men, I'm not sure I'm not a man, but for me, and I've come across this with many other women, that our identity can ride up so much in identity as a wife to your husband. And when that suddenly is taken away, it can be difficult to understand. Where is my identity? I'm very grateful to my pastor, Pastor Fraser, who helped me through that time, in us exploring together through our talks that our identity actually isn't completely dependent on another human being, rather that our identity is through our baptism and us being saved through what Christ has

done for us. And so many Scripture texts, of course, affirm that. It really helped me to become more of the person that God wants me to be. There's such a great comfort and we can let go of all those other things that the world sometimes throws at us with identity, such as whether you're married or not, or what sort of job you have and all those other sorts of things. Our financial status, for example, those actually are insignificant, except for marriage. I'm not going to play that down. I'm not saying that it's not important. Because it's of course, ordained by God and blessed by God. But still, when people are challenged during those difficult times, for example, in marriage, we can lean on God's Word and be reassured and reaffirmed that our identity is in Him and that we are saved through the power of the cross.

Lexy: Yes, and how does knowing this, how should it, I suppose, manifest in our everyday lives? Practical application? Tatiana: For me, it's everything, really, because, as I said earlier, starting my day in a devotion, being reaffirmed by the Word of God, I don't want to say it takes the responsibility away, but we know that we can lean on and trust in God's promises. So when we're challenged by, say, work issues, which I'm often challenged by, I can pray through that issue, I don't have to be the one to solve it. In fact, I've often thought to myself, my greatest sin, really, is when I think that I can solve something on my own terms or on my own merit, or I have to solve this problem. No, I can take it to the Lord in prayer and I can be reaffirmed by God's Word and just trust in His promises over me and over my marriage and my family and my work and financial matters or whatever it is. I can entrust those things to Him and know that he cares for me completely. So precious to me. It's my everything, really.

Sonja: Do you have some favourite Bible verses that you like to lean on in those times?

Tatiana: I have three today that I would like to share. The first one from 1 Corinthians 1:10 and I'll read that out. *Now, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be knit together in the same mind and the same purpose*. I love that one. I chose that one today because I do a lot of knitting. So it really kind of jumped out at me this week in one of the devotions, but also that we can be at peace with one another as believers and that we don't have to argue and be worried about things; that we can just be in agreement. So that was one that meant a lot to me at the moment. Another one that I've held dear to my heart for many, many years is from Isaiah 1:18, *"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool"*. So again, there's that connection with wool and beautiful fibres. Very much so for so many years, that reassurance, that when we really ponder what texts like that are saying, that we know that we're sinful human beings, that even when we try our very best, it's impossible to do the right thing all the time. We are still a sinful human being. And yet the Lord promises that He's going to wipe that clean, and I love that. I find that just so beautiful and such a wonderful gift when we understand that promise is given to us because of what Jesus has done on the cross.

Lexy: Yes, we can rest. He's done the work, we can rest. And we don't have to be enough, because we can't be enough.

Tatiana: That's right. But to believe that, to truly believe that in our heart, that no longer our sins are like scarlet but as white as snow, when we really take that on, the guilt is taken away, the shame, the burden of not being good enough. And I think that for me, that's been a journey through my life, growing into that knowledge, growing into that assurance, and growing in faith and trust and belief.

Sonja: We have to take God at His word.

Tatiana: Yes. There is one more text which I have written up on a chalkboard in my home, which reassures me over and over again. I mean, there are so many, of course, but this was the last one that I wanted to share on the program today, and that is from Philippians 4:6, *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God.* That links really well with what I was talking about before, doesn't it? That we can just take everything to God in prayer. Anxiety is at an all time high at the moment when I meet young people or friends and I mean, we look at the global situation, there's plenty that we could be anxious about, but yet God says, *Don't be anxious about anything*. I love that; that's very reassuring.

Lexy: That can be very hard sometimes because we often want to take things back into our own hands, and that's what makes us anxious; taking it back into our own hands. Thank you so much for sharing those beautiful verses. What are some things that we can do to remind ourselves of our true identity in Christ?

Tatiana: I think it's very important to me to understand that God's Word is the source of His avenue to us, to remind us. So to daily go back to His Word, I feel is very important. It doesn't take me long if I have forgotten or missed or not tapped into, not read His Word, that I start to sort of go askew in my thinking or in my feelings. So for me, it's very important to daily be reading His Word.

Sonja: It's crazy how quickly our minds can change things and twist things and come up with new things if we don't constantly check in with God's Word.

Tatiana: That's right. So I would say that reading the Bible is very important, and then from there, of course, is prayer. Often as we're reading, we'll be reminded to pray for something, again an avenue of communication that God has provided for us and worship, of course, coming together with others and not making excuses of why. I mean, that's just what it means to me. I'm not trying to judge anyone, but for me to go to worship weekly and it's so encouraging. Sometimes I'm kind of dragging my feet a little bit because it's been a long week or I might be thinking about the week ahead. But if I attend worship, it just sets me right. It gives me a time of peace and rest. I really feel God serving me through worship. And that's a great encouragement.

