



who am i

FINDING YOUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

1: EVERY PERSON HAS AN IDENTITY

1. **Definition of 'personal identity'**: it is the way **you** see or perceive **yourself** i.e. it is the answer to the question, "Who am I?" Your identity describes how you relate to the world in which you live – and it is determined by the way you think about yourself. As time goes by, you become who you think you are.

Proverbs 23:7 NKJ

For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

Because identity describes the way you **think** about yourself, there is a real possibility that your thinking is not in line with the reality of who you are. The truth is that every human being has capabilities that are way beyond what he or she thinks is possible, especially if that person has Christ living within. However, whether a person has the power or ability to release his or her tremendous potential depends almost entirely on that person's self-identity.

2. **The goal of this course**: to help you understand that your gifting, capabilities and destiny in God are all **way above** the identity you have chosen for yourself, or allowed to be thrust upon you, and to encourage you to change your self-identity to bring it in line with the identity God has given you as a born-again Christian.
3. **Your identity is formed or based on a number of factors** e.g. who you are, past experiences, what you do for a living and the various roles you play. How you perceive or view these different factors will determine whether you have a negative or positive self-identity:

- **Who you are**: nationality, race group, family, position in the family, age group, physical health, personality type, talents and gifts and education.

- a. Mention any of above factors that have had a positive effect on the development of your identity:

- b. Mention any of above factors that have had a negative effect on the development of your identity:

- **Past experiences or achievements**: upbringing, personal relationship with each parent and siblings, school life, relationship history with friends, lovers, spouse or ex-spouses, success or otherwise in the workplace, shock and tragedy (Abuse, death, violence, divorce etc.) sports or work rewards. Sadly, so much of the way we see ourselves is shaped by early experiences as a **child** that have caused us to doubt our worth or value.

- a. Mention examples of your past that had a positive effect on your identity.

b. Mention examples of your past that had a negative effect on your identity.

- **What we do:** profession, job, position (e.g. manager) sports we play, the hobbies we enjoy, church ministry.

a. How do the things you do effect your identity in a positive way?

b. How do the things that you do effect your life negatively?

- **Roles we play:** e.g. husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter, work colleague, manager, trainee.

a. How important are the various roles you play in your sense of identity? Explain:

4. Many people today face an identity crisis.

- **Definition:** a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's sense of identity becomes **insecure**, often when there is an unexpected change in social roles or the lack of fulfillment of dreams and goals e.g. a divorce, job loss, failure, business collapse or age related changes such as children leaving home, retirement or death of a spouse. It is usually demonstrated by a feeling of **unhappiness and confusion** caused by the person not being sure what type of person he or she really is or what the **true purpose** of life is. You are no longer certain about **where you fit in!**
- **People are vulnerable to identity crises** because they mistakenly base their identity on things they have, things they do or the roles they play e.g. possessions, bank balance, job title, achievements, sporting success or family role. This is often the way we have been raised from a young child or, without realizing it, it is the way we have allowed society to mould our thinking. In this unstable, fast changing world it is very risky to base your identity on these factors. Let's be honest, is so easy to wake up one morning and find that you have become redundant in the workplace or your family unit has changed in a radical way and will never be the same again. Spend a little time in thought about your personal identity: are you **vulnerable** to the possibility of experiencing an identity crisis sometime in the future or are you **currently in an identity crisis**? If so, how has it made you feel?

- **It is dangerous to remain in an identity crisis.** In truth, it is almost impossible to avoid ever having an identity crisis, especially as it forms a natural part of our development as an adolescent, who is growing up and discovering a place in adult world. I think that it is true to say that most of us face a number of these crises during the course of a lifetime. When you are in crisis it is vital to look for **help and support** because it is dangerous to stay there! An ongoing identity crisis will destroy your confidence, hope, dreams and potential for the future. It will affect all your relationships and rob you of inner joy and peace. So often, the root of drug, sex and alcohol addictions lies in the loss of identity and purpose. How have you been **affected** by your identity crises?

- **The true key to overcoming an identity crisis is to know who you are in your relationship with God.** Why can we make such a statement? Let us read two passages of scripture in order to discover two very important answers: Psalm 139:13-18; Ephesians 2:8-10

- a. **First answer:** (Psalm 139:13-14)

- b. **Second answer:** (Ephesians 2:10)

- c. Thinking of your answer in (b.) above, how are you encouraged by David's observation of truth in Psalm 139:16?

