



LESSON

2

MY STORY

gospel identity

1. SERMON NOTES

2. OPENING QUESTION

How would you describe yourself to someone you first met?

3. BIG IDEA

Understanding God's story is crucial to understanding your story.

4. SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." **Galatians 2:20**

5. BIBLE CONVERSATION

Let's begin with the big picture. Let me share the vision, mission, and values that I believe God has called us to live out together as a church family.

OUR VISION

To see Fort Lauderdale and South Florida redeemed by the power of the gospel for the glory of God.

OUR MISSION

We exist to help people become so captivated by Jesus and what He accomplished for them on the cross that they reorient their entire lives toward Him and His mission.

OUR VALUES

We value story. We are story-formed people who worship a storytelling God. The Bible is made up of 66 books, written by at least 40 different authors over the course of a millennium, telling one unified story about Jesus. Story is the language of the heart. We learn our most important lessons through story, and story deepens those lessons in profound ways. It is the best way to reflect the glory of our Creator. We have four values:

- **GOD'S STORY:** gospel fluency
- **MY STORY:** gospel identity
- **OUR STORY:** gospel community
- **SHARED STORY:** gospel mission

MY STORY: gospel identity

In this session, we are going to look at our second value—MY STORY: Gospel Identity.

When God's story intersects with your story, you experience salvation and transformation. Significance and meaning are infused into your life. We value letting God's story transform our identity by the power of the gospel.

TWO ENEMIES OF THE GOSPEL

Throughout the story of Scripture, there have been two overarching narratives that shape people's lives apart from God. These narratives are shaped by the pursuit of the human heart: the pursuit of idolatry or the pursuit of self-righteousness. These are often referred to as identity narratives—ways in which we seek to find our value, worth, and identity in ourselves or in something other than Christ. Many of us have allowed the story of our lives to be shaped by being captivated by one or both of these pursuits, rather than being captivated by Christ.

Just as two thieves hung on either side of Christ on the cross, there are two enemies that rob us of experiencing the power of the gospel in our everyday lives. To live each day in the power of the gospel, we must wage war against these two enemies that seek to disengage us from living out our true identity in Christ.

THE FIRST ENEMY OF THE GOSPEL: IDOLATRY

We were created to worship. We will either worship the uncreated God or some created thing (an idol). Idolatry isn't just a bad thing—it's when an ordinarily good thing becomes a god-thing.

READ: Romans 1:18-25

1. Understanding Idolatry

Idolatry is at the root of all sin and is one of the best ways to understand the nature of sin. It is by far the most frequently discussed problem in the Bible. Romans 1:18-25 exposes what sin is and how it works.

Verse 21 tells us that the reason we make idols is because we want to control our lives, even though we know we owe God everything: "Although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him" (Romans 1:21).

Verse 25 reveals the strategy for control—taking created things, setting our hearts on them, and building our lives around them. Since we are created to worship, we cannot eliminate God without creating God-substitutes.

Verses 21 and 25 also show us the two results of idolatry: (1) Deception - "Their thinking became futile and their hearts were darkened." (2) Slavery - "They worshipped and served created things." Whatever you worship, you will serve. And whatever you serve is what you will ultimately give your life to.

The Bible does not treat idolatry as one sin among many (as if it's now a rare sin only found among primitive people). Rather, it presents idolatry as the only alternative to true, wholehearted faith in the living God. All our failures to fully trust God or live rightly are rooted in idolatry—something we make more important than God. There is always a reason for sin, and beneath every sin are idolatrous desires.

Idolatry lies at the root of every human heart, and it is the only lens through which we can truly understand motivation. It is always the reason we do anything wrong. Why do we lie? Why do we fail to love, keep promises, or live unselfishly? Of course, the general answer is "because we are weak and sinful," but the specific answer is this: there is something besides Jesus Christ that we believe we must have to be happy. Something has become more important to our hearts than God. That thing spins out a delusional field and enslaves the heart through inordinate desires. Therefore, the secret to change—and even to self-understanding—is to identify the idols of the heart.

