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IDENTITY & SELF-IMAGE

Knowing What's True About You

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THE LINDELL KEYS FOR RECOVERY HANDBOOK

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The Thoughts and Emotions Series

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A PERSONAL NOTE

from Mike Lindell

My passion is to see people recover from addiction! And that's why I'm proud to partner with author June Hunt and Hope for the Heart, and so excited to use the *Keys for Living* as part of the Lindell Recovery Network. People everywhere are struggling with addictions, wounds, and challenges in life. They need hope. They need help. And the *Keys for Living* provide that hope and real answers from God's Word.

This is the best material I've seen in biblical counseling and caregiving . . . with over 100 topics that speak to almost every presenting problem. There's nothing else like them. They take God's Word and apply it to life's challenges.

The *Keys for Living* are exceptional and outstanding resources for those who need help in overcoming the obstacles they face, and above all, to find Christ.

Read this book. Share it with others. Ask God in prayer to make it real in your life.

May God bless you as you do it!

Mike Lindell

Lindell Recovery Network

INTRODUCTION

The topic of identity reminds me of a tale about an eagle. . . .

A little eaglet falls to the ground from its nest and is found by a family of turkeys. They take the helpless bird under their wings and teach him everything he needs to know to survive. But the more he grows, the less he looks like them.

He tries hard to be a good turkey, but he's unhappy. On several occasions, he sees mature eagles soaring high in the sky. Crushed and defeated, the eaglet grows up without ever leaving the ground.

One day, a wise owl says to him, "Who are you? What are you doing?" The eagle replies, "I am a bad turkey. I try so hard, but I just can't do anything right." The owl says, "Your problem is that you don't know who you are. You're an eagle, and eagles are meant for the sky."

The eagle's eyes are opened. He sees who he really is . . . who he is meant to be. The eagle finds the courage to try something he's never done before. He stretches out his wings and flaps to the top of a tree to see his way to the sky. Lifting his wings, he rises with the currents of the wind—and he never looks back. The eagle can now do what he is meant to do . . . because he knows who he really is.

This little tale reminds me that confusion about your identity can impact your destiny. The whole trajectory of your life can be affected when you don't understand who God created you to be. It also reminds me that family greatly impacts identity. This is true physically and true spiritually.

When I was a college freshman, my roommate was from Hong Kong. We looked like polar opposites. She had the physical characteristics of her Chinese family, and I had the physical characteristics of my English family. I have curly, blonde hair and she had straight, black hair. I have green eyes and angular facial features whereas she had brown eyes and flattened facial features. I had a light complexion, and she had a dark complexion.

Let's say I wanted to change my physical characteristics to look like my friend from Hong Kong. I could dye my hair black and straighten it, wear brown contact lenses, and darken my complexion with a suntan. However, none of these changes would be permanent. My bone structure certainly wouldn't change. Even if I lived her with family, or married into her family, or was adopted by her family . . . I would still look like

me. My physical characteristics will always resemble my family from English descent.

Our physical characteristics come from our family of origin. They are inherited—we are born with them. Just as with physical characteristics, we inherit our spiritual characteristics based on the family in which we're born. The Bible tells us we are all born into the family of Adam.

Since Adam disobeyed God, he and his descendants are identified with sin. Psalm 51:5 reveals, *"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."* The spiritual family we're born into doesn't just determine our spiritual characteristics—it also determines our spiritual destiny. The Bible says, *"Everyone dies because we all belong to Adam"* (1 Corinthians 15:22 NLT).

Pretty sobering. However, there is good news!

God has made it possible for us to change families. We can be adopted into God's family and receive a new identity, a new inheritance, and a new destiny. The Bible says, *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come"* (2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV).

How do you change families? Jesus said, *"You must be born again"* (John 3:7).

Just as you were born into Adam's family, you must be born into God's family. This happens when you place your faith in Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. The Bible says, *"You also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance"* (Ephesians 1:13–14).

My hope for you is that you will not only embrace Jesus as your Lord and Savior but that you will embrace your new identity in Christ. The identity God gives you in Christ not only changes your eternal destiny but it can change everything in your life now. If you have *"Christ in you"* (Colossians 1:27), then you will reflect Christ's love through you— and that can change the world.

June Hunt
Founder, Hope For The Heart

IDENTITY & SELF-IMAGE

Knowing What's True About You

When you enter the world and breathe your first breath, the canvas of your life is blank. The possibilities are endless. Then, stroke by stroke on your impressionable heart, people sketch their opinion of you through the words they say to you and about you, and the way they act toward you. Some are good—some are bad. Yet the image they paint will hang in your "gallery of thought" . . . painting a portrait of your identity.

So how do you see *yourself*? What does your canvas look like? To understand who you *really* are, you need to see yourself through God's eyes.

The Bible describes two identities, two families—those in Adam and those in Christ. As a result of Adam and Eve's choice to disobey God in the Garden of Eden, they and all their descendants have been *identified* with sin. This declaration of independence from God explains the rebellious nature we each inherit. Because we are born into the family of Adam, we all possess the natural bent to live self-centered lives. Yet with a heart of love, the heavenly Father persistently seeks to draw each person to Him.

He desires to adopt you into His family and to give you a new nature. When you become a Christian by receiving Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, you also receive a *new identity*. Your old sin nature is exchanged for a glorious new nature. The Bible reveals that when you place your faith in Christ, you become a child of God.

"In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith."
(Galatians 3:26)

DEFINITIONS

“Only God knows us completely, inside and out.”

Case Study: Misplaced Identity
The Working Man's Story

He starts his career earning a small wage. Smart, hard-working, and ambitious, he climbs the ladder of success one rung at a time. A few leaders take him under their wings, allowing him the opportunity to prove himself. He succeeds again and again.

On his way to the top, he falls in love, gets married, and starts a family. He buys a bigger house, a bigger boat, a better car, and puts aside a nice little nest egg. He plays just as hard as he works, priding himself on his exceptional hunting and fishing skills and adds a few "big boy" toys like a motorcycle and a couple of four-wheelers to enjoy on the weekends when he's not working or traveling on business.

Life looks good: good job, good wife, and good-natured kids. At the young age of 48, he's mostly content . . . until life starts falling apart—until *he* starts falling apart.

First he feels an ache in his hip and he trips occasionally, then with more frequency because his foot doesn't lift when his brain sends the signal to walk. He dismisses the symptoms until they can no longer be ignored. He starts with one doctor, then another, with test after test after test. Finally, he hears the diagnosis: a terminal neuromuscular disease called ALS (or Lou Gehrig's disease) and life as he knows it is over.

He plans to work as long as he can, but must retire on disability. He plays at his hobbies as long as he can, but eventually that becomes more work than play. He can't work like he did and he can't play like he wants . . . where does that leave him? Who is he *now*?

His wife struggles to help him through this identity crisis. As a Christian, she has prayed for her husband to come to Christ, but she didn't want it to come to this! Previously, he's had no time for God . . . no time for Christ. He stubbornly thinks if he didn't come to Christ when he was well, how could he come to Christ with nothing to offer? He sinks into despair because he has a *misplaced identity*—his identity has been in what he *does*, and now he can't do what he used to do.

Finally, his wife declares: "The Lord wants you to come to Him! I don't want to lose you, but I'd rather lose you in this life than to know you're lost for all eternity."

He agrees to attend a men's Bible study group where they teach him, support him, and offer him hope. Then one summer day, he receives Jesus as His personal Lord and Savior and at the same time, receives his new identity in Christ.

Seven years later, he passes from this life to the next, and all of the blessings he received when he accepted Christ he now experiences for eternity—his faith has become sight.

"For we live by faith, not by sight."
(2 Corinthians 5:7)

What Is Identity?

If someone were to ask: "Who are you?" . . . What would you say? Most of us would state our name and then describe ourselves by what we *do*, by our profession: "I'm a teacher." "I'm an accountant." "I'm in sales." But what happens if you can no longer teach or no longer work as an accountant or a salesperson? Is that really who you *are*?

Others may spend years studying genealogy, tracing their roots to learn who they are through their family lineage: "I'm a descendant of Michelangelo." "My ancestors were on the Mayflower." What if you discover a broken branch in your family tree? How does that affect your personal identity? Thankfully, name tags, professions, and pedigrees are never necessary with God. He has no need to ask who you are because He knows you even better than you know yourself. He formed your heart and fashioned you Himself.

"For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb."
(Psalm 139:13)

Identity is your distinct personality and physical characteristics.

— Your identity includes your family lineage, your genetic makeup, your DNA.

— Your identity incorporates your particular physical mannerisms and patterns of behavior.

Identity is your consistent character across time and circumstances.

— Your identity, paradoxically, is developed over time yet involves a level of similarity over time.

— Your identity encapsulates your sense of personal uniqueness and continuity over time, across circumstances, among groups of people and in the various roles you occupy.[1]

Identity involves both your inner character and your outer conduct that distinguish you from everyone else.

— Your identity reveals the individual characteristics by which you are known.

— Your identity, as seen through your visible conduct, should consistently reflect your inner character.

"As water reflects the face,
so one's life reflects the heart."
(Proverbs 27:19)

What Is Self-Image?

Do you have a favorite picture of yourself? If so, what about the picture makes it your favorite? Perhaps the photo was a candid shot of you laughing out loud or sincerely smiling—the image captures your physical features well. Maybe the image includes other people who are meaningful to you—the image captures your relationships. Or maybe the photo is of you at work or doing a meaningful activity—the image captures your various roles.

Like a photograph, you have a mental image of yourself—your self-image. The image might be positive or negative, clear or unclear. Your self-image might accurately represent who you are, or like a bad photograph, it might be an inaccurate representation of who you are. Just as no one photograph can fully capture everything about you, your self-image is not a full picture of you. Only God sees the full picture.

> *"The LORD looks down from heaven*
> *and sees the whole human race."*
> (PSALM 33:13 NLT)

Self-image is the conception of yourself or of your role within a given context.[2]

- Your self-image involves your conception of yourself as an individual with unique traits.
- Your self-image involves your conception of yourself in relation to others.

Self-image is your mental snapshot of who you think you are.[3]

- Your self-image is your personal self-description of who you are.
- Your self-image includes your character, strengths and weaknesses, gifts and abilities.

While the Bible does not use the term "self-image," it does speak about the importance of how we should think about ourselves.

"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought,
but rather think of yourself with sober judgment,
in accordance with the faith God has
distributed to each of you."
(Romans 12:3)

Self-Image, Self-Worth, Self-Esteem, and Identity

Question: What is the difference between self-image, self-worth, self-esteem, and identity?

Answer: These terms are often used interchangably but there are distinctions among them.

- **Self-image**: your view of yourself or mental snapshot of yourself.
- **Self-worth**: your sense of your own value as a person.[4]
- **Self-esteem**: your sense of confidence and satisfaction in yourself.[5]
- **Identity**: your sense of what makes you distinctly and uniquely you.

Your identity and self-image are terms that act like a *description* of who you are, while the terms self-worth and self-esteem act as an *evaluation* of your worth, significance, or competence.[6] God's Word speaks to both the descriptive aspects of who you are as well as your worth as a precious child of God.

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God!
And that is what we are!"
(1 John 3:1)

What Does It Mean to Be Made in God's Image?

Do you know the first thing God says about humanity—about *you*? It's perhaps the most important truth to know about your identity and your worth: *"God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness . . .' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them"* (Genesis 1:26–27).

You are made in God's image—it's the first thing God tells you . . . about *you*. This truth is foundational to your identity, self-image, and worth. The Bible describes God as infinitely beautiful, glorious, and majestic. There is nothing greater than God. And you are made in His image! You therefore have inherent, unchanging, and immeasurable worth.