- d. Whenever you lack in confidence or feel overwhelmed by your weaknesses and failures and the challenges that face, how can Psalm 139:17-18 inspire and motivate you to find strength in your identity in God?

5. **Every living person has an identity, including God.** When God met with Moses at the burning bush in the wilderness and gave him the instruction to go and confront Pharaoh and demand that he release the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, Moses began to panic. If he went to the Israelites and told them that God had sent him to them, they would want to know the name of the God – as that would identify him. In Exodus 3:14 we read that God identified himself as, "*I Am Who I Am*". This is God's ultimate personal statement of who He is: **self-existent**, not dependent on anything else for power and energy, **eternal** and **unchangeable**. God is the same person past, present and future. We can have total faith in his promises as nothing can deter God from keeping them. The name speaks of God's limitlessness and the fact that he is everywhere at once. As far as God was concerned, Moses and the Israelites **needed to know nothing else!** It was supposed to cover all the challenges that Moses would face in his confrontation with Pharaoh and his leading of the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land! In Exodus chapter four we read the story of Moses' panic attack when God spoke to him. He was expressly chosen by God for this task yet he struggled to trust God fearlessly and he had to go on a quite a faith journey before he was ready to accept his new identity as God's leader.

Question:

- Now that you know that God identifies himself as 'I Am who I Am' does it have an impact on how you face challenges and lead in difficult circumstances, whether at home, work or in the church? Explain.

6. **The salvation experience is amazing, because not only does it provide us with eternal life, but it gives us a brand new identity in Jesus Christ.** Change takes place in our lives as long as we continue to live in that identity. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

2 Corinthians 5:17 NL

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

The NIV uses the phrase, "*if anyone is in Christ*". What it is saying is that when you ask Christ to come and live in your heart and become your leader, you find a new personal identity in him! You become a new person and embrace a new life with new values that you receive from Jesus. The NIV describes the person who is in Christ as, "*a new creation*".

Question:

- If you are a 'born-again' Christian, describe some ways in which you have become a new person or creation. [There must be real and observable change in your life]

- Explain briefly how your identity has changed since you have become a Christian:

7. **Jesus was fully man but also fully God and he had a very clear understanding of his identity.** A Jesus was never confused about who he was or his purpose on earth. In fact, he often made declarations to the crowds that followed him concerning his identity. **N.B.** it is very important for us to study these declarations and the record in scripture of the life of Jesus. It is impossible for us to find our identity in Christ if we do not know who he actually is!

Question:

- Do you agree with this statement? How well do you think you know Jesus?

- Whenever you have to make a decision, do you ever ask, "*What would Jesus do?*" Scenario: you have a misunderstanding with a person who serves with you in church, and who you thought was a good friend. This person is gossiping about you and saying things about you that are untrue and unfair. You are very hurt, feel betrayed and are furious with that person. What would Jesus do in this situation? Read Matthew 5:21-24; 6:14; 18:15-17; 5:38-39; 5:43-48.

8. **The Seven I Am's in the Gospel of John:** John has carefully selected seven declarations of identity made by Jesus during his ministry on earth. Notice the link between his identity and mankind's destiny. Read the seven passages and write down a. the identity statement and b. the purpose or intended benefit to those who embrace Christ as lord and Saviour:

1. **John 6:35:**

a. I am _____

a. Benefit: _____

2. **John 8:12:**

a. I am _____

b. Benefit: _____

3. **John 10:9:**

a. I am _____

b. Benefit: _____

4. **John 10:11**

a. I am _____

b. Benefit: _____

5. **John 11:25-26**

a. I am _____

b. Benefit: _____

6. **John 14:6**

a. I am _____

b. benefit: _____

7. **John 15:5**

a. I am _____

b. Benefit: _____

8. The final passage in the final chapter of the final book the Bible is entitled, '*Epilogue: Jesus is Coming*'. Read **Revelation 22: 6-21**; it is very encouraging for all Christians! In verse 13, John, the author, quotes an amazing identity statement from Jesus that give final perspective, not only on the book of Revelation, but to the whole Bible.

Revelation 22:13 NL

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”

Read this statement of Jesus’ identity and write down what you think it means and then how it will shape your personal identity in Christ:

I trust that today there is at least the beginnings of a desire to embrace the identity that is offered us by Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. It is only ‘in Christ Jesus’ that we can truly become the people God has destined us to be.

