

Finding Our Identity in Jesus Series

Finding Our Identity in Jesus (1 Jn. 3:1-3)

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At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Finding Our Identity in Jesus

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Christmas with the Kranks

1. As we are coming out of the Christmas season, the memories of Christmas are still fresh in my mind. Our family watches several Christmas movies during the Christmas season. One of the movies that we like to watch because it's both funny and has a good overall message is the movie *Christmas with the Kranks* which is based on the book *Skipping Christmas* by John Grisham.
2. There is a character in the movie who has an unknown identity. This character acts as if he knows the Krank family so he gets invited to their last-minute Christmas Eve party even though neither the husband nor the wife knows the identity of this man. After inviting the man to their party, the wife says she has no clue who he is and she asks herself the question, "Who are you?"
3. When this mystery man arrives for the party, the Kranks ask the other guests if anyone else knows who this guy is. No one else at the party knows who this man is either. However, as he introduces himself to others, the Kranks discover that his name is Marty as they overhear the conversation. Still bewildered, they have no idea who Marty is, yet Marty seems to know a lot about them.
4. Without spoiling the movie for those who haven't seen it yet, the Krank family eventually figure out who Marty is and how he knows them. Marty's true identity is discovered.
5. We go through a similar process of trying to figure out who a person is but the person we are trying to identify is ourselves. As we grow up and go through life, we need to figure out who we are and how we are going to spend our life. Every person goes through a journey of discovery as we try to figure out who we are. Some identify who they are earlier in life, some later, while others live with a certain identity for a long time but are forced to change that identity when their life changes. Our self-identification process isn't always easy, comfortable, or smooth. It can be a bit mysterious.

B. Identity, most simply put, is what we think about ourselves. It provides the answer to the question, "Who am I?" In another sense, our search for identity goes much deeper. We are on a journey of discovering who the "real me" is and how my true identity shapes my view on life and where happiness can be found.¹ The way we answer the identity question will greatly influence what we value, the decisions we make, and the direction our life takes.

C. When we find our identity in the wrong place it will leave us feeling uncomfortable and dissatisfied at best and in a state of crisis at worst. While many people seem to value the process of self-discovery, it is much more difficult to find a healthy true self. If we are going to

¹ Carl R. Trueman, [*Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 21–22.

feel safe, secure, and confident in our identity we need to understand the importance of finding our identity not in ourselves but in Jesus just as 1 John 3:1-3 teaches us to do.

II. Sources of Identity

- A. As we opened this new sermon series, we learned about the impact our identity has on our ability to carry out a healthy Christian life. Those who do not realize and forget who they are according to God's word will be unable to effectively act on God's word. They will not be able to become the type of person God wants them to be. There will be a disconnect between what God says and how they live causing a lack of personal transformation from God's word. The way to overcome this problem and connect our lifestyle to the word of God is by grounding our identity in Jesus. We learn who God says we are, we believe what God says, and we act as if what God says about us is true. In short, we find our identity in Jesus.
- B. If we are going to learn how to ground our identity in Jesus, we must first understand how we as human beings typically discover and determine our identity. Being aware of what the identity journey looks like is critical. It will be helpful to identify the different sources of identity formation. How do people generally go about figuring out who they are?
- C. There is a very instructive statement found in the Bible that tells us about human nature and how we tend to find our identity,

²⁹ The glory of young men is their strength, And the honor of old men is their gray hair.
 (Pr. 20:29)
- D. Young men tend to find their identity in their physical strength or abilities ("The glory of young men is their strength", v. 29) while old men find their identity in wisdom and experience ("the honor of old men is their gray hair", v. 29). So often we find our identity and take pride in what we are good at. It might be some ability or characteristic. Observing human behavior will confirm this tendency. Often, our identity springs from what we are good at, what we value, and what we have achieved in life. This notion is repeated in other places as well (Jer. 9:23-24, Ps. 44:6, 49:6, 10-12, 62:10, Isa. 30:12, 31:1, 59:4, Jer. 48:7, Mic. 7:5, Rm. 2:23, 2 Cor. 1:9).
- E. The characteristic that marks a person as being worthy of esteem or respect ("the honor of", v. 29) for older men is their wisdom, righteousness, and life experience with God (Pr. 16:31).² Living a long life evidenced by having grey hair is viewed as a blessing for those who are righteous. While using different language the same idea is true of young men regarding their physical strength and energy. These qualities are a core source of a person's identity at different stages of life.
- F. The list of sources of identity found in the Bible seem endless, it includes our own abilities, physical strength and energy, wisdom and intelligence, education and degrees, wealth and business success, house and possessions, power and authority, plotting and scheming, achievements, doing good, popularity and friendships, romantic relationships and family, beauty and physical attractiveness, etc. However, every one of these sources of identity can be harmful. God regularly turns our attention back to Him. People should find their identity in God

² Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Proverbs 20:29 "the honor of"

and who they are in relation to God (1 Chr. 16:10, Ps. 62:8, 118:8, 125:1, Pr. 3:5, Isa. 26:4, 2 Cor. 1:9).

