



FINDING IDENTITY IN CHRIST

WEEK THREE - MEANING

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen Christ working in your life in the last week? And... we've talked about what teams you're a fan *of* ... but let's switch it up. What teams have you been *on*? Did your peewee league "Little Giants" win the pennant? Maybe your debate team, the "Argue-nauts," won state? Share with the group.

OPENING PRAYER

Creator of all Life, help us to see the purpose to which we have been called, and the beautiful richness of life in everything around us.

INTRODUCTION

The power of a good team is a clear and common goal. Teams often set goals at the beginning of the season...have a winning record, compete for the division, don't lose to Ohio State. (If you're Michigan,

you could go 1-11, but if that 1 win is over The Buckeyes, it's a successful season.) When a team's goals are clear, and every player, coach, and manager are working for the same thing, the team is at its best. Our lives operate in much the same way. When we have a clear goal from our Heavenly Coach, we work at our best, as well. This leads us to the third element of what makes up our identity in Christ. We'll come back to that. But first...

Setup Question: What is the meaning of life?

SCRIPTURE & REFLECTION

Okay, the "setup question" was a set up. Take a deep breath. You survived. See, we've covered two key elements of what makes up our identity in Christ to this point... *strength* that comes from God and *connections* that mean we are never alone. But today, we'll talk about something that every person, at some point in their life, (or at many points in their life,) considers... why am I here? What am I supposed to do? The good news... our faith, our identity in Christ, gives us an answer.

When a team has a common goal, an aim that every player understands, it gives them a *reason* for what they do...every at-bat, snap, spike, nutmeg, check, or googly... every play has meaning. (Bonus points to anyone who can identify all those sports. Yes, a "googly" is a thing... Google it.) But whether you're on a sportsball

team or simply living life, when you're part of something bigger than just you, what you do, how you live, has...

MEANING

Our faith, our identity in Christ, gives our lives *meaning*. Without something higher than our existence, life's meaning really does boil down to... "you're born, you live, you die, you're gone, that's it." But we are so fortunate... our identity in Christ gives every moment, every breath, every "googly," meaning.

To get into this, we'll look at a player from the '90s, who was trying to find meaning for his role on his team. It was the 590s B.C.. His name was Jeremiah. And the "team" he was on was called "The Prophets of God." (BTW, this is a solid team name for the next NFL expansion team. Just sayin'.) Israel was in turmoil. They had just been conquered by the Babylonians and King Nebuchadnezzar had exiled thousands of Jews from Jerusalem. God knew that the people would need a prophet to remind them who they were, where they were from, and what meaning their lives had in the midst of the chaos and *loss* of identity. But first, he needed to instill those same things into Jeremiah.

Read Jeremiah, chapter 1, verses 4 through 9.

God had just set Jeremiah on a path, giving his life meaning.

Question 1: Discuss Jeremiah's call? What stands out to you about God's request and Jeremiah's response? How would you have reacted were you Jeremiah, being given such a grand task?

From Jeremiah's story, we see that our identity in Christ gives our lives meaning in two ways. In verse 5, God tells him, "...before you were born, I chose you to speak for me to the nations." (v5, CEV.) Jeremiah's job, his goal now, is to be a prophet of God. God selected Jeremiah to direct the people of Israel through this awful time of chaos. And just like Jeremiah, God has chosen each of us for a specific and sacred role, as well. And so, the first way we can talk about faith giving our lives meaning is just that... God has given each of us *purpose*. Through Christ, our lives, our actions, our endeavors have meaning because we each have a calling, something we are uniquely set aside to do, that, like Jeremiah, will affect God's people. Not everyone is called to be a prophet of God, or even a pastor. But God does have a purpose for your life. Your calling might be to support or volunteer for a specific cause or charity. Your purpose might be to raise your children or provide for your family. Hopefully part of your calling is to step into leadership for this faith community and utilize your skills. But each one of us has been set aside for a specific, sacred, purpose. Our lives have meaning, first, because God has given each of us a calling only we can do. Our identity in Christ gives us *purpose*.

Question 2: Have you thought about your "purpose" in life? Have you articulated your "calling"? If so, what is it? If not, why not? Give it some thought now. What might be your "purpose"?

Now, this is a big question, so there's no expectation to have this all figured out in the span of this one reflection guide. (If only it were that easy, right?) But because this is something every human explores, these questions are important. So, we'll say two brief things about our lives having meaning through purpose. First, Jeremiah's response is to tell God, "no," which never works out. It's like he's never read a story about a prophet before. If that weren't enough, he then gives God excuses, "I'm not a good speaker, Lord, and I'm too young." (v6, CEV) But God makes Jeremiah, and us, a promise. God tells Jeremiah that not only will God be with him, but that God will give him the words to say. Jeremiah is equipped to do the job he is asked to do. God says the same thing to us. "Don't say you're too young or too old. Don't say you don't have the time or the resources or the ability. I will go with you, and I will equip you to get it done."

Second, if you read on past these verses, you'll see that Jeremiah does what he's told, and when God gives him the words to say, he speaks boldly. He may not know the outcome, but given the purpose he is set upon to be a prophet of God, he takes the first step. You may not know exactly the calling God has placed on your life, but if you have a sense or a tug toward something... be bold and take the first step. You never know the doors that might open until you give it a chance.

Question 3: What prevents you from doing whatever it was you answered to question 2? What excuses do you give God as to why you can't fulfill that purpose?

CLOSING

The second way our identity in Christ gives our lives meaning is a little deeper. When asked, many people said, “my faith gives my life meaning,” but they didn’t mean *purpose*, something to *do*. Instead, they meant that their relationship to Christ gave their lives depth, significance, fullness. We might use a different word... *richness*. (Not wealth... this isn’t the prosperity gospel.) Rather, when we realize we are part of something greater, when we see the beauty of creation and the work of the Creator, when we see the value our life has, not because we’re getting our purpose done, but simply because we’re a part of the whole, when we embrace that we are beloved children of God, every relationship, every action, every thing we do... every day we get to wake up, every breath we get to take... every heartache or celebration... everyTHING just means more. There’s a depth, a significance, a richness to our lives when we have a relationship with Christ, that gives our lives meaning. Without it, we’re simply on this earth to be born, live, die... and that’s just a depressing way to live. Instead, through our identity in Christ, we get to live a life where we have a *purpose* and where simply being alive gives our lives *richness*.

So, add this to your list of reasons to have a relationship with Christ. Not only do we receive strength from God that leads to hope, and deep, meaningful relationships that are based on love, but our identity in Christ gives our lives meaning, first through a purpose, a God-given calling that, like Jeremiah, only you can do, but also through the fact

that we are part of something bigger, which makes our lives exceedingly rich.

Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations.

Close in prayer.