"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?
You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor."
(Psalm 8:3–5)

Made in the Image of God: Three Views

The image of God can be understood from three different aspects or views:

The substantive view refers to the essential attributes or substance inherent within people.

- We are conscious and volitional creatures, having a mind, will, and emotions.
- We are spiritual and moral creatures, made with a sense of right and wrong.

"God created people to be virtuous, but they have each turned to follow their own downward path" (Ecclesiastes 7:29 NLT).

The relational view refers to our capacity for relationships.

— We are made with the capacity to have a relationship with God.

— We are made with the capacity to have relationships with others.

"He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them 'Mankind' when they were created" (Genesis 5:2).

The functional view refers to our sense of purpose and our actions.

— We are made to reflect God's character in thought, word, and deed.

— We are made to steward and rule over God's creation.

"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (Genesis 1:28).

The image of God is a vast, complex, and exhaustive topic. Mountains of books have been written on the subject. Because God is infinite, we can never fully grasp what it means to be made in His image. However, the image of God reminds us that if we want to know more about ourselves, we must look to God, who made us to be like Him.

"When God created human beings, he made them to be like himself."
(Genesis 5:1)

Image and Likeness

Question: The Bible says God created us in His *"image and likeness"* (Genesis 1:26). What is the difference between image and likeness?

Answer: Though different terms, there is similarity between them.

— The Hebrew word for image is *tselem* and simply refers to an image or representation of something.[7] A painting, sculpture, or photograph can be said to be an image, as it reflects or represents the reality of the thing being portrayed.

— The Hebrew word for likeness is *demuth*, and it refers to the similarity or resemblance of one thing to another.[8] If you know any siblings that look alike or children that look like their parents, you could say, "He has his father's likeness," meaning that the son resembles his father in appearance.

— The Bible uses these terms to refer to God creating humanity, and also of people having children . . . "[Adam] *had a son in his own likeness, in his own image"* (Genesis 5:3).

In biblical times, a ruler or king would place a statue or "image" of himself in a distant land to show that he had dominion over it. Anyone who looked at the image would know that the land was ruled by the king whose image was on the statue. In a similar way, these terms in essence refer to the fact that we are made to reflect, resemble, and represent God to the world. Just as an image or photo reflects the person in the photo, God made us in such a way that we "image" or reflect Him.

"Man is made in God's image and reflects God's glory."
(1 Corinthians 11:7)

What Is Outer Identity vs. Inner Identity?[9]

The outer you projects your reflection in the mirror. You may even project a certain image or identity around others. People who see you may think they *know* you based on your interactions with them—through the observations, conversations, and experiences they've had with you. But the inner you—the you within your heart and mind—may not be known to others. Many of your thoughts, desires, and dreams may be utterly unknown to anyone but you and God. Only He knows us completely, inside and out.

"O LORD, you have examined my heart
and know everything about me.
[2] *You know when I sit down or stand up.*
You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.
[3] *You see me when I travel and when I rest at home.*
You know everything I do.
[4] *You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD.*
[5] *You go before me and follow me.*
You place your hand of blessing on my head.
[6] *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,*
too great for me to understand!"
(PSALM 139:1–6 NLT)

Discern the difference between your outer identity and your inner identity:

The Outer You

— Your gifts and talents
— Your masks and pretenses
— Your personality and persona
— Your appearance and appeal
— Your actions and accomplishments
— Your verbal communication and body language

The book of Proverbs reiterates this fact regarding the importance of our actions:

"Even children are known by the way they act, whether their conduct is pure, and whether it is right" (PROVERBS 20:11 NLT).

The Inner You

— Your basic nature
— Your moral character and sense of right and wrong
— Your value system and principles
— Your core beliefs and convictions
— Your innermost feelings and emotional state
— Your deep-seated desires and needs

Proverbs also reveals the reality that God knows us even better than we know ourselves:

"A person may think their own ways are right, but the Lord weighs the heart" (Proverbs 21:2).

What Is an Identity Crisis?

What would happen if you had no idea who you really are? The answer is simple: you would have an identity crisis—a turning point in time when a change or major transition trips you up or disillusionment knocks you down. These crises happen to many people who experience a significant life event such as getting married, becoming a parent, going through a divorce, changing careers, losing a loved one, or having a life-changing injury. Changes like these reveal that our identity must not ultimately be built on shifting roles and relationships—it must be built on the solid foundation of the unchanging Word of God. Jesus said . . .

"Everyone who hears these words of mine
and puts them into practice
is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.
The rain came down, the streams rose,
and the winds blew and beat against that house;
yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock."
(Matthew 7:24–25)

An identity crisis has different meanings:

An identity crisis is a period of difficult transition, such as adolescence or mid-life, when the *outer you* severely conflicts with the *inner you*—causing pain, distress, and a desire for change. Those experiencing an identity crisis often ask these kinds of questions:

—"Who am I?"

—"What do I believe in?"

— "What values should I live by?"

— "What do I want to do with my life?"

— "What gives me joy and truly motivates me?"

— "What are my strengths and abilities, my assets and liabilities?"

Those in crisis need to seek the Lord's wisdom, knowledge, and understanding:

"For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (PROVERBS 2:6).

An identity crisis is a period of severe disillusionment when your identity is based on a *role* or a *relationship* that has been changed or removed.[10]

— The loss of a secure environment due to moving away
Identity was in your friends and family (a relationship).

— The loss of an intimate friendship
Identity was in a cherished companion (a relationship).

— The loss of children living at home, leaving you with an empty nest
Identity was in being a parent (a role).

— The loss of a spouse as a result of death or divorce
Identity was in your marriage partner (a relationship).

— The loss of physical mobility as a result of aging or the onset of a disability
Identity was in your ability to perform (a role).

— The loss of a job or financial resources
Identity was in your career or social status (a role).

Losses can be devastating, especially those that shake us to our very core and cause us to devalue ourselves. Whether abuse, abandonment, or betrayal, acts like these severely wound the heart and cause distrust and isolation:

"Look and see, there is no one at my right hand; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life" (PSALM 142:4).

An identity crisis is a period of extreme identity confusion which often results from childhood trauma or sexual abuse.[11]

- *Discomfort with personal sexuality*—rejecting or feeling ambivalent toward a person's own God-given sexuality
- *Flagrant or bizarre nonconformity* in behavior and appearance—rejecting current cultural norms
- *Cross-dressing*—wearing clothing and other items of the opposite gender; rejecting the apparel of one's own gender and dressing as a different identity in an attempt to feel significant or secure
- *Victim mentality*—feeling and acting powerless in relationships
- *Dissociative disorders*—occurring when a person's conscious awareness becomes separated or disassociated from previous memories, thoughts, and feelings[12]
  - *Amnesia* (partial or total memory loss)—an impairment or lack of memory, often resulting from a brain injury, emotional shock following a traumatic event, excessive fatigue, repression, substance abuse, or various illnesses.[13]
  - *Dissociative Identity Disorder*—adopting two or more identities as a means of coping with severe trauma during early childhood

    In this, the most severe of all dissociative disorders, all of the individual "alters" or parts have their own distinct personalities, age, voice, and mannerisms (even gender and handwriting). With the help of a highly skilled therapist, over time all parts can "integrate" into the one core personality.

The Psalms reflect the inner pain of those in anguish:

"Relieve the troubles of my heart and free me from my anguish" (Psalm 25:17).

What Is God's Heart on Your Identity?

Paul had it all—born into the right family, educated by the best teachers, and held the top status job and position in his culture as a religious teacher, a Pharisee. He said, *"I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault"* (Philippians 3:5–6 NLT).

His identity was wrapped up in where he was born, who he knew, and what he did. But that all changed when he met Jesus. Paul continues, *"I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord"* (Philippians 3:7–8 NLT).

As Paul compared his past identity to his identity in Christ, there was no contest. He even says about his former accolades and accomplishments: *"I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him"* (Philippians 3:8–9).

When you are *"found in him,"* everything changes. The identity you receive in Christ far outweighs any other identity you may have. Your gender, your family, your age, race, culture, school, job, accomplishments, status, and hobbies may all reveal important aspects about you—but they are not where your ultimate identity is found. Your identity is to be rooted in Christ.

"Just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord,
you must continue to follow him.
Let your roots grow down into him,
and let your lives be built on him.
Then your faith will grow strong
in the truth you were taught,
and you will overflow with thankfulness."
(Colossians 2:6–7 NLT)

You are loved.

"God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people" (1 Thessalonians 1:4 NLT).

You are chosen.

"Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes" (Ephesians 1:4 NLT).

You are accepted.

"Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory" (Romans 15:7 NLT).

You are redeemed.

"But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you . . . he who formed you . . . 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine'" (Isaiah 43:1).

You are precious.

"You are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you" (Isaiah 43:4 NLT).

You are forgiven.

"You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins" (Colossians 2:13 NLT).

You are cleansed.

"But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11 NLT).

You are renewed.

"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" (2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT).

You are empowered.

"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3).

You are gifted.

"In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well" (Romans 12:6 NLT).

You are useful.

"We are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

You are blessed.

"All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ" (Ephesians 1:3 NLT).

Case Study: Busy Mother or Beloved Daughter? Danielle's Story

Danielle would tell you that she's a Christian, a wife, and a mother of three young children. She also works full-time in a demanding role at a hospital. She's smart, ambitious, funny, hard-working, and, as you can imagine, exhausted.

Her exhaustion isn't simply due to her job and her children. Danielle constantly feels the pressure to be the best at everything—best mom, best wife, best employee—yet she feels like she excels at nothing.

She often escapes to social media to not think about the demands of all her responsibilities. It seems harmless, but it usually ends up leaving her feeling worse about herself. As she scans through the lives of her friends, many of whom are stay-at-home moms or are working out of the home, she begins to feel jealous. *I wish I didn't have to work*, she thinks. *I guess I'm not a real mom*, she tells herself.

At church, Danielle often feels out of place. She can never meet during the women's ministry gatherings because of her job. When she's not working, she wants to be with her family anyway. However, she feels like she's not a "good" Christian woman because she doesn't have time for women's ministry.

Amidst the busyness and exhaustion of working full-time and life with three little ones, Danielle regularly reminds herself that *"The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love"* (Psalm 145:8). She's comforted in the fact that the Lord looks on her with compassion, grace, and love.

When she remembers who *God is*, she remembers who *she is*. She reminds herself that God does not define her primarily by her role as a wife or mother or by her job. Danielle knows first and foremost—she is a daughter, a beloved child of God.

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God!
And that is what we are!"
(1 John 3:1)

CHARACTERISTICS

“Your identity and self-image greatly impacts your behavior.”

Case Study: Forgotten Identity
The Ansel Bourne Story[14]

He is a renowned amnesiac with the last name of *Bourne*. No, his first name isn't Jason—the fictional amnesiac/assassin featured in the Jason Bourne books and movies who attempts to remember and bring closure to his jaded past. The *real* Ansel Bourne is one of the earliest documented case studies of a form of amnesia called the *fugue state*, where identity is temporarily lost and then suddenly returns.

Ansel is a 19th-century evangelical preacher living in Coventry, Rhode Island. But for a season he becomes Albert J. Brown, who operates a general store in Norristown, Pennsylvania.

One day, Albert (who is truly Ansel) wakes up in a confused, anxious state, prompting him to knock on his landlord's door and inquire: "Who am I?" A doctor is called and discovers Ansel's last memory is from two months earlier—traveling to Providence to visit his sister.

Baffled as to how he arrived in Pennsylvania, Ansel is bewildered to learn that he's been buying and selling goods as a busy merchant, an occupation the preacher knows nothing about!

Realize, if you don't know your real identity, how can you be who you're created to be? In the most troubling, even traumatic times, God's Word assures . . .

