

Identity: Who Am I?

Title: Part 2 – My True Identity

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Transition: Video

As you might have guessed we are talking about “Identity” today. If you are just jumping in with us or catching this on our app or social channels this is the continuation of a message I began last week. If you missed it I laid the groundwork for where we are going today. We talked about what difference knowing your true identity makes, you can watch it on our app or website, because today I want to, as clearly as I can, tell you who you really are. I’m calling this:

My True Identity

So many people are confused about their identity: confused about their racial identity, confused about their gender identity, confused about their sexual identity, confused about their spiritual identity, confused about their personal identity. Everyone today is on this journey trying to find themselves. Everyone is asking: Who am I? AND that’s not a bad thing! Christianity also makes self-discovery an important part of its message, but its criteria is totally different than the worlds.

So, let’s just pick up where we left off last time. I’ve got so much Good News to dump on you today! If you came in discouraged, if you are feeling down, if you feel like no one sees you, then you could not be in a better place because I’ve got Good News on top of Good News today! In fact, if I could only preach one message, this would be the message I would preach. This is the stuff that, if you allow it, will change everything!

But how many of you know if we are talking about identity then we also have to talk about identity theft. How many of you have been a victim of identity theft, raise your hands. It’s one thing to have your credit card or social security number stolen, but it’s another thing when your true identity is lost!

A man with no identification was found beaten, naked and unconscious behind a Burger King in Georgia in 2004. True story. He eventually regained consciousness, but when they took him to the hospital he realized that he had developed total amnesia. For the next 11 years no one knew who he was. Can you imagine that? The FBI did fingerprints and DNA testing on him but that didn’t produce any results. Dr. Phil did a TV show on him and still no one claimed they knew him. They hired a private investigator to try to find this man’s identity, but no one could discover it. Kathleen, a woman who was his nurse, actually took him into her home and for 11 years tried to gently restore his memory. Finally, in 2015, thanks to the work of a genetic genealogist they finally learned his true identity.

Imagine if that were you. Just imagine that you’d come to church, you know who you are, you know your family, your friends, your past, your plans for the future. But on the way home something traumatic happens and for the next 11 years you have zero clue about who you are. No past, no present, no friends, no connections. Your entire identity erased. That would be scary thing!

BUT that is exactly what your spiritual enemy is trying to do to your true identity. He’s trying to erase it! You may not even realize this but there’s a spiritual war going on over your identity and mine. I know this message got deep quick, but Satan cannot create anything. Only God creates. God is the creator. Satan can only pervert, distort, or destroy. So, what he does (his M.O.) is to take what God has created for good and pervert, distort or destroy it.

Satan can’t hurt God. He isn’t that powerful as a created being. So, what he does is hurt God by hurting God’s kids! If you want to get at me you go after my wife and kids, right? This is what Satan does. Satan knows that if he can keep you from being who God made you to be, if he can hide your true identity, if he can distort your true identity, then he has succeeded in hurting God by hurting God’s children.

I promised last week I was going to dive into your true identity, the stuff that is truer about you than anything else, but I felt like we needed to begin here. How does Satan do this? How does Satan keep you from knowing your true identity? He uses a lot of different tools.

He uses the opinions of other people. Things your parents said about you. Things your peers have said about you. Things your former boyfriend or girlfriend or spouse said about you. Some of those things were true; some of them were not. But they were all trying to mold you into their image. People your entire life have been trying to get you to be what they want you to be not what God wants you to be. Satan uses that!

Satan uses hurt and pain to deceive you and to disguise your true identity. Because if he can make you resentful, if he can make you bitter, if he can make you angry, guilty, or ashamed, he knows you're going to miss your true identity.

Satan uses the media and culture. I don't think it's a coincidence, in fact it's been scientifically proven now that the rates of depression, anxiety and loneliness have all increased at the same rate the smart phone and social media became mainstream. All around you there are messages, constantly bombarding you with attacks on your identity.

Then Satan puts thoughts in your mind. When God puts a thought in your mind we call it inspiration. When Satan puts a thought in your mind we call that temptation. Satan wants to steal your identity, so he says things like: "You have to earn God's acceptance. You don't matter. You're not important. In fact, you're worthless." He says that to you all the time. He says things like, "You know that sin, that thing you did, you can never be forgiven for that. You should be ashamed of yourself." Then he says things like, "You never do anything right. You are such a fake, a fraud, a hypocrite." He says those things to hide your true identity.

But the number one tool that Satan uses in your life to cause your true identity to be erased is to get you to repeat or to make an agreement with what he's told you. He'll plant an idea in your mind, a seed, then you just repeat it over and over and over: "I'm worthless, I'm no good, I'm never going to amount to anything, I can't do it, God is disappointed in me." The truth is Satan doesn't have to mess with most of you because you just keep repeating the lies and now you think it's your identity.