- G. We can find the source of our identity in many different places. Usually, our self-understanding is a combination of sources. J. Warner Wallace provides a helpful framework when it comes to understanding the common sources of identity. He distinguishes between outside-in identities, inside-out identities, and a top-down identity.³
- H. Some people find their identity from the outside-in. We pick up on what other people are saying about us or telling us and we accept it as the truth of who we are. We observe what other people value about us and invest ourselves in those areas. We pay attention to our culture and follow the crowd. Perhaps we find our identity in a group of people that we are associated with, possibly our family. A certain type of relationship may become our identity such as husband, wife, dad or mom. An example of an outside-in identity might be a person who comes from a military family. They find their identity in joining and being successful in the military, perhaps even the same branch of the military that their family members participated in.
- I. Other people may develop an inside-out identity. This way of discovering our identity has become very popular. Instead of finding our identity in those around us or something outside of us, we look inward. A characteristic of who we are, a passion or desire becomes the main source of our identity. People have shaped their identities on their race, gender, sexual preferences, skills or abilities, and past experiences. Perhaps we find something we enjoy doing and that becomes who we are. This inside-out method of discovering our identity is called Expressive Individualism. An example of an inside-out identity might be a person who loves music and has an aptitude for it. They turn their love of music into their identity and pursue a full-time music career.
- J. The danger we will face in finding our identity in these other sources, is how we respond if we are ever separated from the source of our identity. If I define myself by my job, what happens if I lose my job or when I retire? If I find my identity in my physical attractiveness, what happens when it fades due to age or a significant injury? If I find my identity in my athletic ability, what happens if I'm injured and end up in a wheelchair? If a woman finds her identity in being a mom, what happens when her kids move out? If I find my identity and purpose in marriage, what if I'm forced to get a divorce? When we are separated from the source of our identity, our lives painfully fall apart. It is unwise to find our identity in anything that can be taken away from us. If we do, we set ourselves up for extreme discomfort and a crisis. The only safe and secure source of our identity comes from the top down—the identity we receive from God.

III. Finding Our Identity in Jesus

- A. Contrary to the unstable and unhealthy sources of identity are those who find their identity in God using the topside-down approach. Strong and healthy individuals described in the Bible consistently find the core of their identity from God in the midst of the changing situations of life. They receive what God says about them and live in the truth of who God has created them

³ Warner J. Wallace and Alisa Childers, [*The Truth in True Crime: What Investigating Death Teaches Us About the Meaning of Life*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2024).

to be. These individuals who are worth emulating looked upward for their identity rather than inward or outward. Our relationship with God can define our identity, provide purpose and meaning, and give direction as we relate to others.⁴

B. Here is how a person's identity is described when they are rightly connected to Jesus,

¹ See how great a love the Father has given us, that we would be called children of God; and *in fact* we are. For this reason the world does not know us: because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope *set* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1 Jn. 3:1-3)

C. This passage is packed with wonderful truths about being a child of God. But before we can rightly claim all the benefits of being a child of God, we must become a child of God. Here are the requirements for having this identity,

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him. (1 Jn. 5:1)

D. To be a child of God a person must develop the personal conviction that Jesus is God's special promised King (called the Messiah or Christ) who rules the world and the Son of God who has the nature and attributes of God ("Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God", v. 1).⁵ It is through faith—active trust in Jesus—that a person becomes a child of God (Gal. 3:26, Jn. 12:36). When a person becomes a child of God, they automatically inherit the promises of God (Rm. 9:8) and are given the Holy Spirit (Rm. 8:15, Gal. 4:6).