"I will turn the darkness into light before them
and make the rough places smooth."
(Isaiah 42:16)

On What Do You Base Your Identity?

Have you ever filled out a form or created an online profile that asks questions about who you are? You might provide your gender, age, race, marital status, job, and maybe a few hobbies and interests. It doesn't capture the full picture of you though, does it? In truth, a full picture of your identity cannot be described on such a small form.

Nonetheless, we are trained to look in various places for our identity. *Things* can quickly become the foundation on which we build our self-worth and our value to others. We look at our background, the places we belong to, or the people we know. These are important, but the Lord wants you to remember that first and foremost, you are His.

"Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people,
the sheep of his pasture."
(Psalm 100:3)

Your Basis for Identity

What do you look to in order to determine your identity? As you review the list, consider which statements describe what is most important to you.

I evaluate who I am based on . . .

— The clothes I wear
— The house where I live
— The car I drive
— The job I have
— The country in which I was born
— The clubs and organizations to which I belong
— How much money I have

— My family
— My education level or background
— My religion or faith
— Who my friends are
— What I look like
— What I've accomplished
— What others say about me
— What I believe about myself

"You and I both belong to God."
(Job 33:6 NLT)

What Are Common False Identities?

When you look in the mirror, you should see yourself as you are. But if the mirror is broken or distorted, like a funhouse or carnival mirror, your reflection will be distorted. Your image will be warped.

You may be living with such distortions. Your self-image might not be based in reality, or it is distorted by what others have said about you, what has happened to you, or by misguided thoughts and beliefs. You may have a warped view of yourself, a warped view of God, or a warped view of how He sees you. You may only see your reflection dimly, but God sees you and fully knows you.

"For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror;
then we shall see face to face.
Now I know in part; then I shall know fully,
even as I am fully known."
(1 Corinthians 13:12)

False Identities[15]

When people feel unworthy of love, respect, and approval from others, they often feel unworthy of God's love, respect, and approval. This faulty mindset can lead to accepting a false identity, which will affect how you see yourself and how you interact with others.

Following are common false identities:

Controller

Some seek to control every situation and the people around them. They fear the fallout of what will happen if they aren't in control. Instead of trusting God who is in control of all things, they become obsessive, anxious, and overstressed.

Defender

Some stand in the gap to save others when their own world is falling apart. They find significance is rescuing others. While this is a noble effort, defenders may only see weaknesses in others while neglecting to see their own. Those who help others often struggle with receiving help.

Dependent

Some look to other people, positions, and possessions to identify who they are. Everything depends on what they have, what they do, or who they know. The things they depend on for their identity, however, could be removed, lost, or taken away—resulting in a devastating blow to their identity.

Excuser

Some refuse to accept responsibility for their own actions and beliefs. Excusers often blame others for their problems or their situation. They sit on the fence and fail to make decisions or take decisive action for their lives.

Failure

Some surrender to setbacks as if failure is always inevitable. They struggle with getting back up after being knocked down. Instead of learning from a failure, they define themselves by it and avoid new opportunities to learn, grow, and change.

Fixer

Some attempt to solve problems they encounter all on their own, usually as caretakers or peacemakers. While it is good to help and fix things, they usually attach their own value and identity to accolades they expect by "fixing" others. Similar to defenders, fixers can struggle to receive help because they are busy helping others.

Performer

Some seek praise and affirmation by putting on a show or doing a task as perfectly as possible. Performers are often highly stressed and exceptionally busy people as they are almost always "on." They don't know who they are unless they are immersed in a project, task, or role.

Pleaser

Some try to prove value and worth by pleasing other people. They rarely say *No* and frequently end up being victimized or taken advantage of by others. They struggle to set boundaries with others and all-too-often end up doing tasks that others should be doing.

Sufferer

Some play the martyr when trials come. They consistently sacrifice themselves on behalf of others. By bearing the burden of others' faults, they may see themselves as righteous and altruistic, yet they may be neglecting their own faults.

Recognize when we are tempted to assume these false identities and refuse to accept them. God's Word allows us to view ourselves in light of how God sees us. But we must not only take His Word in—we must live it out in our lives. The Bible says . . .

"Do not merely listen to the word,
and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.
[23] *Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says*
is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror
[24] *and, after looking at himself, goes away*
and immediately forgets what he looks like."
(James 1:22–24)

What Does Misplaced Identity Look Like?

He was eccentric to say the least. He wore clothing made of camel's hair. He ate locusts and honey. He was John the Baptist. The religious leaders of his day wanted to know who he was. Their conversation went like this:

"[John] *confessed freely, 'I am not the Messiah.'*

They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?'

He said, 'I am not.'

'Are you the Prophet?'

He answered, 'No.'

Finally they said, 'Who are you? . . . What do you say about yourself?'

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, "Make straight the way for the Lord"'" (John 1:21–23).

John was certain of his identity—who he was and who he wasn't. Others were confused about him. They mistook him for a number of people.

Unlike John, some people are not so certain of their own identities. They struggle to honestly answer the same question posed to John, *"Who are you? . . . What do you say about yourself?"* They struggle because they are placing their individual identity in different people and positions, roles and relationships.

Is it possible that *you* could have a misplaced identity? Maybe you seek your self-worth or approval in having everything perfect. Maybe your self-image is based on what others think of you or how well you perform at your job, at school, or in ministry. Does your identity rest in something you do, or does it rest in who God says you are?

"I will be a Father to you,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty."
(2 Corinthians 6:18)

Misplaced Identity Checklist

Place a check mark (✓) beside each of the following questions that apply to you.

- ☐ Do you always need to receive praise for your efforts?
- ☐ Do you need to have everything perfectly in place?
- ☐ Do you expect others to do things your way?
- ☐ Do you believe making mistakes is unacceptable?
- ☐ Do you consider your way to be the *right* way?
- ☐ Do you find it impossible to let go of a mistake?
- ☐ Do you think you must perform perfectly in order to receive God's love?
- ☐ Do you avoid taking a risk for fear of failure?
- ☐ Do you avoid conflict at all costs?
- ☐ Do you think other people are always trying to find fault with you?
- ☐ Do you set higher standards for yourself than you do for others?
- ☐ Do you think people would not respect you if they learned you have struggles in life?
- ☐ Do you set such high goals that you are continually under stress?
- ☐ Do you think that making a mistake makes you less valuable as a person?
- ☐ Do you wonder whether people would love you if they really knew you?
- ☐ Do you feel responsible for someone else's happiness?
- ☐ Do you believe you must please everyone, all of the time?
- ☐ Do you refuse to take a rest for fear of failure or disapproval?

Do any, many, or most of these questions describe you? Consider what the apostle Paul said about primarily seeking approval of people. We can unknowingly have a misplaced identity—being desperate to please others rather than to please God.

> *"Am I now trying to win the approval*
> *of human beings, or of God?*
> *Or am I trying to please people?*
> *If I were still trying to please people,*
> *I would not be a servant of Christ."*
> (Galatians 1:10)

What Impact Does Identity Have on Self-Worth?

Identity is closely related to self-worth. How you define yourself can impact your sense of value. If your identity is wrapped up in being a perfect mom, and your child grows up to be a prodigal, your self-worth will likely be damaged. If your identity is rooted in being a straight-A student, and you fail an exam or a class, you might be devastated and feel worthless.

Identity and self-worth work differently with God. He *gives* you an identity. He establishes your worth. Both are unchanging, and neither are based on what you do. Circumstances can't change who God says you are. As a person made in His image, your worth is inherent, unchangeable, and immeasurable. The God of infinite worth says you too have immeasurable worth.

However, many people struggle with low self-worth. They've been rejected, abandoned, neglected, abused, belittled, bullied, or devalued—often by those who are significant to them. Their actions and responses to situations reveal what they truly believe about themselves. For example, instead of attributing a poor exam score to study habits or to the difficulty of the exam, a person with low self-worth may think, "I got a bad grade because I'm stupid and I'm a failure."

Those with low self-worth are often people who have been hurt, feel insecure, inferior, or intimidated. If you struggle with feelings of worthlessness, know that God loves you and considers you precious in His sight.

"You are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you."
(Isaiah 43:4 NLT)

Those with low self-worth may exhibit the following behaviors:

— Socially shy and withdrawn, reluctant to make eye contact
— Aggressive and intrusive
— Critical and fault-finding
— Intense and perfectionistic
— Compulsive overachiever or overly driven
— Irresponsible or undependable
— Exaggerating/lying
— Uses/abuses alcohol and/or drugs
— People-pressured or people-pleasing
— Uncomfortable giving or receiving compliments
— Procrastinating and reluctant to take on responsibilities
— Slow to express thoughts or feelings

"Look at the birds.
They don't plant or harvest
or store food in barns,
for your heavenly Father feeds them.
And aren't you far more valuable
to him than they are?"
(Matthew 6:26 NLT)

Perils of Perfectionism

Question: "What do I do when I make a mess of things? How can I forgive myself when my work isn't perfect?"

Answer: For perfectionists, the pressure is always on and the performance never stops. It seems like all of life is under the scrutiny of an unforgiving microscope and the slightest mistake could move you to the basement of shame and despair.

— If you are caught in the perfectionism trap, you can be set free by embracing God's unconditional love and grace. Realize, God saves you not by your works but by His grace (Ephesians 2:8–9). This means that there is nothing you can do to earn His love, and there is nothing you can do to lose it.

— Also, recognize that there is a difference between the demand for perfection and the desire for excellence. There is no one on earth who does everything perfectly. Rather than demand perfection, aim for excellence instead.

— In summary, receive God's grace when you make a mess of things and keep doing the good work God has called you to do—with excellence. The Bible says . . .

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—
and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—
9 not by works, so that no one can boast.
10 For we are God's handiwork,
created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do."
(Ephesians 2:8–10)

What Do Negative Emotions Reveal about Your Self-Image?[16]

Imagine two college friends, Andrew and Scott, getting lost on a road trip. They've been driving for hours and are in completely new territory. Then their GPS goes out. Andrew feels calm and collected because he's capable of figuring out a map and comfortable asking for help—he's adaptable, teachable, and confident.

Scott, however, feels confused and fearful. The farther they go, the more he worries about being even more lost. He's anxious and feels incapable of handling the situation. He blames himself and feels stupid for getting lost in the first place . . . *I'm such an idiot*, he thinks.

There are numerous reasons to explain the differences between these two. However, their responses reveal something about their self-image. Andrew's response reveals a positive self-image. Because of this, he attributes getting lost to circumstances such as being unfamiliar with the area. Scott's emotional response reveals a negative self-image, and he attributes getting lost to a personal character defect.

Emotional responses in normal situations, and especially in stressful situations, can often reveal something about self-image. The same experience for two people can result in very different emotional responses. Those struggling with issues related to self-image may feel like the psalmist. . . .

> *"How long must I wrestle with my thoughts*
> *and day after day have sorrow in my heart?"*
> (Psalm 13:2)

The Language of Negative Emotions

Emotional conflicts exist within those who struggle to establish a personal identity. Common to every age group, these feelings relate as much to external events as to inner thoughts and preoccupations.

Anger—"I'm such an idiot!"

Anxiety—"I don't know who I really am."

Apathetic—"I don't care what happens to me."

Depression—"I have no hope for the future."

Distress—"I am always worried."

Fear—"I am afraid of what will happen to me."

Grief—"I have lost so much that I don't know who I am anymore."

Hurt—"I am always overlooked and never included."

Low self-worth—"I am not good enough."

Rejection—"I am not wanted by anyone."

Self-condemnation—"I am unacceptable and unlovable."

Self-doubt—"I am so inadequate."