SO, if all these tools are being used against me to conceal who God really made me to be—things my parents said, my hurts, the media, lies I say to myself—then how do I know the real me? How do I know the true me?

The 17th century philosopher, Blaise Pascal said this:

"Not only do we know God only through Jesus Christ, but we know ourselves only through Jesus Christ. We know life and death only through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ we cannot know the meaning of our life or of our death, of God or of ourselves. Without Scripture, whose only object is to proclaim Christ, we know nothing, and we can see nothing but obscurity and confusion in the nature of God and in nature itself."

This phrase "**in Christ**" is used about 140 times in the Bible. It's the most used term to describe a disciple, a believer, somebody in the family of God. By contrast, the word "Christian" is only used a couple times in the Bible. Instead of the word Christian, the New Testament authors say you are **in Christ**.

AND about thirty-five of those 140 times in the New Testament God says, "Because you're in Christ here is your true identity, here's who you were made to be. Here's the real you! This is who you really are no matter how you feel or what people say about you!" We don't have time to go over all 35 of those statements. But

we're going to look at five of them all found in 1 Peter 2:9-10. Peter was one of Jesus disciples and after Jesus resurrection here is what he began to preach.

⁹ But you are not like that, [Not like what? The people who rejected and crucified Jesus. Instead, you believe, he continues] **for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.** ¹⁰ **"Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy."**

We are going to break these down and the amazing significance of each, but Peter says you are chosen, a royal priesthood, you're holy, you belong, and you have received mercy. I want us to consider the deep meaning of each of these because they're packed with significance in who God created you to be. So, write these down:

MY TRUE IDENTITY

I am completely accepted.

Some of the deepest wounds in our lives come from rejection. We've all been rejected, in our families, at school, by an employer, by a friend you thought was your ride or die, by someone you said death 'till us part to... But that rejection causes a deep wound. And as we grow up we try to solve that wound by finding acceptance in any place we can find it. We start chasing acceptance rather than starting with what God has said about us.

And it starts to influence every part of our lives. It starts to affect the clothes that you wear. You wear certain things so that the people around you will accept you. Look back at what you wore in high school, you wore that because you wanted to be accepted by some group. For some of you your biggest regret began out of a desire to be accepted. Some of you chose a major or a career based on acceptance. Sadly, some of you have even endured abusive relationships because you just want to feel accepted. So many of our decisions are consciously or subconsciously all about acceptance.

BUT I've got some good news for you! You don't have to chase after this feeling of acceptance for the rest of your life because God have already given it to you! Peter said you are a chosen people! That's where you start! That is the truth about you! That is your identity! I don't matter if you feel that or not, in Christ this is the truth about you, you are completely accepted by God Himself!

But how do we know this? If I don't feel it, how am I going to be convinced of what I don't feel? Two things that will begin to let you know how deeply God has chosen you.

One, because God chose you before everything! That's why you are completely acceptable. Before everything, God chose you! Ephesians 1:4, the Apostle Paul says:

Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.

Just think about this with me for a minute. Before everything God chose you in Christ. Before God chose to make the oceans, He chose you. Before God chose to make this planet, He chose you. Before God chose to allow the sun to burst into existence, He chose you. Before God spread the galaxies of stars across the universe, He chose you. Before all of it He decided, I'm going to choose to love you! That's worth taking a minute to be amazed by. That's how deep God's acceptance of you is!

But then I would say this. I can also know because Jesus has made me acceptable. Jesus made me acceptable. Titus 3:7 says:

Jesus treated us much better than we deserve. [He certainly has treated me better than I deserve, aren't you glad of that!] **He made us acceptable to God and he gave us the hope of eternal life.**

Notice how it says, “**made us**” and “**gave us.**” That’s where acceptance comes from. If you’re trying to get acceptance from God like you try to get it from everybody else, by chasing after it, by trying to earn it, you’re never going to get there because it’s a gift. AND it can only be received as a gift! He made us acceptable! So, stop trying to perform your way into acceptance because it’s not based on performance. The acceptance that God gives, He gives it as a gift!

That’s where your identity starts. Realizing I’m already accepted by God. Now write this down:

MY TRUE IDENTITY

I am extremely valuable.

God says I don’t just accept you; I value you. You’re not just completely accepted; you’re extremely valuable! In fact, you are priceless. Peter says we are, “A holy nation, God’s very own possession.”

But what determines if something is valuable? There’s a couple of things:

The first thing that makes something valuable is who owns it. If you saw some shoes for sale on eBay and one pair was some I had worn to preach in some Sunday and the other pair were shoes worn by Lebron James, which ones are going to be more valuable? Lebron’s, right? Why? Because of who owned them! So, here’s the question: **Who do you belong to?** If you are God’s property then you are extremely valuable. You are owned by the King of kings!