2. Constructing Idols

Idols have both "root" and "surface" dimensions:

a. Root idols - These include desires for power, approval, comfort, and control. They are subtle and foundational—motivational drives buried deep within us. Root idols often operate through surface idols. They are best addressed through repentance and rejoicing.

b. Surface idols - These are often good things that we make into god-things. They are more concrete and specific—things like a spouse, children, or a career. While these are good gifts, they must be detached from the deeper idols that are using them. This means they may often (even ordinarily) remain in our lives if they are "put in their place." This is what Augustine meant by the "right ordering of our loves."

3. Identifying Idols

David Powlison writes, "That most basic question which God poses to each human heart: Has something or someone besides Jesus Christ taken title to your heart's functional trust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight?"¹ To get to the bottom of what the Bible calls idols, and what Powlison calls our "heart title," ask these diagnostic questions:

- If you are angry, ask, "Is there something too important to me? Is there something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am angry - because I am being blocked from having something I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be.
- If you are fearful or badly worried, ask, "Is there something too important to me? Is there something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am so scared - because something is being threatened, which I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be.
- If you are despondent or hating yourself, ask, "Is there something too important to me? Is there something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am so "down" - because I have lost or failed at something I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be.

Take a moment to look at the 'Root Idol Inventory' on the last page of this study and identify your root idol(s). Write them down.

Take a moment to look at the 'Surface Idol Inventory' on the last page of this study and identify your surface idol(s). Write them down below.

4. Warring Against Idolatry

Idols create delusions. They appear more wonderful or powerful than they truly are, and they lead us to deny their hold on our hearts. Idols promise life and life to the fullest up front, but in the end, they demand everything from us. Why not give your life to the true Savior—who sacrificed Himself for you upfront—so that you can have life to the fullest now and forever (John 10:10)? Pastor John writes to the church in Ephesus, "Beloved children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

a. Repent of Your Idols

- Recognize how weak and poor your idols are (in themselves). In prayer, confess that these things—though good—are finite and fragile. Praise God for being the only true source of what you ultimately need.
- Recognize how dangerous your idols are (to you). Idols enslave, and they are never satisfied. Acknowledge how they increasingly destroy you. In prayer, confess that these things are spiritually lethal, and ask your strong God for help.

¹ Powlison, David. Idols of the Heart and "Vanity Fair" The Journal of Biblical Counseling, Vol 13. Number (Winter 1995)

- Recognize how grievous your idols are (to Christ). Idols wound the heart of the One who gave everything for you at infinite cost. Realize that when you run after idols—in your anger, fear, or despair—you are saying: “Lord, You are not enough. This is more beautiful, more fulfilling, and sweeter to my taste than You. You are negotiable, but this is not. Despite all You have done for me, I will only follow You as long as You help me get this. You haven’t done enough for me—if You don’t give me this, I will discard You.” In prayer, admit how deeply you have grieved and devalued Jesus, and ask for His forgiveness.

b. Rejoice in the Freedom of Grace

It is only as we rejoice in the absolute certainty of God’s love for us that we can truly repent. In the gospel, free grace both deeply convicts us and profoundly assures us. The gospel exposes the motives of our hearts in such a way that Jesus becomes the only possible answer. True repentance always leads to rejoicing in what a glorious savior we have in Christ.

THE SECOND ENEMY OF THE GOSPEL: SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

When Adam and Eve looked to the created rather than the Creator for their source of life (idolatry), they immediately saw their “nakedness” and sewed fig leaves together to make themselves loincloths (Genesis 3:7). These fig leaves were a functional form of self-righteousness.

We fall into self-righteousness when we move on from the foot of the cross and begin to rely on our own works to justify ourselves rather than trusting in the finished work of Christ on the cross (John 19:30).

We embark on “self-salvation” projects when we fail to see Christ as our only hope of redemption. It’s not that we reject Jesus as Savior, but we believe we need Jesus plus *something else* to find validation and satisfaction. The danger is that this *something else* tends to become our functional savior, attempting to displace Jesus as our ultimate Redeemer. That *something else* becomes our functional source of righteousness instead of Christ. Once again, it is an attempt to add to what Christ has already accomplished on the cross.

READ: Romans 10:1-4

When we do not rest in the righteousness that comes from God through the gospel, we will inevitably make something else our functional source of righteousness. We begin to trust that thing—rather than Jesus—to build our reputation and give us a sense of worth and value.