What happens if you are caught in an *identity crisis*? In some ways, you are like an amnesiac—you don't know who you are—you can't find your own way home. What a fearful situation! If your heart is heavy with fear, if you don't seem to know yourself or know what to do with yourself, take comfort in knowing that God knows. He not only holds all the answers, but He can free you from your fears.

"I sought the Lord, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears."
(Psalm 34:4)

What Behaviors Result from Self-Image Struggles?

Adolescents often exhibit outer evidence of inner conflict as they transition from child to adult. They may become rebellious and defiant or shy and withdrawn. They may disguise themselves in a drastic change of clothing, cover up with makeup, or camouflage themselves in the current styles and trends of the culture—all in an attempt to fit in with one group or another because they may not have yet discovered their own true identity.

This reality among adolescents reveals an important truth: Your identity and self-image greatly impacts your behavior. For example, if your identity is primarily in your work, then most of your time, energy, money, thoughts, and emotions will be directed toward your job. Generally speaking, a person could look at your behavior—where you spend most of your time, what you often talk about, how you spend your money, etc.—and get a good sense of what's important to your identity.

Using the metaphor of a tree and its fruit, Jesus spoke of the connection between identity and behavior:

> *"A tree is identified by its fruit.*
> *If a tree is good, its fruit will be good.*
> *If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad. . . .*
> *A good person produces good things*
> *from the treasury of a good heart,*
> *and an evil person produces evil things*
> *from the treasury of an evil heart."*
> (Matthew 12:33, 35 NLT)

Behaviors That Reveal Self-Image Struggles

If you don't have a sense of who you are, then your behavior might become aimless or irregular as you try to find your place in the world. Emotional struggles with identity usually result in the following patterns of inconsistent behavior:

Oppositional attitude and actions[17]

Difficulty making a spiritual commitment

Unhealthy friendships

Inability to make decisions or impulsive decision making[18]

Rejection of family values or blind acceptance of the values of others

Struggles with sexual immorality

Difficulty establishing intimacy

Excessive difficulty choosing a career

Inability to set long-term goals[19]

Isolation from family members and friends at school or in the neighborhood

Unpredictability and extreme fluctuation in behavior and mood

Shortened attention span and easily distracted

"Such a person is double-minded
and unstable in all they do."
(James 1:8)

What Are Contrasting Characteristics of Two Spiritual Identities?

The Bible divides people into two groups, two families—those "in Adam" and those "in Christ." The apostle Paul contrasts the two:

"There is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift.
For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many.
But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness
to many through this other man, Jesus Christ. . . .
[16] *For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift*
leads to our being made right with God . . .

[18] *Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone,*
but Christ's one act of righteousness brings
a right relationship with God and new life for everyone.
[19] *Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners.*
But because one other person obeyed God,
many will be made righteous."
(Romans 5:15–16, 18–19 NLT)

The differences could not be more drastic. Over and over, the Bible presents the strong contrast between those who are in Adam and those who are in Christ. Perhaps the sharpest and most distinct constrast is this:

"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."
(1 Corinthians 15:22)

Two Spiritual Identities

Those in Adam	Those in Christ
Hardened Heart *"I will remove from you your **heart of stone**."* (Ezekiel 36:26)	**New Heart** *"I will give you a **new heart** and put a new spirit in you; I will . . . give you a heart of flesh."* (Ezekiel 36:26)
Slave to Sin *"We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be **slaves to sin**."* (Romans 6:6)	**Free from Sin** *"Anyone who has died has been set **free from sin**."* (Romans 6:7)

Those in Adam	Those in Christ
Death *"The wages of sin is **death** . . ."* (Romans 6:23)	**Eternal Life** *"But the gift of God is **eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 6:23)
Powerless *"When we were still **powerless**, Christ died for the ungodly."* (Romans 5:6)	**Powerful** *"His divine **power** has given us everything we need for a godly life."* (2 Peter 1:3)
Enemies of God *"If, while we were **God's enemies** . . ."* (Romans 5:10)	**Reconciled to God** *"We were **reconciled to him** through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"* (Romans 5:10)
Condemned *"One trespass resulted in **condemnation** for all people."* (Romans 5:18)	**No Condemnation** *"There is now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 8:1)
Slaves *"Formerly, when you did not know God, you were **slaves** to those who by nature are not gods."* (Galatians 4:8)	**Sons & Daughters** *"'I will be a Father to you, and you will be my **sons and daughters**,' says the Lord Almighty."* (Galatians 3:7)

Those in Adam	Those in Christ
Slaves to Impurity *"You used to offer yourselves as **slaves to impurity** and to ever-increasing wickedness . . ."* (Romans 6:19)	**Slaves to Righteousness** *"Now offer yourselves as **slaves to righteousness** leading to holiness."* (Romans 6:19)
Under Judgment *"The **judgment** followed one sin and brought condemnation . . ."* (Romans 5:16)	**Justified** *"But the gift followed many trespasses and **brought justification**."* (Romans 5:16)
Under a Curse *"For all who rely on the works of the law are **under a curse**, as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.'"* (Galatians 3:10)	**Redeemed from the Curse** *"Christ **redeemed** us **from the curse** of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'"* (Galatians 3:13 ESV)
Under God's Wrath *"All of us also lived . . . gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires . . . Like the rest, we were by nature **deserving of wrath**."* (Ephesians 2:3)	**Saved from God's Wrath** *"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be **saved from God's wrath** through him!"* (Romans 5:9)
In Darkness *"You were once **darkness** . . ."* (Ephesians 5:8)	**In the Light** *"But now you are **light in the Lord**."* (Ephesians 5:8)

"The first man [Adam] *was from the earth, a man of dust;*
the second man [Christ] *is from heaven.*
[48] *As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust,*
and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.
[49] *Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust,*
we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven."
(1 Corinthians 15:47–49 ESV)

Case Study: Lost Identity
The Scott Bolzan Story[20]

In one fateful moment, 46 years of memories fade to black.

As the busy CEO of a private jet management company, Scott Bolzan always strives to stay on the cutting edge in a highly competitive market. One morning, this pilot slips in the bathroom on an oily patch and hits his head on the floor. He rises—disoriented but functional—only to later discover he has experienced a severe concussion.

This former pro football player is expected to fully recover, but, in truth, Scott will never be the same. He has one of the worst cases of *retrograde amnesia* on record—forgetting *everything* that happened before the fall. He no longer recognizes Joan, his wife of 24 years . . . nor does he know what a "wife" actually is. He has no idea who his children are . . . nor the name of a single United States president. When Scott looks in a mirror, he sees a complete stranger. "I have no concept of who I am as a person, I don't know what my dreams, my aspirations, or my goals were."[21]

Scott Bolzan's amnesia causes another type of identity crisis—a *spiritual* one. Among his lost memories is his profession of faith, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his sins and the free gift of eternal life. Joan becomes his primary spiritual mentor, teaching him about the love and character of Christ . . . all over again.[22] His daughter reassures him that his most important memories are yet to come.

In troubling times—in the midst of a profound identity crisis—Scott and Joan have experienced a testing of their trust in the Lord, but His Word says . . .

"Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,
whose confidence is in him."
(JEREMIAH 17:7)

CAUSES

“My identity is found not in my earthly roles and relationships. Instead, my identity is found in Christ.”

Case Study: Chosen Identity
Emma & Ellie's Stories

Bill and Dorothy meet in college and it's love at first sight. They start their lives together, both in the medical field, and settle down to start a family. Sadly, they are unable to have children. The couple shifts their focus from their own dreams for a family to seeking ways to serve God's family abroad.

They enter the mission field as medical missionaries stationed in South America. In the steamy jungle terrain, they work with indeginous people to learn their language, provide medical care, and spread the gospel.

As God would orchestrate it, Bill and Dorothy have an opportunity to adopt not just one child, but two! Both girls come from different tribes and different places where the missionaries serve. For years, the little family continues their work abroad until Dorothy becomes ill and they're forced to return to the States.

By now, the girls are teens, active Christians in their church, devoted to helping take care of their mom and to supporting and encouraging their dad. Daughter Emma is self-assured and confident, although a bit shy and reserved. Slightly younger Ellie is outgoing and athletic and makes many friends. But something is amiss.

The girls have known they were adopted from the very beginning. Their dark hair, dark eyes, and dark skin are obviously different from their parents' light complexions, light eyes, and graying hair. Living in a Christian community, going to a Christian church, serving in Christian missions, no one comments on their differences. But public school is another story.

Emma understands she was adopted and that somewhere in the world she has other family. But Ellie struggles with the idea of being abandoned by her birth parents . . . living half a world away from whatever "other family" she might have. Both know their identies as daughters of Bill and Dorothy. They have been raised Campbells, through and through, with all the requisite cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents any child could want. But Ellie feels as though her identity is just a name tag she wears and it doesn't reflect who she is inside—who she might've been born to be.

Dorothy especially wonders what to do to help ease her daughter's pain. She doesn't understand why one daughter has adjusted so well to being adopted and the other's heart is so wounded from feeling rejected. "What did we do wrong?" she asks. "We raised the girls exactly the same. I feel as though I've failed as a parent."

A wise friend advises that the answer lies in the girls accepting and embracing their status as beloved, adopted children—not only in their own family, but especially being adopted into the family of Christ.

Rather than feeling abandoned and rejected by their birth families, both girls have a choice to focus on the blessings that have come their way since being adopted into a loving, caring family. They have a choice to remember that they were specifically chosen and desperately wanted . . . and that Bill and Dorothy would do anything they could for them both. Emma and Ellie are learning to trust this truth.

In a similar way, God does everything He can to ensure our adoption into His family. He rescues and redeems us from a dismal existence and lifts us up to live with Him as our heavenly Father.

"But he lifted the needy out of their affliction
and increased their families like flocks."
(Psalm 107:41)

What Causes Identity Struggles and Poor Self-Image?

When you drive a car, numerous factors can cause your car to drift into another lane. External factors such as the weather (wind, rain, and snow) or traffic (congestion, bad drivers) can lead you off course. Internal factors such as malfunctions with the car (engine trouble, no power steering) or distractions in the car (loud children, noisy music playing) could cause you to drift out of your lane. Even if you're not turning or taking detours and are essentially heading forward, you still have to keep your hands on the steering wheel and continue making minor adjustments.

Many factors also contribute to self-image and identity struggles. Some factors are external (environment, upbringing, circumstances) and some factors are internal (thoughts, beliefs, responses). Just as it is necessary to keep your hands on the wheel of a car to stay headed in the right direction, it's vital to have your mind and heart centered on God so you can stay on the right path and ground your identity in truth.