Deuteronomy 7:6 says: **For you are a holy people, who belong to the Lord your God. Of all the people on earth, the Lord your God has chosen you to be his own special treasure.**

If God is my Father and I’m in His family then I own part of the family inheritance. One day in heaven, He’s going to share all of His glory and inheritance with you and me. God is going to share everything He has with His children and because I’m a child of God I’m extremely valuable.

The second reason why I’m extremely valuable is because Jesus gave His life for me. That shows my value. So many people in our world walk around feeling like, “I’m nothing, I’m worthless, I’m no good. I’m junk...” Listen to me, Jesus did not die for junk! Stop saying that! Paul reminds us of this in 1 Corinthians 7:23, he says:

A high price has been paid for your freedom, so don’t devalue God’s investment by becoming a slave to people.

What is it that determines something’s value? First, who owns it. The second thing that determines its value is what somebody’s willing to pay for it? What was someone willing to pay for you? Just look at the cross! That’s how much God paid to save you. Jesus, when He stretched out his hands on the cross and they nailed Him to the tree, He said, this is how much you’re worth! This is how much I love you. I’d rather die than live without you! I am willing to shed my blood for you! This is how much you’re worth!

So, come on, those people that told you growing up, "You're not worth anything. You're not important. You don't matter as much as your sister or brother does..." Jesus says, "They were lying! They were lying because you're not only completely acceptable to God in Christ, but you are extremely valuable to God because of what I did for you on cross."

The greatest ransom ever paid in the history of humanity was paid to ransom you when God gave His own Son to die in your place to rescue you from your sins!

I'm completely accepted and I'm also extremely valuable. This is Good News! Come on I said, this is Good News! Here's some more:

MY TRUE IDENTITY

I am eternally loved.

I'm completely accepted, I'm extremely valued, and I am eternally loved. That's the third thing Peter says about your true identity. He said, "God called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light." Then He says, "Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people." This is profound. God says now you're in my family and I'm not ashamed of my family.

Do you realize when you get to heaven Jesus is going to go, "Hey bro! Hey sis!" That's what the Bible says. He is not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters. That's the kind of love God has for you. He's not ashamed to call you His family, to identify with you.

Jeremiah 31:3, God speaking through the prophet says: "I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself."

There are two characteristics of God's love that I want you to memorize. Because if you forget these you're going to let other people steal your identity. If you don't realize these, you're going to be sucked into performance mentality. Two things about God's love for you. One, it's unconditional. And two, it is unending. Unconditional and unending

First, it's **unconditional**. God's not like, I love you *if* you pray. I love you *if* you do good. I love you *if* you please me. I love you *if* you go to church. NO! God says I love you PERIOD! In fact, unconditional love is I love you in spite of you!

You know why we have such a hard time with that? Because you've rarely experienced unconditional love. You may have experienced a few moments in your life of unconditional love, but no human being loves unconditionally all the time. Because we're all broken our parents didn't *always* love us unconditionally. There were conditions at times. Because we're all broken our siblings didn't always love us unconditionally. There were conditions at times. And because we're all broken we don't always love unconditionally.

But God does! He says, "I love you period. I love you in spite of yourself. I love you regardless of what you do for Me. I just love you." That's real love! That's the kind of love God has for you. It's unconditional.

BUT it's not only unconditional, it's **unending**. It's consistent. God isn't fickle. God isn't unpredictable. God doesn't have bad hair days. God doesn't get up on the wrong side of the bed. Some of you grew up with a dad who you never knew if he was going to hug you or slug you. Right? Unstable parents create unstable children. But God says, "My love for you is consistent. It is unending. It is everlasting. It is unfailing. You never need to ask 'Is God going to love me today? Did I do enough? Did I pray enough yesterday? Did I tell somebody about Jesus? Did I give a big enough offering? Did I help somebody? Did I hold my temper? Did I stop cussing?'" You never have to say, "Is God going to love me today?"

Maybe you have never heard this, maybe you have heard this for most of your life, it doesn't matter, let this sink into your soul. This will change your life! This is radical. This is not the world's system. Are you ready? You can't make God stop loving you! God's never going to love you one ounce more than He does right now, no matter what you do. AND God's never going to love you one ounce less than He does right now, no matter what you do! WHY? Because God's love is not based on you; it's based on Him, it's based on Christ! Do you receive that today? Break any religious agreement you have made that's anything less than that!

We always get into trouble when we doubt God's love. The reason I'm eternally loved is because God *is* love. The only reason love is in the universe is because the Creator of the universe is love. It all comes from our creator. God is love. It is His character. AND since His character isn't going to change, His love for you isn't going to change. Amen?

