

Your Identity in Christ

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Your Identity in Christ contains two lessons, each about 1-hour long. Our true identity is not found within ourselves, but who we are in Christ. This study of Scripture will help you see your true identity.

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Your Identity In Christ

Opening Prayer

Lesson 1

About this study—

Too often we focus on ourselves—what we can do, what we can't do; who we are, who we aren't; what we are, what we aren't; where we serve, where we don't; what talents or gifts we have, what we don't have. Focus on self can only lead to disappointment, failure, self-destruction of soul and mind, loneliness, discontentment, and possibly even anger towards our God.

At the end of the day, and the end of our lives, all that matters is who we are in Christ. In this study, we will explore, learn and remind ourselves of the truths that God tells us—what our true identity is in Christ, His Son. Our true identity does not come from ourselves. Understanding this is key in grasping and embracing our true identity. With this understanding, we can live life to the full, confident because of who we are in Christ.

Introduction

Use a word or phrase to finish the sentence with the first thing that comes to mind:

"I am _____."

Now take a few more minutes to come up with several more statements, finishing the phrase "I am....".

Many statements may come to mind; statements that are positive or negative, true or false, or that deal with your vocation, occupation or traits.

Depending on your season of life or circumstances that surround you, you may begin to believe you are something that you really aren't. Many times this can be referred to as low self-esteem. The devil, the world and our own sinful flesh can make us believe these lies about who we are. Take a minute or two to make a list of the lies that at times have made it into your head about who you are or how you feel about yourself.

Possible answers may include: I am not good at anything. I don't have any/many gifts. God can't really use me for the benefit of his kingdom. I have led such a sinful life, God can't possibly love me. "Spiritual amnesia": This is a term used to describe how we struggle in who we are because we've forgotten who God is--the powerful one who fills our lives.

Some of what we believe about ourselves really is true: We are sinners who deserve only God's wrath and punishment; we can do nothing without God's help. But a problem exists if we believe only that and don't know or fail to remember who we are in Christ.

When we fail to know/remember who we are in Christ, how does this hinder our lives?

We don't recognize opportunities to serve. We feel powerless and helpless in who we are. We don't serve God with the right motivation.

The goal of the rest of this study is to give you the confidence in knowing who you are in Christ, what I like to refer to as "Christ-esteem".

You are a loved child of God

Love is one of the greatest human needs. A newborn baby's cries are often soothed by a loving embrace. A young child's scraped knee often feels better after a hug. A friend offers encouraging and comforting words when a trial enters our life. When we feel loved by another, this fulfills one of our greatest needs.

1. Has there ever been a time when you didn't feel loved?

What did you do?

To whom did you turn?

Why?

2. Can you think of people in the Bible who felt rejected or unloved?

Possible answers may include: Joseph, Noah, Moses, Hannah, Leah, the "sinful woman"

Can you relate to them? How?

3. What would be some causes of feeling unloved?

On whom is the focus?

4. When bad things happen to us or others, what are we tempted to believe?

God does not love us; God forgot about us; we are being punished.

5. What does Satan tell you about:

- why God shouldn't love you?
- why you shouldn't have the blessings of being a dearly loved child of God?

And Satan is right—we don't deserve God's love!

6. When you start to believe that God doesn't love you or that you can't have his blessings, how can these lies affect your relationship...

- with God?
pull us further away from God as we feel our worthlessness
- with your family?
find it hard to reflect God's love to them
- with others in your church and community?
may become bitter and angry with those around us as we struggle with the lies inside us

Read Jer. 31:2-4, 10, 11.

7. What words or phrases tell that God's love for us is great?

will find favor, I [God] will come to give rest, loved you with an everlasting love, drawn you with loving-kindness, will build you up again, will gather, will watch over his flock like a shepherd, will redeem

Leader's Notes: God PLANNED to create you, that you be born, when you were born, to the parents he chose for you, the family, the place, and that you be HIS!—everything; he planned it all exactly for you. You are his. "God cannot love you more and he will not love you less." –Michael Card

Read John 1:12-13.

8. As you read this, what phrases jump out or are important to you?

THIS WORD in my LIFE

9. From what we have studied in this section, what will you tell yourself next time you are feeling unloved or rejected by others?

God loves me perfectly – He cannot love me more and he will not love me less. Nothing I do or don't do will ever change this.

10. What will God's love motivate you to do?

Repent, obey him, live a godly life, serve joyfully, love others.

You are redeemed

11. Would you buy something that looked as if it had no great value? Why/why not?

Read Ephesians 2:1-3.

12. In what ways did we have no value? What might still lead you to feel like you have no value?

dead in transgressions, followed the ways of this world, gratified the cravings of our sinful nature, by nature objects of wrath

13. And yet what do we hear about our value in **1 Corinthians 6:20a**?

you were bought at a price

THIS WORD in my LIFE

14. "You were bought at a price." The price was great! What was the "price"?