> *"Show me the right path, O Lord;*
> *point out the road for me to follow.*
> *Lead me by your truth and teach me,*
> *for you are the God who saves me.*
> *All day long I put my hope in you."*
> (Psalm 25:4–5 NLT)

Factors Affecting Formation of Identity

The following factors can lead to confusion, doubt, and struggles with identity and self-image.[23]

Abuse—verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse in the home, at school (bullying), or in the workplace

Comparison/favoritism—growing up with parents who played favorites or constantly compare you to siblings

Cultural influences—social media, music, movies, celebrities, fashion trends, and cultural narratives (i.e., the "self-made" man, the American Dream, etc.); how well you perceive yourself to fit in with your culture

Faulty thinking—having a negative or pessimistic view of yourself, believing lies about yourself, negative or self-condemning self-talk, having a victim mentality, regularly attributing bad circumstances to personal factors rather than those outside your control

Major life transitions—entering a new school, graduating, career changes, getting married, becoming a parent, children moving out, getting a divorce, losing a loved one, retirement, and many other major life transitions

Network & affiliations—your circle of friends, place of employment, organizations you belong to, memberships you have

Parenting style—if your parents were abusive, authoritarian, domineering, harsh, neglectful, over-protective, over-critical, or unaffectionate

Personality—your level of openness (vs. inaccessibility) to experiences and ideas, conscientiousness (vs. lack of direction), extroversion (vs. introversion), agreeableness (vs. antagonism), and neuroticism (vs. emotional stability)

Physical issues—deformities, handicaps, illnesses, injuries, size or weight issues

Theological beliefs—your view of God (believing God is a harsh judge or loving father), your view of humanity (believing we're created in God's image with purpose or randomly evolved creatures with no purpose), and your view of salvation (believing we're redeemable and able to change or we're hopelessly lost and unable to change)

Sin and guilt—how you respond to sin and guilt; whether you run *to* God for grace and forgiveness or run *away* from God in guilt and shame

Socioeconomic status—your perceived sense of wealth and status; how you respond to your level of wealth and worth

Success or failure—how you respond to success and failure; how much you attribute success and failure to yourself or to circumstances

Unrealistic expectations—the standards you set for yourself or the expectations others have of you—and how well you meet or fail to meet those standards

With so many factors to influence your identity and self-image, it's easy to drift off course and not understand who God created you to be. That's why it's crucial to know God's Word and follow His leading, so your life and identity have a firm foundation.

"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God.
May your gracious Spirit lead me
forward on a firm footing."
(Psalm 143:10 NLT)

What Causes Confusion about Your Spiritual Identity?

Most people experience confusion about *who they really are* because they lack a biblical understanding of what determines their identity. Your behavior is an outgrowth of your identity. Your personal identity is determined by what *family* you are born into. Based on the Bible, everyone is a descendant of Adam—we all are born into Adam's family. No one in Adam's family has the capacity to live as God designed us to live.

A new spiritual life is made possible in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. To embrace Him as your personal Lord and Savior is to inherit a new family and a new identity *"in Christ."* With this new identity, you will begin to develop Christlike character through the working of the Holy Spirit.

"And the Lord—who is the Spirit—
makes us more and more like him
as we are changed into his glorious image."
(2 Corinthians 3:18 NLT)

Two Families

Every person born into the family of Adam is identified with Adam, and will by nature exhibit the character of Adam. The life of Adam is reflective of the humanistic view of life. (Humanism is a worldview that centers on human self-sufficiency, personal fulfillment, and reason.) Ultimately, to be "in Adam" means that you are an heir to everything he was.

"When Adam sinned,
sin entered the world.
Adam's sin brought death,
so death spread to everyone,
for everyone sinned. . . .
For the sin of this one man, Adam,
caused death to rule over many."
(Romans 5:12, 17 NLT)

The Family of Adam	The Family of Christ
Source of Control	**Source of Control**
Believing you are ultimately in control of your life	Believing God is in control of events and circumstances

The Family of Adam	The Family of Christ
Source of Truth Self, feelings, or reason—thinking there are no moral absolutes; everything is relative	**Source of Truth** God's Word—realizing that you are set free by the truth
Source of Morality Believing you have the right to choose your own moral restraints	**Source of Morality** Knowing that moral absolutes, as seen in the Bible, establish godly behavior
Source of Fulfillment Viewing self-fulfillment as life's highest purpose	**Source of Fulfillment** Viewing God's glory and doing God's will as life's highest purpose

The good news is that God has made it possible for everyone to have a new identity by moving us out of the family of Adam and adopting us into the family of Christ. Everyone who is "in Christ" experiences a new birth, receives a new heart, and becomes conformed to the image of Christ. To be "in Christ" means that, regardless of your background, you are an heir to everything He is.

"And this is God's plan:
Both Gentiles and Jews who
believe the Good News
share equally in the riches
inherited by God's children.
Both are part of the same body,
and both enjoy the promise of blessings
because they belong to Christ Jesus."
(Ephesians 3:6 NLT)

Where Do You Find Your Real Identity?

The answer to the question "Where do I find my *real* identity—my *true* identity?" lies in where you place your trust.

Do you look to cultural or secular society to determine who you are and where you will place your priorities? Do you allow social influences alone to guide what you believe about yourself? Or do you place your trust in God to determine the condition of your heart . . . and who He created you to be?

> *"Trust in him at all times, you people;*
> *pour out your hearts to him,*
> *for God is our refuge."*
> (Psalm 62:8)

Questions to Ask and Answer

When you've searched anywhere and everywhere for answers to discover who you are . . . and you are still uncertain and unsure about who you really are and if there is a plan and a purpose for your life . . . know that God has the answer. He has provided the answer in His Son, Jesus.

Are you ready to find yourself . . . in Him? Ask and answer these questions for yourself:

Do I accept by faith who Jesus is—God, the Son?

Will I accept His teachings that He came to rescue and redeem those who will come to Him?

Am I willing to accept biblical truths above my own thoughts, feelings, and opinions?

Am I willing to apply biblical principles to my life?

Am I willing to let Jesus take control of my life?

Have I already or am I now willing to accept Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of my life?

Do I understand my true identity is found in Christ—in Him alone?

When you come to terms with understanding and accepting who you are in Christ, you will learn that you are not defined by what other people say you are. You are not limited to who you think you might be—you are who God says you are. You are complete in Christ.

"You are complete in Him."
(Colossians 2:10 NKJV)

What Is the Root Cause of Identity Struggles?

Underage teenagers are notorious for trying to obtain falsified identification—fake IDs—to gain access to alcohol or clubs where they can party with older friends. Others may want fake IDs to hide criminal behavior or even assume the identity of someone they are not.

Likewise, many people who consider themselves to be Christians may not have a true, authentic relationship with Jesus. If they had to check off a box under the heading "Religion," they might choose "Christian" by default. This is a form of fake ID. Many of these people are in fact *cultural Christians* . . . simply because they fit into no other category. But the only way we can become *authentic Christians* is through a life-transforming relationship with the Savior, Jesus Christ.

"You were called into
fellowship with His Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord."
(1 Corinthians 1:9 NASB)

3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.[24]

Love—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

Significance—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

"I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me" (Psalm 57:2 ESV).

Security—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

"Whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge" (Proverbs 14:26).

The Ultimate Need-Meeter

What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?

God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn't need God! Our inner needs draw us into a deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

"The Lord will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail."
(Isaiah 58:11)

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

Love—*"I* [the Lord] *have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness"* (Jeremiah 31:3).

Significance—*"'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'"* (Jeremiah 29:11).

Security—*"The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged"* (Deuteronomy 31:8).

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, *"My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."*

Wrong Belief:

"My identity is found in the significant roles and relationships in my life. I will be fulfilled when I have an image of success."

Right Belief:

"My identity is found not in my earthly roles and relationships. Instead, my identity is found in Christ. I am fulfilled as my life reflects the image of God by allowing Christ to live in me and through me."

"We . . . are being transformed into his image
with ever-increasing glory, which comes
from the Lord, who is the Spirit."
(2 Corinthians 3:18)

What Is God's Plan for Your Identity?

In many a fairy tale, when a peasant marries into a royal family, the commoner eventually becomes a king or a queen.

A modern-day Cinderella catches the eye of a handsome prince. Or a pauper proposes to a beautiful princess. Invitations to parties and balls result in favorable impressions and soon a whirlwind courtship ensues. The two marry in a grandly lavish ceremony—setting the stage for the whole world to gaze in amazement as a dream-come-true fairy tale becomes reality before their very eyes.

When a commoner marries into a monarchy, they instantly become a full-fledged member of the royal family. They receive a new name, a new title, a new legacy, and a new life. Rather than spending time cloistered away in a stuffy throne room, they venture out among the people, showing compassion and humility to many suffering subjects.

Likewise, when a man or woman becomes a child of God, they too become royalty—instantly and eternally. For they become sons and daughters of the King of kings and Lord of lords. They receive a new name—no longer identified as a broken "sinner," but suddenly a whole and holy "saint." As co-heirs with Christ, they receive a new legacy—a royal inheritance—with a place reserved at the King's table on high. A new life of serving Him and His kingdom begins immediately as nobility is conferred, not in the blue blood of aristocracy, but the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ.

This royal title is not earned . . . instead it is bestowed by order and pronouncement of the King. When we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, we belong to Him, bear His likeness, and serve the kingdom He rules and reigns forevermore.

"I will be a Father to you,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty."
(2 Corinthians 6:18)

4 Points of God's Plan

Whether you're trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you've done or what's been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

"'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord*,*
'plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.'"
(Jeremiah 29:11)

1. God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

— What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him"* (John 3:16–17).

— What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (John 10:10).

2. The Problem: *Sin*

— What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway"* (Romans 7:18–19 NLT).

— What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *"Your iniquities* [sins] *have separated you from your God"* (Isaiah 59:2). Scripture also says, *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

3. God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

— Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8).

— What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). The Bible says, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus,and you will be saved"* (Acts 16:31).

4. Your Part: *Surrender*

— Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"* (Matthew 16:24–26).

— Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your "good works" as a means of earning God's approval. The Bible says, *"It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast"* (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you've humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

"God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I've chosen to go my own way
instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross
to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me the person
you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen."

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . ."* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

"Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word
and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged
but has crossed over from death to life."
(John 5:24)

You Can Have a New Name

Parents diligently consider the meaning, sound, history, and heritage of names when considering what to call their offspring.

In the Bible, names are significant. Many times people were known by different names at different points in their lives. Consider these individuals and what their new names represent.

Old Name and Meaning	New Name and Meaning
Abram —"high father"	Abraham —"father of many"
Sarai —"princess"	Sarah —"mother of nations"
Jacob —"supplanter; grasps heel"	Israel —"struggles; contends with God"
Naomi —"beautiful"	Mara —"bitter"
Hadassah —"myrtle tree"	Esther —"star"
Ben-Oni —"son of sorrow, trouble"	Benjamin —"son of my right hand"
Simon —"obedient, listening"	Peter —"rock"
Saul —"asked for"	Paul —"small, little"

The Bible also reveals that a new name will be given to the victorious . . .

"Whoever has ears, let them hear
what the Spirit says to the churches.
To the one who is victorious,
I will give some of the hidden manna.
I will also give that person a white stone
with a new name written on it,
known only to the one who receives it."
(Revelation 2:17)

In Matthew 16, Jesus asks the disciples the question, *"Who do people say the Son of Man is?"* and they replied, *"Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets"* (Matthew 16:13–14).

Jesus continues, *"But what about you? . . . Who do you say I am?"* to which Simon Peter answers, *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"* (Matthew 16:15–16). Jesus confirms this truth was revealed by the Father in heaven and Jesus then confers a new name on Simon . . . Peter, which means "rock."

Jesus, the Name above all names, is also known by many other names:

Advocate	Good Shepherd	Messiah
Alpha & Omega	Head	Prophet
Arm of the Lord	High Priest	Savior
Branch	Immanuel	Servant of God
Bridegroom	Judge	Son of God
Builder	King of kings	Son of Man
Comforter	Lamb of God	The Angel of the Lord
Cornerstone	Last Adam	The Life
Counselor	Light	The Truth
Deliverer	Lion of the tribe of Judah	The Way
Firstborn	Lord of lords	Vine
Gift of God	Mediator	Word of God

The question for us also is: Who do *you* say Jesus is? And who does Jesus now say *you are*?

Case Study: Losing Her Memory, but Not Her Lord
The Kayla Hutcheson Story[25]

Kayla Hutcheson and Jeni Gabriel are on the court, dribbling basketballs and dodging past teammates to prepare for an upcoming game. Their coach dutifully conducts demanding drills, spurring the community college team to greater athleticism and greater accomplishments. Kayla and Jeni embrace the challenge, but their valiant efforts lead to a catastrophic collision.