Take a moment to review the Self-Righteousness Inventory on the page 10 of this study and identify your specific forms of self-righteousness. Write them down below,

These sources of functional righteousness disconnect us from the power of the gospel. They lead us to find righteousness in what we do, rather than honestly confronting the depth of our sin and brokenness.

Furthermore, each of these sources of righteousness becomes a way of judging and excluding others. When we rely on them, we implicitly elevate ourselves and condemn those who don’t measure up to

our standard of “righteousness.” In other words, finding righteousness in these things leads us into more sin, not less.

A NEW IDENTITY

In Christ, our identity is not earned by what we have or who we know (idolatry), or even by what we do (self-righteousness), but by what Christ has done. It is an identity that is received, not achieved. The gospel gives us a stable, freeing identity that both humbles us and lifts us up.

The apostle declares in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

This verse powerfully communicates the believer’s new identity in Christ:

- **“Crucified with Christ”** speaks to the death of our old identity.
- **“Christ who lives in me”** reflects our new identity—Christ is now the defining center of our lives.
- **“By faith in the Son of God”** reminds us that this identity is not earned but received through faith. Through faith, we are united with Christ—His record becomes ours.
- **“Who loved me and gave himself for me”** anchors our identity in His love and sacrifice.

In a world that constantly tells us to find ourselves, the gospel calls us to lose ourselves in Christ. Our old self—defined by sin, shame, and striving—has been crucified. In its place, a new identity is born, not by our performance but by Christ’s presence. You are not the sum of your failures or successes; you are defined by the One who loved you and gave Himself for you. The result is an identity that is neither fragile nor prideful. It gives you a gospel swagger—a humble confidence. Humble, because you are more sinful than you ever dared admit; confident, because you are more loved and accepted in Christ than you ever dared hope.

Take a moment to review The Gospel Inventory on the page 11 of this study and identify your specific forms of self-righteousness. Write them down below,

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, remind me today that I belong to You. Let me live not for my name, but Yours. Strip away the false identities I cling to, and root me deeply in the truth that Christ lives in me. May I be captivated by you and you alone. Amen.

6. MISSION

Have you ever wondered why God has you living in Fort Lauderdale? In Broward County? This is your mission field. It's where God has called you to make His name known. Over the next seven weeks, I want to help you answer that call. It's called the Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion. God is calling you. Who's your PLUS one? Who is the one person God is calling you to share the Good News of the gospel with? Write their name down now. Don't run from this assignment.

- _____
- _____
- _____

Here are 3 simple steps of obedience to answer God's call to be on mission with Him:

- **Intercede** - Who is ONE person that you can be praying for that needs to know the saving grace of Jesus Christ?
- **Invest** - How can you invest in them relationally?
- **Invite** - Begin praying for courage to invite to them church.

Don't say, "But God, you don't know my neighbor." Answer God's call. Join Him in this great redemptive mission of rescuing sinners so that they may know the riches of God's grace, mercy, and salvation.

7. ACCOUNTABILITY AND PRAYER

- What is one thing you need to remember from this lesson that you can apply to your life this week?

- How can your group pray for you personally?

- How can you pray for your group members?

IDOL INVENTROY

1. Root Idols:

- **Power Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - I have power and influence over others."
- **Approval Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - I am loved and respected by _____."
- **Control Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of _____."
- **Comfort Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - I have this kind of pleasure experience or a particular quality of life."

2. Surface Idols:

- **Helping Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - people are dependent on me and need me."
- **Dependence Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - someone is there to protect me and keep me safe."
- **Independence Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone."
- **Work Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if - I am highly productive, getting a lot done."
- **Achievement Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - I am recognized for my accomplishments or if I am excelling in my career."
- **Materialism Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions."
- **Religion Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - I am adhering to my religion's moral codes, and I'm accomplished in its activities."
- **Individual Person Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - this one person is in my life and is happy there and/or happy with me."
- **Irreligion Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - I feel I am totally independent of organized religion with a self-made morality."
- **Racial/Cultural Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - my race and culture is ascendant and recognized as superior."
- **Inner Ring Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - a particular social grouping, professional grouping or other group lets me in."
- **Family Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if - my children and/or my parents are happy and happy with me."