Jesus perfect life and innocent suffering and death

15. How does this lead you to treat yourself?

With respect in thanksgiving to God; as God's valued possession

16. How does this lead you to present yourself to others?
Humble but confident in Jesus' blood shed for you.

You are forgiven

What sins trouble you? Past sins that have already been paid for and forgiven? The guilt can weigh on you like an anchor pulling you further down into the depths of despair. Present sins that you try again and again to stay away from? But the temptation is alluring and you just can't seem to resist. And what about the many sins you don't even realize you are committing against God every single day? Those unknown sins burden your weary soul. It is too much for us to bear. We do not bear it. Someone else did for us because none of us can live perfectly in the sight of God. We have only one place to turn...God's words to us.

Read Romans 7:15-24.

17. What is your reaction to reading this section?
18. We have this constant inner conflict. How does the specific role you have in your life magnify this conflict?
own expectations, meeting the expectations of others, striving to be "an example" to the others

Read 1 Corinthians 7:23 and Colossians 3:23-24.

19. What will we want to remember?
You were bought at a price; it is God you serve with joy and thanksgiving; through Christ you are able to stand up against temptation
20. If we based our worth on our own actions, where would that lead us?
Down a path of destruction, far from God, hurt our faith or lose it

THIS WORD in my LIFE

Read 1 John 1:9.

21. What does God tell us to do with our sins? Then what will he do?
As all sin puts a barrier between us and God, we confess all our sins

Leader's Note to add to the group's discussion: Using the private confession of sins found on page 156 in Christian Worship will help guide us through our life and may show us sins that have gone unnoticed; God will show us his faithfulness and forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness; Psalm 103:12 says "so far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

22. You may sometimes struggle to grasp this truth. In those moments, who might you identify with in the Bible that may have struggled in the same way?

Paul, Joseph's brothers, the woman at the well...

Read the following to reinforce the truth of 1 John 1:9.

Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:13-14, 1 John 2:12.

Which passage would you like to commit to memory?

We can look at this from a different angle. All too often we look at the mistakes and sins of our spouse, our children, people we interact with daily, and those we serve with at church and our pride takes over. We tend not to think of our own sins. At times we think "How could they go against God's commands? They are God's children. They know better."

Read Acts 20:28 and Colossians 3:12-14

23. Of what are we reminded? How will that lead us to act towards others?

God bought them with his Son's own blood too. They are God's chosen people and he tells us to forgive. It seems easier to do this when we can recognize our own sins first and then fully grasp God's forgiveness for ourselves.

24. Discuss: "The grace of God will exalt you without inflating you. And it will humble you without defacing you."¹

Closing Prayer

Opening Prayer

Lesson 2

You are complete in Jesus

“You complete me.” Famous words from the romantic comedy, *Jerry McGuire*. (*this might date me*) This underscores the need for someone (or something) besides ourselves in order to feel complete.

1. If we look to ourselves for completeness, we instead find emptiness. We will never feel filled or whole. Where else do we often look to feel complete?
our spouse, our children, our accomplishments, our work, how others think about us, our looks
2. Describe why we might try to find fulfillment in people or things?
they give us purpose, make us feel good, they affirm us in our work
3. Do we ever feel complete if we turn solely to them as our source? Why/why not?
they fail, they aren't always there for us, they don't do what we want, we and they are sinners, they don't meet our expectations

Read Colossians 2:6-18a.

4. We are nothing without Christ living in us. In fact, God tells us exactly how “nothing” we were. What do we read in v. 13?
5. We are made whole only because of Christ. How does he complete us? (v. 9-14)
putting off the new self, buried with him in baptism, raised with him through faith, God made us alive, forgives sins, cancels the written code
6. Can you think of other passages that give us the promise of Christ completing us?
Answers will vary. Some examples are: 1 Corinthians 1:4-7 “enriched in every way”, “do not lack any spiritual gift”, Ephesians 1:3 “blessed us...with every spiritual blessing”

THIS WORD in my LIFE

7. God's grace makes us complete in Jesus. Now how do we live? (v. 6-7)
rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith, overflowing with thankfulness
8. When serving in your home, church or work, how will this truth help you?

You are a new creation in Christ

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. (I like NIV 2011 here)

9. What does it mean to be "in Christ?"
a person who, through the work of the Holy Spirit, has made Christ's death and resurrection her own; baptized; clothed with Christ; regularly remains connected to Christ through Word and Sacrament, worship and Bible Study
10. What is the new creation?
The new man, "the old has gone, the new has come"—"has come" and "is here" = something that started in the past, continues into the present, and continues to be a new creation in the eyes of God; God no longer sees a guilty sinner but rather sees the righteousness of Jesus, we are no longer the person we were when we were born into sin, we are reborn and recreated in the perfection of the image of Christ.