In a routine move, the two girls bang heads—*hard*. Jeni emerges unscathed, and Kayla is momentarily distracted by a bloody nose. But a bloody nose is just the *beginning*.

Hours after the accident, Kayla's world begins to fog over. She can no longer identify friends or even everyday objects, like a toaster. Kayla begins to babble like a two-year-old, perplexed by a banana that captures her attention. Roommates tell her it's something to eat, but first must be peeled. *Peeled?* Kayla has no understanding. Then Kayla's eyes glaze over, taking on a chilling, blank stare: They signal the greatest loss of all—Kayla no longer knows *who* she is.

Kayla's doctor believes she should stay in familiar surroundings, which includes keeping her in school. That's when "Kayla Care" comes to the rescue. Kayla's three roommates sacrificially assume various roles and tasks to help their friend make her way back to normal living. Each day their conversations are the same—"OK, who's got her lunch, who's got her here [at home], who's taking her notes, who's taking her to class?"

The road to recovery has been slow for Kayla Hutcheson, but her memories are returning. She credits not only faithful friends, but an intimate relationship with a faithful God for her remarkable improvement. Kayla describes her relationship with God as "skyrocketing." During her recovery, she experiences an intimacy with Him that brings her a deepened sense of purpose.

"I've grown so much. I'm a lot stronger, this has shaped me to be there for people like they were there for me. It's made me appreciate life and everything in it. So much. I have come this far and it's amazing. I credit God with that."[26] In the first hours following the collision, her devoted friends asked her questions and showed her pictures. When Kayla was shown a picture of Jesus, she knew His name. She may not have known who she was at that moment, but she knew who He is.[27]

"Dear friends, now we are children of God,
and what we will be has not yet been made known.
But we know that when Christ appears,
we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."
(1 John 3:2)

STEPS TO SOLUTION

“Thankfully, there is one identity that can never be stolen. That’s your identity in Christ.”

Case Study: Stanford Prison Experiment[28]

In 1971, research psychologist Philip Zimbardo conducts the infamous Stanford Prison Experiment. He builds a mock prison in a basement at Stanford University complete with prison cells, barred doors and windows, and bare walls.

Zimbardo enlists volunteers (male college students) to participate in a study on the effects of prison life. Each participant is assigned to be either a guard or a prisoner, with a total of twelve guards and twelve prisoners.

The guards wear police uniforms, dark sunglasses, and carry whistles and clubs. Prisoners wear smocks with an ID number, nylon caps, and each has a chain locked around one ankle. All personal possessions are confiscated and the "prisoners" are fingerprinted, stripped, and only called by their prison number.

The participants quickly adjust to their roles. The "guards" are told to maintain order in the mock prison, but no violence is permitted. The guards, however, punish the "prisoners" if they misbehave by making them do menial tasks or push-ups. The exercise may be an experiment, but the situation becomes increasingly real to the participants.

On the second day of the experiment, the prisoners incite a rebellion by removing their caps and ID numbers and setting their beds against their cells as a barricade. In response, the guards spray them with a fire extinguisher, break into the cells, remove the beds, strip the prisoners, and place the leader of the rebellion in solitary confinement.

The dehumanizing and aggressive treatment by the guards continues in other ways, such as withholding food and constant verbal abuse. The experiment is scheduled to last for two weeks but is stopped on the sixth day because of the harsh treatment. The mock prison seems only too real, and the prisoners experience significant psychological and emotional damage.

The Stanford Prison Experiment has been criticized for issues related to ethics and morality. However, this study reveals critical insights into the profound effects of how quickly people adapt to social roles. In time, the prisoners feel like prisoners and behave like prisoners. The guards take on the characteristics of guards. *They become who they are told to be.*

A part of each person's identity is due to nature—what's been inherited from parents such as looks and genes. But, some element of identity, as this experiment shows, is due to nurture—through relationships and social environment. We can take on characteristics and become like those we spend time with, and we adapt ourselves to the various roles in our lives.

The Bible speaks to both of these realities. Regarding our nature, the Bible says we are born with a sin nature, *"For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me"* (Psalm 51:5 NLT). Regarding nurture, God's Word shows that our social environment and relationships can also impact our identity. The Bible says, *"Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble"* (Proverbs 13:20 NLT).

When you become a Christian, the Bible says you become a *"new creation"* in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). That's your new nature. Yet the Bible also says you are to *"clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Romans 13:14). As your nature changes, so should your behavior.

The Christian life is about growing in Christ—becoming more and more like Him. This doesn't mean you change who you are on the outside in order to change who you are in the inside. It means that God, through His Spirit, changes you day by day to reflect His Son. In other words, *God makes you become who He already says you are in Christ*. The Bible uses the word picture of putting on new clothes to describe this truth—how God changes us to be more and more like Jesus.

"For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.
And all who have been united with Christ in baptism
have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes."
(Galatians 3:26–27 NLT)

Key Verse to Memorize

Heart transplant stories inspire and amaze. With the wonders of modern surgery and the generosity of organ donors, a dying individual can receive new life from another. There's a sense in which the donor's life continues, living in and through the recipient. The new life of the recipient is due to the generosity of the donor.

However, astounding stories of successful heart transplants are but a dim reflection of an incredible biblical reality. When you become a follower of Christ, God gives you a new heart, a new identity, a new family, and a new purpose. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ's life becomes yours as He lives in you and through you. This new life and identity is due entirely to the generous grace of God in Christ.

"I have been crucified with Christ
and I no longer live,
but Christ lives in me.
The life I now live in the body,
I live by faith in the Son of God,
who loved me and gave himself for me."
(Galatians 2:20)

Key Passage to Read

God's Word describes each person in two different ways. There's the "you" before receiving Christ, and there the "you" after receiving Christ. Similar to the "in Adam" and "in Christ" distinction, the Bible describes this difference as your "old self" and your "new self."

The old self, like Adam, disobeyed God, lived independently of God, and generally lived to please self. But in and through Christ, we are given a new nature. The new self seeks to obey God, lives dependently on Him, and desires to please God. Everything about the old self was centered on self; everything about the new self is centered on Christ.

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self,created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."
(Ephesians 4:22–24)

Colossians 3:1–17
Putting on the New Self

You are with Christ and in Christ—so focus on Him. .....v. 1

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."

You have died to your old self—so look to Christ to find life. ..... vv. 2–3

"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

You have a new, glorious future—so live with joyful expectation. ..... v. 4

"When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

You are not defined by the sins of your past—so you can conquer them. ..... vv. 5–9

"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices . . ."

You are made new—so grow to be more and more like Christ. ..... v. 10

"and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

You belong to Christ—so find your primary identity in Him. .....v. 11

"Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."

You are chosen, holy and loved—so love and forgive as Christ does. .....vv. 12–14

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

You have the peace of Christ—so live a life of peace and gratitude. .....v. 15

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."

You have a new purpose in Christ—so share Him with others. .....v. 16

"Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts."

You have a new motivation in Christ—so do everything to the glory of God. .....v. 17

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

How to Have a Transformed Life

Thieves steal the identities of others for a variety of reasons. Some to swipe another's credit card account and live the high life on their dime. Others to mask their own identities while they commit other crimes. Some who are underage only want to sneak past someone checking IDs, while others want to take over another person's life entirely to run up debt that will never be repaid.

Email and social media accounts get hacked. Credit reports are copied. Social Security numbers are duplicated and sold on the black market. Someone pretending to be you is really an evil twin—at least on paper.

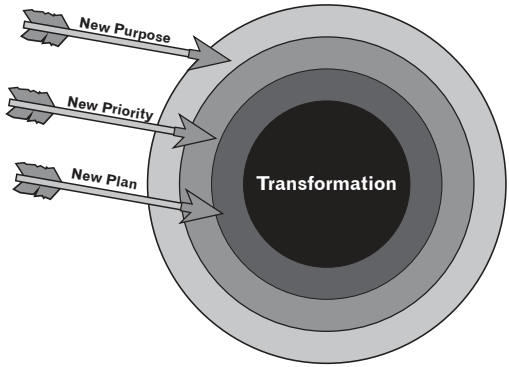
Identity theft is big business—and preventing identity theft is big business, too. The cost of identity theft isn't limited to just losses—countless hours and lots of cash can be consumed just trying to restore your own credit and prove that you are who you say you are.

Identity thieves dig through trash to steal documents, steal and misuse personal information they gain access to, trick people into revealing personal details, or simply steal a wallet, purse, or backpack.

Thankfully, there is one identity that can never be stolen. That's your identity in Christ.

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;
I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."
(John 10:10)

Reaching the Target: Transformation!



The Freedom Formula

A New Purpose
+ A New Priority
+ A New Plan
A Transformed Life

Target #1—A New Purpose

God's purpose for me is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

"Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29).

—"I'll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ."

Target #2—A New Priority

God's priority for me is to change my thinking.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

—"I'll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God's thinking."

Target #3—A New Plan

God's plan for me is to rely on Christ's strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13 NKJV).

—"I'll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength."

My Personalized Plan

Who am I?

There are so many ways people answer that question. Some look to their country—"I am an American." Some look to their family—"I am a mother" . . . "I am a husband" . . . "I am a grandparent."

We could look to our jobs, schools, gender, or many other things to define ourselves. But God knows us best. He knows everything about us. Only He can give us the most accurate description of our own identities. So we look to Him and His Word for our identity.

Inevitably, we will recognize that there is a great difference between who God says we are and who we think we are. But God doesn't just give us a new identity in Christ and leave us alone to figure it out—He graciously helps us become who He says we are.

"But by the grace of God I am what I am,
and his grace to me was not without effect.
No, I worked harder than all of them—
yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."
(1 Corinthians 15:10)

As I seek to grow and become more like Christ, **I will** ...

Embrace my identity in Christ

I understand that Christ died not only to forgive my sins but to make me a new person—to make me to be more like Him. The Lord has the final word on my identity, not me or my family or my job or my circumstances. The person the Lord says I am . . . is who I am.

— I will study God's Word regularly to remind myself of who God is and who He says I am.

— I will look to Christ to find my primary identity.

"For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).

Put my old self and old ways behind me

God does not define me by my sin, my past, or my mistakes . . . so neither will I. Things in my past no longer define my self-image and identity. I can acknowledge those influences and overcome them with God's help.

— I will remember that I am not defined by my past or my sins.

— I will seek to overcome the sins that have previously entrapped me.

"We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. . . . So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:6, 11 NLT).

Acknowledge my background

Who I am is no accident. God is sovereign over my life. He determined the time, place, and family I'd be born into—it's no mistake. God chose the circumstances surrounding my life, and chose me to be His, so I can acknowledge and be thankful for the various ways God has orchestrated my life to make me who He created me to be.

— I will acknowledge the people, places, and positions that have influenced my identity (for good or bad), but remember they are not where my ultimate identity lies.

— I will reflect on and be thankful for the positive influences that shaped who I am today—my family, culture, education, friends, jobs, and life experiences.

"Give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20 NLT).

Honestly evaluate myself

Having an exaggerated or elevated view of myself is prideful—God doesn't want that for me. However, having a worthless or undignified view of myself is not what God desires either. I must honestly assess who I am in God's sight.

— I will not think of myself too highly—remembering that I am a sinner saved by grace.

— I will not think of myself too lowly—remembering that I am made in God's image and loved.

"Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us" (Romans 12:3 NLT).

Correct faulty thinking and emotions

If I *feel* like a failure, that does not mean I *am* a failure. If I *think* I am worthless, that does not mean I *am* worthless. I recognize that my thoughts and emotions can be misguided and wrong. It's important to be in God's Word to identify the lies I believe about myself and God—and correct them with His truth.