Lexy: Yes, and he's the one serving us.

Tatiana: That's right.

Lexy: He's the life giving one that serves us when we go to church. That also plays into

our identity as well, in that we are His children and He's the Father and He's the one who provides for us.

Tatiana: Yes, totally agree.

Lexy: So what do you think are some of the misconceptions that people have about our Christian identity or even our identity in general?

Tatiana: Are you referring to people perhaps who are non-Christian?

Lexy: I suppose, yes, we could start with that.

Tatiana: That's a tricky one because we know that we are called by the Holy Spirit into faith. I often have this discussion with my husband that it is a gift to us. We've been given that gift of faith. God has called us through the Holy Spirit to turn to His Word. It's a cycle of nurturing. We go to the Word, the Holy Spirit calls us, we go back to the Word. We're being strengthened in that. So when people are not able to believe in Jesus as the Savior, I often think about having compassion on that because perhaps they're not hearing the Spirit calling them, the Holy Spirit calling them to faith. It's a mystery, isn't it? And so we need to be careful, from my perspective, as Christians to not to judge those who are not in faith too harshly.
Because we don't know, we don't know if the Holy Spirit, it might be tomorrow, it might be next year. So it's not really up to us. I believe that God has called us to love others. That doesn't mean accepting everything, things that are damaging, but to have compassion on others, knowing that there's always an opportunity. And I mean, what sort of example do we really want to set to others that we are Christian? We don't want to come across as being judgmental or being hurtful in what we say or do toward those who don't understand why it's so precious to us.

Lexy: Yes.

Tatiana: I hope I've kind of made that clear. But that's something that I always think about, that it's not really up to us to judge why they don't understand, but more setting an example of what God is calling us to be for others.

Lexy: Yes. It can be really easy, and this is something that I struggle with on a daily basis, to just slip into that judging, or to even just try and analyse why, "Why don't you believe?"

Tatiana: I think that you're really touching on something important there. And that's where we can pray for others. We don't have to necessarily understand. I mean, I have people dear to me that don't really live every day by faith, and I don't understand why they might not be trusting the way perhaps that I do, but it's not up to me to make that comparison. But our prayers for others, I think, are pleasing to God. And I did hear, probably there's lots of stories like this, but people who have prayed for others for many years, and those people have come to faith, and it was because of their prayers. We can entrust that also to God.

Lexy: Yes. It's so easy to slip into the trap of trying to analyse and figure out why. It is good to ask God for knowledge and to understand the person that we love, but sometimes we don't get all the answers. And that's when we need to really press into our identity in Christ and know that He knows,

He knows their heart and that we can just trust Him.

Tatiana: And isn't that such a great thing that we don't have to know all the answers or that it's not up to us, or that we can just continue to surround that person with God's love and lean on God and know that he's got it, we don't have to have it, He's got it under control, all things. I just find that it takes away the burden, doesn't it?
Lexy: It does.

Tatiana: I think that's pleasing to God. He knows that we care and we'll just keep entrusting that person to Him.

Lexy: We don't have to be the Messiah.

Tatiana: That's right. Thank goodness.

Lexy: I would make a terrible Messiah.

Sonja: And that's part of our identity in Christ, isn't it? That we are the created, we're the creature, and we are under his authority.

Tatiana: That's right.

Sonja: I was going to say in the case of Christians, when they're not sort of leaning on their identity in Christ, I think they're the ones that are missing out the most. In that case, if you're a believer but you're still finding your identity in things other than Christ, and there's many things we can find our identity in, you're the one that's missing out and you're the one that's going to daily struggle in life and God's not missing out or anything like that. Jesus isn't missing out on anything, but you're the one who's hurting because our identity in Christ is what's going to give us the most freedom.

Tatiana: Yes, and as you were saying that, I believe that sometimes those struggles help to shape our identity and we might see a brother or a sister and even ourselves. It happens to me still. It certainly has happened in my life, where I've gone the wrong way or made wrong choices or turned to other things. Yet in the end, God was still calling me. He still was holding me throughout that time and it helped to strengthen my faith in the end and that was part of his promise for me.

Sonja: We can also learn through that putting our identity in whatever other thing just isn't as good. I guess in the end we'll find more relief if we put our identity in Christ.

Tatiana: Yes.

Lexy: I think that's kind of the end of our questions. Was there anything else you wanted to talk about before we close?

Tatiana: Probably lots and lots of things I'd love to talk about. But that is just all wonderful for today. I hope that what I've shared today will be an encouragement for others. And I'm speaking from the heart and I'm just very grateful for the opportunity to be able to share some thoughts with you on your special show today.

Lexy: Thank you so much for coming on.

Tatiana: You're most welcome. Thank you.