THIS WORD in my LIFE

Read Galatians 2:20. (I like the NIV 2011—"now")

11. Explain "I have been crucified with Christ."
It is no longer me who lives, but Christ who lives in me. I so closely share in Christ's merit that it's as if my sinful nature were also crucified
12. What is the life we now live?
a life lived by faith; love for the Savior moves me to live a life of willing obedience
13. Agree or disagree. I live for Christ so that others will be encouraged to live by my example.
"set an example" (Titus 2:7), but this is not our main motivation; "that others may

see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven”(Mt. 5:16)

14. Think of your acts of service (public or behind the scenes). What temptations can ruin our proper motivation?

Song lyrics: “My heart’s desire is to be like you in all that I do, all I am. Do they see Jesus in me? Do they recognize your face? Do I communicate your love and your grace? Do I reflect who you are in the way I choose to be? It’s amazing that you’d ever use me. But use the way you will. Help me to hold out a heart of compassionate grace, a heart that your Spirit fills. May I show forgiveness and mercy the same way you showed it to me. Now I want to show all the world that you are the reason I live and breathe, so you be the one that they see when they see me. Do they see Jesus in me?”²

The Skit Guys—God’s Chisel video³

If you are able to acquire this video and show it, take time for comments on the video.

You are more than conquerors

Romans 8:18-39

15. Think about any present suffering that you are now enduring. How are you getting through it? What do you do?
16. We all too often try to fix our own problems; we turn to books, brownies or our besties in order to feel better. We are TOLD these will make us feel better. All of these are good things (ok, maybe not the brownies!) ...as long as they point us to Christ...and too often they don’t. We seek out self-help books instead of THE Book. We turn to unnecessary food that fills our bodies instead of the real food that fills our souls. We turn to our life’s best friends instead of our Best Friend, Jesus.

In what do we find our *real* comfort when going through sufferings? (v.25-28)

the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, we have hope, God works for good of those who love him

THIS WORD in my LIFE

Read Ephesians 3:20

17. Could someone share a time that you prayed about something, someone or for yourself. How did God answer your prayer with something far greater and better than what you were even thinking?

18. What is our greatest suffering? How has God delivered us?

Temptation and sin; through Jesus' life, death and resurrection—again, something/ONE far greater than we could ever think up ourselves!

19. Is there anything we can do to accomplish what God desires? Cite a passage that tells us this.

No. Nothing! It is always what Christ does through me. i.e. Philippians 2:13, 4:13

So it is not who I am, but who Christ is in me! Again those lyrics come to mind—"It's amazing you'd ever use me," the lowly sinner I am. And yet he does--whether it be supporting your husband, raising your children, teaching Sunday School or VBS students, driving for the school carpool, encouraging others, directing a choir, playing organ or delivering a loaf of bread to the new family down the block—he uses YOU! And we don't need to worry how, when or where. And we don't need to worry how challenging the task might be or what temptations lie ahead. He makes you "more than a conqueror" through Christ in all of those things.

You are a citizen in heaven

Read Philippians 3:20a.

20. Really think about each word individually, emphasizing a different word as you read through this passage multiple times. Tell/write what this means to you.

Read Colossians 1:12.

21. Compare this passage with an athlete who needs to meet certain expectations in order to qualify for an event or race.

THIS WORD in my LIFE

Read Ephesians 2:19-22.

22. How will this portion of Scripture comfort you when you struggle with rejection, sin, guilt, loneliness, anxiety or (fill in the blank)? How will this portion of Scripture help you when you struggle with who you are, why God has you where you are, or in what capacity you should serve?

Read Revelation 7:13-14.

23. When God sees you, what does he see?

Someone washed in the blood of the Lamb, wearing a white robe, clean from sin

24. Armed with all these truths and promises we've studied, how will you continue to serve him?

Activity: Write a letter to yourself from God.

Closing Prayer

Notes:

¹From Focus on the Family podcast, 8/15/14—Dr. Adrian Rogers, pastor at a Baptist church in Memphis, TN

²“Do They See Jesus in Me?” by Joy Williams

³ The Skit Guys, “God’s Chisel”, <http://skitguys.com/videos/item/gods-chisel> purchased and used by permission

Books Consulted/Further Reading:

The People’s Bible: 2 Corinthians. David J. Valleskey. Northwestern Publishing House, copyright 1992, second printing 1994, third printing 1998.

The People’s Bible: Galatians, Ephesians. Armin J. Panning. Northwestern Publishing House, copyright 1997.

Learning to Be You: How Our True Identity in Christ Sets Us Free. David D. Swanson. Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI. 2012.