— I will identify the lies I've believed about myself, about others, about life, and about God.

— I will look to God's Word to replace those lies with the truth.

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

Encourage others

I know there are Christians who don't understand their identity in Christ. I also know there are many who are not Christians but long to understand who they can be. The Lord can use me to help others see who they are in God's eyes.

— I will reach out to those struggling with identity and self-image issues and help them see their God-given worth.

— I will embrace my identity as an ambassador of Christ and share the life-changing identity others can also have in Christ.

"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

How to Replace Your Self-Perception with God's Perspective

We naturally see ourselves and the world around us through eyes that are colored by our own thoughts and beliefs. We see ourselves as we think (assume) we really are. If you *think* you are a wretched person, whenever you look in a mirror, you will see a wretched person, and you will think and act and feel like the wretched person you believe yourself to be.

Realize, there's a vast difference between *our perceptions* and *God's perspective*. Our perceptions are often wrong. They can be unreliable and untrustworthy. But God's perspective is never wrong. He sees everything completely and accurately. That's why it's important to see ourselves as God sees us.

That's why we need to willfully choose to yield ourselves to the Lord and to work with Him to transform us. We do this by allowing His truth to replace our faulty thoughts (often based on our feelings). Since all of God's thoughts are true, we need to saturate our minds with His words of truth—allowing those words to cause us to think as He thinks and see as He sees. Thus, He changes our minds . . . about Him, about us, and about others.

> *"Let the wicked forsake their ways*
> *and the unrighteous their thoughts. . . . '*
> *As the heavens are higher than the earth,*
> *so are my ways higher than your ways*
> *and my thoughts than your thoughts.'"*
> (Isaiah 55:7, 9)

Replacing Self-Perception with God's Perspective

This process of change involves: (1) identifying the image you presently have of yourself, (2) identifying the contrasting image God has of you, and then (3) choosing to believe from His perspective rather than your own perception. It is that simple . . . and yet that profound.

Do you think . . . you are unacceptable?

God says . . . you are accepted by Him.

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7.).

Do you think . . . you are alone?

God says . . . He will never leave you nor forsake you.

"The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (Deuteronomy 31:8).

Do you think . . . you are incompetent, a failure?

God says . . . He has made you competent.

"Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God" (2 Corinthians 3:5).

Do you think . . . you are bad, not good enough?

God says . . . He sees you through the lens of His mercy.

"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:5).

Do you think . . . you are a mistake?

God says . . . you are wonderfully made.

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Psalm 139:14).

Do you think . . . you are defeated?

God says . . . you are more than a conqueror.

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

Do you think . . . you are unloved?

God says . . . He has great love for you.

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4-5).

Do you think . . . you can't be forgiven?

God says . . . your sins are forgiven and are gone.

"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).

Do you think . . . you don't have enough strength?

God says . . . He will strengthen you Himself.

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

Do you think . . . you can't have victory over a sinful habit?

God says . . . You have victory through Jesus.

"Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

God's thoughts are revealed to us through His Word, which is powerful and able to transform us to be like Him in thought, in word, and in deed. . . .

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return to it without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower
and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."
(Isaiah 55:10–11)

How to Deal with Guilt and Shame

After the prophet Nathan confronts King David about his sins of murder and adultery, he prays to God, *"Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night"* (Psalm 51:1–3 NLT). Notice his language: he feels stained, dirty, rebellious, guilty, and haunted by his sin.

Feelings of guilt and shame—from what you've done or what has been done to you—can drastically affect how you perceive yourself and your value. Being pounded by *prolonged guilt* can strike a damaging blow to your self-image and sense of worth, leaving you feeling dejected, discouraged, and demoralized.

Despite the devastating effects of guilt and shame, David demonstrates that our hope lies in God's unfailing love and great compassion. The feelings of guilt and shame need to be correctly defined and dealt with God's way, so that healing can happen and you can begin to walk in the freedom of God's grace.

"I will walk in freedom, for I have devoted myself to your commandments."
(PSALM 119:45 NLT)

Understand the Difference Between Guilt and Shame

Guilt and shame are not the same. Guilt focuses on your behavior, whereas shame focuses on you.

Shame is a painful emotion of disgrace caused by a strong sense of real or imagined guilt.

Shame can be a response to what was done to you, but guilt is a response to something you have done.

Shame focuses on who you *are*, but guilt focuses on what you've *done*.[29] Shame is experienced when your guilt moves from knowing you have *done* something bad to feeling that you *are* bad.

Shame creates an inner desire to maintain rigid control over emotions and behavior while guilt can motivate a desire to change or justify emotions and behavior.

Shame produces inner loneliness that fosters unhealthy dependencies, but guilt produces inner longings that foster healthy repentance in relationships.

Shame steals the joy of your salvation, yet guilt confessed restores joy in salvation.

"Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."
(Psalm 51:12)

Understand the Difference Between True Guilt and False Guilt

False guilt can blind and deceive people from seeing the truth about the hurtful experiences they suffer. False guilt adds another unhealthy dynamic to already wounded emotions. Realize, there's a vast difference between true guilt and false guilt.

True guilt is an emotional response as a result of any wrong attitude or action contrary to the perfect will of God—and refers to the fact of being at fault.

- **False guilt** is an emotional response of: (1) self-blame even though no wrong has been committed, or (2) self-blame that continues after confessing and repenting of a committed sin which is no longer a part of a person's life.
- **False guilt** is based on self-condemning feelings of not having lived up to your own expectations or to the expectations of someone else.

True guilt leads to freedom, as it leads you to repent of sin and wrongdoing, turn to God, and receive His grace and forgiveness.

- **False guilt** keeps you in bondage to three weapons of destruction: shame, fear, and anger.[30]
- **False guilt** is not resolved by confession because there is nothing to confess.
- **False guilt** is resolved by rejecting lies and believing truth. Revelation 12:10 says that Satan is the *"accuser of our brothers and sisters."* He loves to burden believers with false guilt and condemnation. Some of his favorite strategies are: bringing up the past, reminding you of your failures, and making you feel unforgiven and unaccepted by God.

The next time your mind begins to replay sins committed against you for which you feel responsible (or the sins for which you have repented), realize that this taunting comes from Satan, the accuser, to discourage you. Ask yourself:

- "What am I hearing?" (Accusation)
- "What am I feeling?" (False guilt)
- "What are the facts?" (Not guilty; fully forgiven)

Use Scripture as your standard to determine true and false guilt. Memorize Romans 8:1 and turn it into a prayer: "Thank you, Father, that you don't condemn me and don't want me to condemn myself. These feelings of false guilt are not valid because I am accepted in Christ."

"There is now no condemnation
for those who are in Christ Jesus."
(Romans 8:1)

Overcoming Guilt and Shame

If you are experiencing true guilt (feeling bad about *what you've done*), confess your sins to God and receive His forgiveness.

"I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.' And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone" (Psalm 32:5 NLT).

If you are experiencing false guilt (feeling bad *although you've done no wrong*), reject the false guilt and replace the lies you've been led to believe with the truth of God's Word.

"Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you" (Psalm 25:5 NLT).

If you are experiencing shame (feeling bad about *who you are*), embrace God's love for you and reflect on your identity in Christ as a beloved child of God.

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1).

The powerful emotions of guilt and shame can take time to untangle and overcome. In addition to believing the truth of God's Word, talk with a wise friend, counselor, or pastor to help you gain victory over these feelings.

"In abundance of counselors there is victory."
(Proverbs 11:14 NASB)

How to Overcome Rejection & Abandonment

Rejection from parents, a spouse, or other significant people in your life can bring devastating blows. In addition to emotional pain, your sense of identity and self-image can be impacted as well. It's no mystery why. Those closest to you play a critical role in forming your identity and shaping your self-image. When these individuals reject or abandon you—it can be difficult to grasp who you are and how to see yourself.

Long before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah spoke of the Messiah, saying, *"He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain"* (Isaiah 53:3). Realize, the Lord understands the pain of rejection and abandonment.

An important step in overcoming rejection is reflecting on God's acceptance of you and the truth that He does not reject you. Even if those closest to you reject you, the Lord will not. . . . *"Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me"* (Psalm 27:10). Embrace the truth of the Lord's love for you just as He embraces you.

"The LORD will not reject his people;
he will not abandon his special possession."
(PSALM 94:14 NLT)

Overcoming Rejection with God's Truth

The messages of rejection and abandonment can be bitterly painful and terribly destructive to your life and relationships. The lies they convey must be countered with the truth of Scripture.

When you experience . . .

Rejection

Tell yourself the truth: "Just because someone withholds love from me doesn't mean everyone will withhold love from me. God listens to me and will never withhold His love from me."

"Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!" (PSALM 66:20).

Worthlessness

Tell yourself the truth: "Just because someone doesn't value me doesn't mean no one values me. God created me, so I have inherent, unchanging worth—and He sees me as precious in His sight."

"You are precious and honored in my sight, and . . . I love you" (ISAIAH 43:4).

Self-hate

Tell yourself the truth: "Just because someone has judged me doesn't mean I should condemn myself. God does not condemn me, because I am set free in Christ."

"There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death" (Romans 8:1–2 NLT).

To Overcome Feeling Rejected
Remember in Christ, You Are Accepted
(an acrostic for the word ACCEPTED)

A—Admit rejection from the past and acknowledge its pain.

"I am about to fall, and my pain is ever with me" (Psalm 38:17).

C—Claim God's acceptance and unconditional love.

"He made us accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6 NKJV).

C—Choose to forgive those who have rejected you.

"Forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others" (Colossians 3:13 NLT).

E—Expect future rejection to be natural in a fallen world.

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12 ESV).

P—Plant Scripture in your mind to produce new and truthful thought patterns.

"I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways" (Psalm 119:15 NLT).

T—Thank God for what you've learned through your rejection.

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

E—Encourage others as an expression of Christ's love.

"Encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

D—Draw on the power of Christ's life within you.

"May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think" (Ephesians 3:19–20 NLT).

People-Pleasing

Question: How do I overcome my tendency to always want to please people?

Answer: You're not alone. Many struggle with people-pleasing and for a variety of reasons. They may be a peace-at-any-price type of person who generally avoids confrontation. They may fear sticking up for themselves or making their opinions known—or they may have never learned how to set boundaries with others. Deep down, they may seek the approval of others as a way to meet an inner need for love, significance, or security.[31]

— **Address your fears**. You may have underlying fears about not meeting others' approval. Pray, journal, and talk with someone you trust to help you address those fears. Whatever the reason for people-pleasing in your life, it can feel like an inescapable trap—but you can be set free with God's help.

"Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe" (Proverbs 29:25).

— **Set boundaries.** It's okay to say *No* to others. Sometimes you need to say *No* to people so you can say *Yes* to God. Setting boundaries can help guard you from excessively doing things for others in an attempt to gain approval.

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Proverbs 4:23).

— **Trust God to meet your needs**. Only God can fully meet your deep needs for love, significance, and security. Even if you receive the approval of others, it won't satisfy the deepest longings in your heart. Look to Christ to meet those needs and seek God's approval above all.

"Am I now trying to win the approval
of human beings, or of God?
Or am I trying to please people?
If I were still trying to please people,
I would not be a servant of Christ."
(Galatians 1:10)

How to Claim Your Identity in Christ

In order for Christians to walk in victory, we need to identify the lies we believe about ourselves and exchange them for the truth about who we really are in Christ. At the moment of our salvation, we become a new creation. But we must believe and accept that truth to live it.

Consider the following seven lies we commonly tell ourselves, followed by seven truths from God's Word. For lasting change to occur, we must cast aside the lies and constantly rely on the truth of Scripture. . . . *"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Review one of these lies each day. Ask yourself, *Am I believing this lie?* Then refer to the scripture verses for that day and write them down. Read them aloud and thank God that His Word confirms the truth about you—*whether you feel like it or not*. Repeating this practice regularly will help you begin to see yourself through God's eyes.

