

Ultimate Identity session II
Questions & Outline
Ephesians 4:17-24

Intro:

Whether you are a Christ follower or not, at some point in our lives we all face the existential questions of **who we are and what our purpose in life is**. When we honestly examine the way we live, we will discover that we have the tendency to ground the identity that influences us the most in ourselves as opposed to heaven. My hope is that you become aware of what in your life serves as the point of reference for all your identities.

Regardless of what that is for you, the main take-away from last week is that **our ultimate point of reference for life (which I am calling ultimate identity) is that we are chosen by the Creator of the universe to be united with Jesus, to be loved and to love.**

At the very end of last week's message, I mentioned that cognitively knowing what our ultimate identity is does not guarantee that we will automatically start living from it. **In fact, I will emphatically say this, knowing our ultimate identity is not enough, we have to learn how to live from it.** In a world where there are so many competing narratives about identity and about what gives you the most satisfaction in life, we have to learn the following:

How can we practically live in the world abiding by our ultimate identity of being chosen to be united with Jesus, to be loved, and to love?

Read Ephesians 4:17-24

*Before answering our main question we first must answer another question, this question is **Why is it so hard to live abiding by our ultimate identity?***

- I. **Our identity is constantly being formed by our experiences, toxic habits and by our culture.**
 - A. Unfortunately, what our culture often sees in the examples of many Christ followers is judgment, being prideful, a lack of compassion, tribalism and so forth. What we are supposed to see according to the teachings of Jesus and according to what Paul says in Ephesians is people who live from their identity of being chosen to be with Jesus to be loved and to love others the way Jesus loves us. The reason why it's hard to live from our ultimate identity is because we have a tendency without realizing it to be influenced by other competing ideas that we are bombarded with on a daily basis through all forms of media and communication channels. **What tends to happen is that if we are not careful our experiences, our habits, and our culture will stop us from living from our ultimate identity.**
 - B. Paul makes this point in **verses 17-19**. In the first three verses that we read is that our experiences, our culture, and our habits that we establish away from God will enslave us and lead us to ground our identity in ourselves and our desires--as opposed to heaven. We have the propensity to live from other identities grounded in ourselves because we struggle to believe that Jesus is all that we need for a life of meaning and purpose. Now, because of this struggle, what tends to happen is we consciously and unconsciously believe that our ultimate happiness is found outside of God. This is what St. Ignatius of Loyola called sin.

"Unwillingness to trust that what God wants for me is only my deepest happiness." This is why the devil's primary target is our trust in God and in his truth as it comes to us in Scripture. If he can get us to doubt God and instead trust in our own inner intuition as an accurate compass for the good life, he has us. In the

ultimate irony, sin sabotages our capacity of happiness by appealing to our God-Given desire for happiness via deceptive ideas.”

To summarize. The point that I want to emphasize here is **if we are not careful, we can easily start to believe and live out our daily lives from identities grounded in our experiences, habits, and culture as opposed to heaven.**

Now despite the reality that it is hard to live from our ultimate identity, the good news is that it is not impossible! So how can we practically live in the world abiding by our ultimate identity of being chosen to be united with Jesus, to be loved, and to love?

II. An intentional approach to communing with God and others is the key to living from our ultimate identity

- A.** I mentioned at the beginning it is not enough to know what our ultimate identity is, we have to learn how to live from it. Laurie Santos, a professor of psychology and cognitive science at Yale University makes the point that **“knowing something is not enough to change. Change is hard. Knowing something is important, but it’s not half the battle it’s more like 10 to 20 percent of the battle.”** So something has to happen for our knowledge of our ultimate identity to be able to result in us practically living by this identity in our day to day life.

“For ideas, good, or bad, to reshape our lives, they have to get into our hearts—The deep centers of our beings that integrate our thoughts, emotions and desires—and from there into our bodies, our muscle memory. Or in more Christian language, our souls.”-John Mark Comer

The only way our knowledge of our ultimate identity can get into our hearts is through what is known in Christianity as spiritual formation. The process of becoming more and more like Christ. To become more like Jesus, we have to intentionally engage in spiritual disciplines that are designed to help us live communing with God and others

- B.** Paul in verses 20-24 uses the imagery of renewing of the mind, the changing of clothes and the language of new creation to emphasize our need to commune with Jesus. Notice that in this passage Paul is combining the renewal of the mind, or right knowledge with practice as he emphasizes the need to actively put on our new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. This idea of communing with Jesus is also found by the words of Jesus himself in John 15:5.

Communing with God and others is a lifelong process. For the message of Jesus to be transformational and to permeate all areas of your life, you have to be committed to embracing a life-long process of communion with Jesus and communion with others. God’s vision for this authentic community is a community that is united with Jesus to be loved first of all, but also to love others as God calls us to.

“When we curate our attention on Jesus and allow the flow of his thoughts into our minds, we begin to experience his peace, his love and compassion for all, and his deep, pervasive joy. We become calmer, more loving, and plain happier, just by abiding. And we do this through the practices of Jesus.” -John Mark Comer

So let's talk about the practices of Jesus or what we call spiritual disciplines.

- C. The first thing here I want to mention is that there is no official exhaustive list of what these are. But I want to share with you a few of them that have help me to abide by my ultimate identity.

The **reading of Scripture**: when you read Scripture with the appropriate lens, the result is never arrogance or a sense of being better than people, but it produces humility, gentleness, love, self-control and so forth. The goal of reading Scripture is for Spiritual formation. The goal is to learn to become like Christ and to fill your mind and heart with the thoughts of God to the point where His thoughts rewire your brain and your whole being.

The second Spiritual discipline I want to highlight today, is **being in community**. You see being in small group or community group is an incubator for spiritual formation. What this means is when you are in a community with others you will learn where you are in your spiritual formation, and you will be exposed to people who will assist you in the process.

Book Recommendation: *The Deeply Formed Life* by Rich Villodas

Questions

1. Why is hard for you to live from your ultimate identity of being chosen to be with Jesus to be loved, and to love?
2. Do you have a particular approach to communing with Jesus and others?
3. What spiritual disciplines do you practice in your life?
4. How can reading Scripture from the lens of spiritual formation change the way you currently read Scripture?
5. Why do you think being in a small group is an incubator for spiritual formation?