

The Way Forward

Identity Before Direction



South Lake Church of Christ | January 4, 2026

Beyond Sunday Study Guide

Introduction

A new year brings reflection, goals, and plans. While vision and direction matter, Scripture teaches that direction without identity leads to pressure, exhaustion, and striving. Many believers grow weary not because they are doing the wrong things, but because they are trying to earn what God has already given.

Before focusing on where we are going, God calls us to be grounded in who we are.

1. Identity Comes Before Mission

Scripture: Matthew 16:18

Jesus declares, “I will build my church.” The word *church* comes from *ekklesia*, meaning a called-out people. Jesus was not describing a building or program, but a people who belong to Him.

Before there was a mission, there was identity. Before movement, there was belonging. God never called people to perform in order to belong. He called them because they already belong.

Biblical Reality:

Belonging comes first. Purpose flows from identity.

Key Truth: *The way forward with God always begins with identity, not performance.*

2. Created in God's Image

Scripture: Genesis 1:26–27

Being made in God's image is not about appearance, but representation, authority, and purpose. Humanity was created to reflect God in the world.

Sin fractured clarity and relationship, but it did not erase God's image or our value.

Key Truth: *God did not say, “Perform well and I will make you in my image.” He created us in His image from the beginning.*

3. Royal Priesthood

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:9

Believers are called a royal priesthood. This identity restores purpose, not pressure.

A priest does not perform to earn God's attention. A priest represents God to people and people to God. Royalty in God's kingdom means responsibility, not dominance.

Key Truth: *We do not perform to earn identity. We live from the identity we have already been given.*

4. Living From Identity

Scripture: Romans 12:2

A performance-based culture trains us to seek approval and measure worth by output. When that mindset enters faith, it leads to exhaustion.

Spiritual maturity is rooted in transformation and relationship, not activity alone.

5. Faith When Control Slips

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5–6

Faith is easiest when life is calm. When circumstances shift, fear and control surface. God invites trust, not self-management.

Key Truth: *Letting go is not weakness. It is trust.*

6. The Church Advances

Scripture: Matthew 16:18

Jesus says the gates of Hades will not overcome the church. Gates are defensive, not offensive. The church is not meant to hide or survive, but to advance.

The enemy is on defense against believers who understand their identity in Christ.

7. Walking The Way Together

Scripture: Hebrews 10:24–25

The way forward is never meant to be walked alone. Discipleship happens in community, through encouragement, accountability, and shared faith.

Key Truth: *We walk The Way together, not individually.*

8. One Step at a Time

Scripture: Psalm 119:105; Luke 9:23

God does not provide a full map. He provides a lamp for the next step. Obedience often precedes clarity, and trust grows through daily faithfulness.

Key Truth: *Daily obedience prepares us for deeper understanding.*

Conclusion: Staying on *The Way*

By knowing who we are in Christ, living from our identity, aligning our direction with God's purpose, and walking together as *ekklesia*, we remain on The Way.

God is faithful to lead His people forward.

The lamp is lit.

The path is before us.

And God is faithful as we walk together, beyond Sunday.