E. Not only will the true identity of Jesus be accepted as fact, but children of God also love everyone who shares their conviction about Jesus ("everyone who loves the Father loves the child born of Him", v. 1).⁶ Being a child of God is not just a matter of accepting accurate theology about Jesus, these truths must change our attitude toward God and others. Children of God have love and affection for God because of believing in Jesus (1 Jn. 5:2). Just as Jesus affirmed, a person must have a love of God in them to belong to God. Children of God will love God, and they will love everyone who is a child of God (1 Jn. 3:15-16). Disciples love other disciples. Children of God love the people of God—the church. This attitude of affection will be demonstrated in action (1 Jn. 3:17).

F. Returning to our main text in chapter three, we observe that God working in us and our lives to make us a child of His as an act of love ("See how great a love the Father has given us, that we would be called children of God", v. 1). Truth number one that applies to every child of God is that God loves us and has demonstrated that love to every child of His. God is the One who decides and acts to make us His child (Jn. 1:12-13). Every child of God is born of God in a similar

⁴ Warner J. Wallace and Alisa Childers, [*The Truth in True Crime: What Investigating Death Teaches Us About the Meaning of Life*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2024).

⁵ 1 John 5:5

⁶ There is discussion on whether "the child born of Him" is referring to Jesus or all believers in God. Both points are taught in the New Testament and affirmed by John (1 Jn. 4:21). However, in this passage it appears John is referring to love of our fellow children of God (1 Jn. 5:2). This is not the first time John combines both of these elements (1 Jn. 3:23). Although. Love of God is not excluded (1 Jn. 5:2).

way to parents who make the decision to have children. The child doesn't decide to be born; the parent decides on behalf of the child. This willful act on God's part is an act of strong positive emotion of regard and affection.⁷

- G. Know for certain that every child of God is loved by God. Part of living by faith means we do not judge God's love or positive feelings toward us by our life circumstances or how we think God is treating us. If we are a child of God, God has already demonstrated that He loves us by making us a child of His and this loving posture toward us does not change. God's love toward us is steady, firm, strong, and permanent. If God does that for us, we can be certain that He loves us regardless of how our life circumstances turn out. God loves us and has our best interests in mind, and He is working in our life to bring us good. If God has reached into our life and changed us into a new person, He loves us and we never have to doubt His feelings and posture toward us. God's love should always be assumed.
- H. Truth number two is that people are a child of God as a fact. The reason God calls those who believe in Jesus and who love God children of God is because that is in fact who we are ("and in fact we are", v. 1). Our spiritual condition is not a matter of how we feel or how we think about ourselves or what we have made up as part of some religious system. Our identity is an objective truth of reality about us like the color of our hair or our height. Every person is either a child of God, or they are not as a matter of fact. While it is possible to be confused about being a child of God, it is not possible to make up our own reality. A person can't simply declare themselves a child of God. Just because a person self-identifies as a child of God this does not make them a child of God. Truth and facts apply to being a child of God.
- I. If someone has an inaccurate understanding of who Jesus is and they reject or deny what Jesus said about Himself, they are not a child of God. Those who have an unbiblical view of Jesus are not a child of God. If a person has hostile attitudes toward God and they do not love God and yet claim to be a child of God, they are mistaken. Those whose primary attitude toward God is anger and resentment are not a child of God. A person who is comfortable living in active disobedience to God's commands and doesn't care about becoming a morally pure person, is not a child of God. There are objective and Biblical standards by which we can determine if we are a child of God or not. While this is not a popular or a common way to approach spiritual topics in our modern culture, this is what God says is true.
- J. Our identity in Jesus is not based on our performance or our level of spiritual maturity. We don't have to wait until we look like Jesus to call ourselves a child of God. We are still a child of God when we mess up. We are still a child of God when we do a good job of obeying God. We are still a child of God when our hearts are on fire for God and when we are going through a dry season. We are still a child of God even though we have flaws and shortcomings. Our identity in Jesus is safe and secure because it is not based on our moral performance.
- K. Third truth, everyone who meets the requirements of being a child of God is currently a child of God. When we accept Jesus as the person He claimed to be and develop a love for Him and the Father, we immediately become a child of God ("Beloved, now we are children of God", v. 2).

⁷ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 1 John 3:1 "a love"

Those of us who are connected to Jesus in this healthy way are currently children of God. The fact that we are children of God is not dependent on our moral performance. We are a child of God even when we fail and sin. We are a child of God even though we are not the person God wants us to be. Our identity is secured by our connection to Jesus. Right now, right where we are in life, we are a child of God if we've met the requirements previously mentioned. Disciples can live with a strong confidence and security in their identity with Jesus.