- **Relationship Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – Mr. or Ms. "Right" is in love with me."
- **Ideology Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – my political or social cause or party is making progress and ascending in influence or power."
- **Image Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – I have a particular kind of look or body image."
- **Social Media Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – I get likes and/or followers on social media."²

SELF-RIGHTEOUS INVENTORY³

- **Job Righteousness:** God helps those who help themselves. If I work hard, God will reward me.
- **Family Righteousness:** If I just do things right as a parent, I will be accepted by God/others/myself.
- **Theological Righteousness:** I have good theology. Of course God is pleased with me.
- **Intellectual Righteousness:** I am better read, more articulate, and more culturally savvy than others, which obviously makes me superior.
- **Schedule Righteousness:** I am self-disciplined and rigorous in my time management. God is pleased with my stewardship of time.
- **Flexibility Righteousness:** In a world that's busy, I'm flexible and relaxed. I always have time for others. God appreciates my laid-back demeanor.
- **Mercy Righteousness:** I care more about the poor and disadvantaged than other people, and this makes me better in the eyes of God.
- **Legalistic Righteousness:** I don't drink, smoke, or chew, or date girls who do. God is pleased by my moral convictions.
- **Financial Righteousness:** I manage money wisely and stay out of debt, so God must think highly of me.
- **Political Righteousness:** If you really love God, you'll vote for my candidate.
- **Tolerance Righteousness:** I am open-minded and charitable toward those who don't agree with me. In fact, I'm a lot like Jesus that way!
- **Social Media Righteousness:** I have more followers than Jesus so I must be spiritual. I find my identity in the number of people who "like" me and am disgusted when more people don't like my pithy post.

These are just a few examples; perhaps we can think of many more. (Think of anything that gives a sense of being "good enough" or better than others.)

² Adapted from Timothy Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church

³ Adapted from Thune, Robert H.; Walker, Will. The Gospel-Centered Life: Study Guide with Leader's Notes (p. 28). New Growth Press. Kindle Edition

GOSPEL IDENTITY

Read through each bulleted list. Under “The Orphan,” check the box if you see that tendency in yourself. Underline the words that most apply. Under “The Son/Daughter,” check the boxes that describe where you most want to grow, underlining the key words.⁴

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Lacks a vital daily intimacy with God | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Feels freed from worry because of God’s love for you |
| Anxious about friends, money, school, grades, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Learning to live in a daily partnership with God |
| Feels as if no one cares about you | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Not fearful of God |
| Lives on a success/fail basis | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Feels forgiven and totally accepted |
| Needs to look good | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | A daily trust in God’s sovereign plan for your life |
| Feels guilty and condemned | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Prayer is a first resort |
| Struggles to trust things to God | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Content in relationships b/c you are accepted by God |
| Has to fix your problems | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Freedom from making a name for yourself |
| Not very teachable | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is teachable by others |
| Is defensive when accused of error or weakness | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Open to criticism b/c you rest on Christ’s perfection |
| Needs to be right | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Able to examine your deeper motives |
| Lacks confidence | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Able to take risks—even to fail |
| Feels discouraged and defeated | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Encouraged by the Spirit working in you |
| Strong-willed with ideas, agendas, and opinions | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Able to see God’s goodness in dark times |
| Solution to failure: “Try harder” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Content with what Christ has provided |
| Has a critical spirit (complaining and bitterness) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Trusting less in self and more in the Holy Spirit |
| Tears others down | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Aware of inability to fix life, people, and problems |
| A “competent analyst” of others’ weaknesses | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is able to freely confess your faults to others |
| Tends to compare yourself with others | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Doesn’t always have to be right |
| Feels powerless to defeat the flesh | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does not gain value from man-made “props” |
| Needs to be in control of situations and others | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Experiences more and more victory over the flesh |
| Looks for satisfaction in “positions” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Prayer is a vital, ongoing part of the day |
| Looks for satisfaction in “possessions” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Jesus is more and more the subject of conversation |
| Tends to be motivated by obligation and duty, not love | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | God truly satisfies your soul |

⁴ Thune, Robert H.; Walker, Will. The Gospel-Centered Life: Study Guide with Leader’s Notes (p. 43). (Function). Kindle Edition.