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true,
whatever is noble, whatever is right,
whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,
whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent
or praiseworthy—think about such things."
(Philippians 4:8)

Day One . . . My New Characteristics

Lie: "I'll never feel valuable because this is just the way I am. I cannot change."

Truth: In Christ, I am made new.

"Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24).

— **I am a new creation.**
"If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

— **I have a new heart.**
"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26).

— **I have a new Spirit.**
"I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezekiel 36:27).

— **I have a new attitude.**
"Be made new in the attitude of your minds" (Ephesians 4:23).

— **I have a new way.**
"We serve in the new way of the Spirit" (Romans 7:6).

— **I have a new mind.**
"'Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

— **I have been given a new covenant.**
"He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Day Two . . . My New Freedom

Lie: "My life has no value because I have failed and deserve to be punished."

Truth: In Christ, I am freed from the penalty and power of sin.

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

— **I am free from God's wrath.**

"God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

— **I am free from being an enemy of God.**

"For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (Romans 5:10).

— **I am free from the power of sin.**

"We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin" (Romans 6:6 NLT).

— **I am free from the law and legalism.**

"You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God" (Romans 7:4 NLT).

— **I am free from condemnation.**

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

— **I am free from the veil of ignorance.**

"But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:16–17).

— **I am free from blemish and accusation.**

"He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Colossians 1:22).

Day Three . . . My New Life

Lie: "My life has no value because I've done so many things wrong. My life is ruined."

Truth: In Christ, I have new life.

"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:4).

— **I am saved.**

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

— **I am cleansed.**

"But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7 NLT).

— **I am washed.**

"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

— **I am sanctified.**

"You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

— **I am justified.**

"Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

— **I am redeemed**

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

— **I am reconciled.**

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Day Four . . . My New Family

Lie: "I can't feel valuable unless I'm loved and accepted by my family and the significant people in my life."

Truth: In Christ, I have a new family where I am unconditionally loved and accepted by God.

"You are members of God's family" (Ephesians 2:19 NLT).

— **I am chosen by God.**

"He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Ephesians 1:4).

— **I am given a new birth.**

"In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:3).

— **I am adopted by God.**

"God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure" (Ephesians 1:5 NLT).

— **I am a child of God.**

"To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

— **I am made an heir of God.**

"So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir" (Galatians 4:7).

— **I am given access to God.**

"In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (Ephesians 3:12).

— **I am given fellowship with Jesus**

"God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9).

Day Five . . . My New Clothing

Lie: "I don't feel valuable unless I live in the right neighborhood, drive the right car, and wear the right clothes."

Truth: In Christ, I am given new clothing.

"I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10).

— **I am clothed with Christ.**
"All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

— **I am clothed with compassion.**
"As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion" (Colossians 3:12).

— **I am clothed with kindness.**
". . . clothe yourselves with . . . kindness" (Colossians 3:12).

— **I am clothed with humility.**
". . . clothe yourselves with . . . humility" (Colossians 3:12).

— **I am clothed with gentleness.**
". . . clothe yourselves with . . . gentleness" (Colossians 3:12).

— **I am clothed with patience.**
". . . clothe yourselves with . . . patience" (Colossians 3:12).

— **I will be clothed with the imperishable.**
"The dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:52–53).

Day Six . . . My New Image

Lie: "My life has value as long as I have a good image and look good to others."

Truth: In Christ, I have a new image.

"Just as we have borne the image of the earthly man [Adam]*, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man* [Christ]*"* (1 Corinthians 15:53).

— **I am totally accepted by Christ.**
"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7).

— **I am totally righteous in Christ.**
"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

— **I am totally holy in Christ.**
"He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Colossians 1:22).

— **I am totally complete in Christ.**
"You are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:10 NKJV).

— **I am totally forgiven in Christ.**
"He forgave us all our sins" (Colossians 2:13).

— **I am totally perfect in Christ.**
"For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Hebrews 10:14).

— **I am being totally transformed into Christ's image.**
"We all . . . are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Day Seven . . . My New Inheritance

Lie: "My life has no value if I do not succeed financially and leave a comfortable inheritance."

Truth: In Christ, I have a new inheritance.

"We have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay" (1 Peter 1:4 NLT).

— **I am given every spiritual blessing.**

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

— **I am given everything needed for a godly life.**

"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3).

— **I am given a seal with the Spirit of Christ**

"When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance . . ." (Ephesians 1:13–14).

— **I am given great promises.**

"Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Peter 1:4).

— **I am given hope.**

"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people" (Ephesians 1:18).

— **I am given eternal life.**

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

— **I am given an eternal home in heaven.**

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20).

How to Live Out Your Identity in Christ

The apostle Paul once told a church *"You should imitate me"* (1 Corinthians 11:1 NLT). On the surface, that sounds like a boastful, if not outright prideful, claim. Some might have been cautious about following such an instruction, considering Paul once described himself as a *"blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man"* (1 Timothy 1:13). Why imitate Paul? He explains, *"You should imitate me just as I imitate Christ"* (1 Corinthians 11:1 NLT).

Paul's life shows that when Jesus gives you a new identity, He also makes your life reflect His life. Jesus can take the "chief" of sinners (as Paul once called himself) and make each a shining example of His love and grace (1 Timothy 1:15–16). God can change your identity and life so much that you'll be able to say, like Paul, *"Imitate me just as I imitate Christ."*

But what does it look like to imitate Christ? Once you receive your identity in Christ, how are you to live it out?

"Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did."
(1 John 2:6)

Love God Like Jesus

Jesus was once asked what the greatest commandment was in all of God's Word. He said, *"'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment"* (Matthew 22:37–38). What does it mean to love God like Jesus?

Obey completely

"For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will" (John 6:38 NLT).

Pray reverently

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission" (Hebrews 5:7).

Work heartily

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:23–24).

Deny your self daily

"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23 NLT).

Suffer willingly

"For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21 NLT).

Give thanks consistently

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Love Others Like Jesus Did

In addition to loving God, Jesus also spoke of a similar commandment of equal importance. Jesus said, *"And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments"* (Matthew 22:39–40). What does it mean to love others like Jesus did?

Love sacrificially

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:12–13).

Serve humbly

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:14–15).

Forgive completely

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Build up others spiritually

"We must not just please ourselves. We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord. For even Christ didn't live to please himself" (Romans 15:2–3 NLT).

Accept others graciously

"Accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory" (Romans 15:7 NLT).

Help others practically

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" (1 John 3:16–17).

As a child of God, living out your identity in Christ means loving God and loving others. Jesus said, *"As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another"* (John 13:34–35). The same Paul who told people to imitate him also told others to imitate God, which he described as a life of love. . . .

"Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do,
because you are his dear children.
Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ.
He loved us and offered himself
as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God."
(Ephesians 5:1–2 NLT)

Case Study: Diving into Your Identity in Christ
The David Boudia and Steele Johnson Story

Qualifying and competing at the Olympics is an admirable achievement. Athletes train for years to earn a place in the spotlight. They do it for the prestige, the accolades, the glory of winning the prize—an Olympic medal confirming their place on the podium and their status as the best in the world.

For two Olympic divers, competing in the Olympics is a dream come true. David Boudia is the seasoned competitor. He captures gold in individual competition during the 2012 London Olympics and the bronze in Rio four years later for the same event. He partners with another diver in 2012 for synchronized diving. Joining Boudia in 2016 for the synchronized dive is Steele Johnson. Both men are superb divers and outspoken Christians.

Six years older than Johnson, Boudia came to Christ in college.

"At first, I had a lot of fear of man. What would my friends think of me if I started talking about Jesus more? I really wanted to please Him but I also wanted the praise from my friends. It probably wasn't until I really started to dive into God's Word that I realized that this life is a speck of what eternity looks like. . . . now my number one purpose in life is to please God and to love on others."[32]

Interestingly, it's the diving platform that almost claims Steele Johnson's life. At age 12, he practices his favorite dive, a triple reverse somersault in a tuck position. Yet, on this dive, his head hits the concrete platform and splits open his scalp. The force of plunging 33 feet into the pool below opens the wound further.

His diving coach pulls him out of the water and holds his scalp together as they race to the hospital. To this day, Steele still experiences some memory loss. Yet that same dive is now his favorite to perform.

As a Christian, Steele readily shares his faith. He sees that God has a plan and a purpose for his life. "He gave me this ability to dive . . . God kept me alive and he is still giving me the ability to do what I do."[33]

Prior to making the USA Olympic team, following the final superb dive to qualify for the team, emotion overtook Steele as he realized his dream of competing among the world's best at the 2016 Olympics was coming true. In a camera interview immediately after qualifying, Steele announced to the watching world: "This is exciting, this is fun, but this is not what my identity will be for the rest of my life. . . . Yeah, I'm Steele Johnson the Olympian, but at the same time I'm here to love and serve Christ. My identity is rooted in Christ, not in the flips we're doing."[34]

When the two men compete at the 2016 Rio Olympics, David Boudia and Steele Johnson take home the silver medal in the 10-meter men's synchronized platform diving event.

David Boudia shares Steele Johnson's sentiments, "We can't take credit for this . . . To God be the glory."[35]

The two athletes share the podium as well as the same alma mater. Their Purdue University diving coach, Adam Soldati, has been a faithful and faith-filled mentor to both men. "I am not a diving coach who happens to be a Christian but rather I am a Christian, a follower of Christ who happens to be a diving coach."[36]

David and Steele would both agree. Their identity is in Christ and the glory belongs to Him.

"Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord,
continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him,
strengthened in the faith as you were taught,
and overflowing with thankfulness."
(Colossians 2:6–7)

SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE

"First seek the counsel of the LORD."

(1 KINGS 22:5)

God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following statements, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

I am a **child of God**.

"See what great love
the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called ***children of God****!*
And that is what we are!"
(1 John 3:1)

I am **adopted** by God.

"He predestined us for ***adoption***
to sonship through Jesus Christ,
in accordance with his pleasure and will."
(Ephesians 1:5)

I am **accepted** by God.

"He hath made us ***accepted***
in the beloved [Jesus]*."*
(Ephesians 1:6 KJV)

I am **justified** by the **Spirit of God**.

"You were washed, you were sanctified,
*you were **justified** in the name*
of the Lord Jesus Christ
*and by the **Spirit of** our **God**."*
(1 Corinthians 6:11)

I am a **new creation** in **Christ**.

*"If anyone is in **Christ**, the **new creation** has come:*
The old has gone, the new is here!"
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

I have a **new birth through Christ**.

*"In his great mercy he has given us **new birth***
*into a living hope **through** the resurrection*
*of Jesus **Christ** from the dead."*
(1 Peter 1:3)

I am **free from accusation** through Christ.

"He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body
through death to present you holy in his sight,
*without blemish and **free from accusation**."*
(Colossians 1:22)

I am a **temple of the Holy Spirit** of Christ.

"Do you not know that your bodies are
***temples of the Holy Spirit**, who is in you,*
whom you have received from God?
You are not your own;
you were bought at a price.
Therefore honor God with your bodies."
(1 Corinthians 6:19–20)

I am an **ambassador** for **Christ**.

*"We are therefore **Christ's ambassadors**,*
as though God were making his appeal through us.
We implore you on Christ's behalf:
Be reconciled to God."
(2 Corinthians 5:20)

I carry the **light** of Christ.

*"You are the **light** of the world.*
A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. . . .
In the same way, let your light shine before others,
that they may see your good deeds
and glorify your Father in heaven."
(Matthew 5:14–16)

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