Psalm 100:5 says this: **God's love is eternal and his faithfulness lasts forever.**

You may be unfaithful to God but He's not going to be unfaithful to you! His love is eternal, and His faithfulness lasts forever. So, I'm completely accepted. I am extremely valuable. I am eternally loved. This is your true identity in Christ. Here's another one:

MY TRUE IDENTITY

I am totally forgiven.

Peter said, "Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy." God's mercy has given us God's forgiveness. And God's forgiveness is total. Because God knows everything, it has to be total. He can't partially forgive. He totally forgives.

Think about what that means. That means that God knows the worst thing you've ever done or ever will do. And He's decided in Christ to forgive you of that already. You and I might be surprised at our sins sometimes, but God is never surprised. That means the Good News of this is, in Christ, when God forgives He doesn't partially forgive, He totally forgives. Your sins are totally wiped away! When God forgives He erases it. He destroys it. All the penalty, all the punishment is totally gone! When you and I start to get a hold of that we begin to understand our true identity.

But your spiritual enemy and mine wants us confused about this. This is why we have this feeling sometimes that when we've done something wrong, and we feel guilty about it, that somehow God's trying to get back at us. Have you ever had that? Be honest. Where every little wrong thing that happens to you, you start to think, "It's because of that sin. If I hadn't done that then this wouldn't have happen." Right? You run into a traffic jam that's usually not there, and you think it's because of your sin. You go to Taco Bell and order a taco and there's no meat in it, you think God's getting back at you. It's because of that sin. The vegetarian at the other table got meat and they're thinking, it's because of that sin.

We get into this thing where we think God is punishing us for our sin. BUT that is not what God is like. Yes, God lovingly disciplines His children. And He leads us the right way. But He does not punish us for our sin. How do I know that? Because he told us. Romans 8:1

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

God doesn't carry grudges. God doesn't rehearse your sin over and over in His mind. God releases it. He forgives it!

Some of you, last week you said something, you did something, you thought something you never thought you'd do or think. And you're wondering, "Can God forgive me?" Yes, He can! Because you don't start by thinking how judged and condemned you are. You start by realizing how forgiven you already are. You

don't fight FOR forgiveness; you fight FROM forgiveness! Based on that kind of forgiveness you find the freedom to live a new kind of life. That is your true identity in Christ.

Well how do I know this for sure? Because Jesus paid for our sins! It keeps going back to what Jesus did on the cross. Because when you look at the cross and what Jesus did on the cross, you see your identity. You see that you're loved. You see that you're accepted. You see that you're forgiven.

The Bible says in Ephesians 1:7: **In him** [Jesus, in Christ] **we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.**

I'm forgiven not based on my performance or what I've done. I'm forgiven based on the great grace of God. This is your true identity. One more for today and I've got some application for you, write this down:

MY TRUE IDENTITY

I am fully capable.

I'm totally accepted. I'm extremely valued. I'm eternally loved. I'm completely forgiven. And I am fully capable. In 1 Peter 2 he says, "You are **royal priests**...chosen to tell about the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." If you're a Christian, if you're child of God, if you're born again, if you're in the family of God, you're also a priest.

So, what's a priest do? A priest does two things. He represents man to God, and he represents God to man. And God says you are capable, you're fully capable of doing that. Which is why you don't have to go to a priest to confess, because you are one! You don't have to go to a priest to get forgiveness, because you are one! You are a royal priest. That's your true identity!

I tell our volunteers this at our team huddles. Every member is a minister. You are just as called as any priest because you are one. The Bible says you are fully capable of representing God to other people and that's part of your calling. That's what God wants you to do. God has life mission for you. God has a calling for us. You are a priest where you work. You are a priest at that school. You represent God to everybody around you. And God says you are fully qualified. You are fully capable. God says I've made you competent to handle anything they throw at you.

A lot of times we don't feel that way. We don't feel very competent. We don't often feel very capable. We often feel overwhelmed by life. BUT who are you going to believe? Yourself, or what God says about you? God says "in Christ" you are fully capable to handle anything that comes at you AND you are fully capable of sharing this Good News with other people.

You say, "I can't do that!" On your own, you are right. But you're not supposed to do it on your own. You're supposed to do it "in Christ." And when you're in Christ He gives you power to do things you never could do on your own. 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 says:

⁵ Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ⁶ He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant.

Most people don't feel this. They don't feel capable. They don't feel competent to do the things in life that God wants them to do. In fact, all those people around you who you think have it all together, and all those people who look so confident—they aren't. Every single person has hidden insecurities just like you. The people on either side of you have hidden insecurities just like you. Because we're all broken.