- L. At the same time, paradoxically, even though we are a child of God, we are not fully transformed as a child of God—we are a work in progress (“and it has not appeared as yet what we will be”, v. 2). The fourth truth about being a child of God is that we are incomplete. We don't have to be spiritually mature or exactly like Jesus to know we are a child of God. Even though we are currently children of God, we are not a finished product. We are still on a journey of personal transformation as we become more like Jesus. In fact, we won't fully know what it means to be a child of God until Jesus comes back.
- M. We won't experience the fullness of our identity and all the benefits attached to it in this life. We will not be spiritually perfect and totally transformed until Jesus comes back. We can accept this truth, be encouraged by it, and not allow it to discourage us as we grow in the Christian life. Some people might want to throw in the towel and give up as they tell themselves there's no point in trying if I can't get everything right. Others might swing to the other extreme and say it doesn't matter if I succeed or fail so I can live however I want as they give up trying to grow into the person God wants them to be. Whether a person gives up striving to be transformed to be like Jesus because try and fail or because they don't try at all, whatever the motivation, we need to keep moving forward. God wants us to keep growing little by little and step by step. Stay on the journey of being transformed.
- N. This means, as children of God, we don't have to hide or pretend like we have everything together. It's okay to be honest about where we are at in our journey of growing to be like Jesus. This should be expected. Every child of God falls short somewhere. No one acts like Jesus all the time. No one is morally pure every moment of their lives. Pretending this is the case is dishonest. Embrace the journey. What usually happens, the more open and honest we are with others about where we are at spiritually, the faster we grow! The more we pretend and hide, the more we slow and stunt our progress.
- O. Truth five is that all children of God will successfully be transformed to be like Jesus. While there is a lot of mystery still involved in the fulfillment of our identity, we know that we will be transformed to be like Jesus (“We know...that we will be like Him”, v. 2). God's main agenda in our life as a person who is attached to Jesus is to transform us to be like Jesus. That is the core and heart of the Christian life. God's work in us will be successful, we will become the person we want to be...eventually (Phil. 1:6). God's guarantees the outcome and His power will accomplish our full transformation. We will become the person we want to be.
- P. The Christian life should be lived with confidence and hope knowing our success is guaranteed. We will be transformed to be like Jesus. God's power will make this a reality in our lives totally and completely when Jesus returns to earth at the end of human history. This isn't fantasy, it is a fact. Our core value of Holistic Transformation which openly invites God into all areas of our

life to become like Jesus will be fulfilled! Every part of our lives will be healed and strengthened so it functions the way God intends—which is good for us.

- Q. The sixth and final truth about being a child of God is that all children of God care about their spiritual growth. Our identity as a child of God brings hope to our life and it sets the direction for our lives. Since we know what God is doing in our lives and we know where God is taking us because we are connected to Jesus, we work at becoming a morally pure person (“everyone who has this hope set on Him purifies himself just as He is pure”, v. 3). The assumption being made by the apostle John is that the children of God are already and will continue to work at being a morally good person like Jesus. John already described this attitude as being a person who practices righteousness and avoids sin (1 Jn. 3:6-7). Those who do this make it obvious that they are a child of God and those who don’t make it obvious they are a child of the devil (1 Jn. 3:10).
- R. Children of God need to develop a desire and passion for moral development and godly character growth. We can’t be content with where we currently are knowing we aren’t like Jesus in all areas of our life. This focus happens because we value becoming the kind of person who is like Jesus. We love Jesus and understand how inspiring He is. Jesus is the best role model we could possibly have. Therefore, we focus on and put energy into following His example. We want to think, be, and act like Jesus. One of the primary ways we become like Jesus is by becoming a morally upright person—we strive to consistently do good according to what God says is good. By living in a blameless, innocent, and above reproach manner, we are lights to the world as we put the word of God into practice (Phil. 2:14-16).

IV. Conclusion

- A. People find their identities from the outside-in, from the inside-out, or from the topside-down. In most cases it is realistically a combination of various sources. Every person builds their self-understanding using a few core elements that form the essence of their identity. God wants us to develop our identity in Him.
- B. Having the core of our identity built on being a child of God will empower us to be able to live a healthy Christian life in connection with God. We can be assured that, as children of God, we will be transformed by the power of God to be like Jesus. We are currently in the process of being transformed and all true children of God are motivated to be morally pure like Jesus.