2: YOUR IDENTITY IS LINKED TO YOUR DESTINY IN GOD

In this course we will study several aspects of our Christian identity, but we will not be able to study the topic in detail in the time we have available. Scripture has a great deal to say about our identity, both as an individual and as part of a group or community. We will start with our individual identity.

A. God gives us an identity that is linked with our destiny in him.

If you are a child of God do not assume that you know and understand your identity in God. It is always different to our natural sense of identity, which is based on our family background, education, past experiences, successes/failure and current circumstances. E.g. **Gideon** became a successful judge and ruler of Israel after he defeated the mighty Midianite army. However, at the time of Gideon's first meeting with the Angel of the Lord he was probably one of the most insignificant men in the nation! He wasn't considered good enough to be a soldier in the Israelite army and instead, was threshing wheat in a winepress so the enemy wouldn't see him! Israel had consistently disobeyed God so he allowed the nation to be oppressed by the Midianites, who continuously stripped the land of crops and animals until the people were living in starvation. In response to the cries of the people, God sent the Angel of the Lord to commission Gideon to rescue the nation. Their conversation is recorded in Judges 6:11-16:

- Gideon was not a soldier but instead he did the work of the family servant, hidden from sight, so why did the angel address him the way he did? (v. 12)

Answer

- What was Gideon's response, firstly in verse 13, and secondly in verse 15?

Answer

1. _____

2. _____

- Gideon was sceptical of the angel's declaration that he would rescue the nation of Israel and felt very insecure, so he kept on asking for proof that God had spoken, and that he was good enough for the job e.g. he set out fleeces v. 36-40. How would you respond if God came to you and informed you that he had a huge task for you; maybe on the mission field, an important justice ministry, ministry in the local church or maybe evangelism in the community? Share:

N.B. God **destined** Gideon to be the leader who would miraculously defeat the Midianite oppressors and lead the nation back to God. God, therefore, gave him the identity of a mighty hero or warrior!

B. Our identity is based on the truth of God's written word – his breath on a page!

- **There is a difference between facts and truth.** 'Facts' refer to the reality of life; things that have occurred or been spoken in the past or the present e.g. lack of finances, work issues, relationship problems, job-loss, divorce, sickness, anxiety or mental stress, habitual sins, failure, criticism and condemnation, hurts etc. 'Truth', on the other hand, refers to God's declarations, actions, promises, principles and laws that are found in the Bible, which is God's written word of God.
- **God's word has incredible power and value:** Today so many people are unsure whether the Bible is truly God's word and whether it is reliable and relevant today.

- a. Even in Jesus' time people were unsure as to whether his teaching could be trusted; maybe he was just the flavour of the day? What did Jesus declare about his words? (Matthew 24:35)

Answer:

- b. What astounding declaration did John make about the Word of God? (John 1:1)

Answer:

- c. What value did Jesus place on his words? (John 6:63)

Answer:

- d. The Apostle Paul made a statement that all scripture is **God-breathed**, i.e. inspired, and useful. (2Timothy 3:16) The writer to the Hebrews also gives us an amazing description of the operation of God's word in a heart that is open to the Holy Spirit. Read Hebrews 4: 12 and explain what it says in your own words.

Answer:

- e. What actual value do you place on scripture when you read it? Do you genuinely believe that everything in scripture is inspired by God? How has your belief about the Bible shaped your life?

- **The truth can change the facts but the facts can never change the truth.** If we want God to change our lives, our relationships, our circumstances and our future, we cannot continue to believe that the facts are always dominant in our lives. Even if you have unsuccessfully tried everything possible to change your circumstances, when God enters the picture the facts of your life are always

superseded by the truth of the Word! **N.B.** The facts of your life may have shaped your identity so far but God's eternal truth, backed by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, is available to completely change your identity! Read John 6:1-13, the story of how Jesus fed more than 5000 people.

- a. Start with the facts: how much food was available for distribution?

Answer:

- b. What is the scriptural truth about God supplying our needs? (Philippians 4:19)

Answer:

- c. What miracle did Jesus perform to demonstrate this truth?

Answer:

During the remainder of this course we are going to spend time examining many of the statements about our identity found in scripture. In this lesson we are going to focus on two main destiny statements:

1. I am God's specific and special creation. [Not a surprising outcome of a random evolutionary accident]

- **The effect of an evolutionary mindset:** The theories of evolution indicate that creation has evolved through the process of natural selection and the survival of the fittest. Many of these scientist do not actually deny that there could be a God up there who *started* the process – but they believe that our world is currently what it is because of this evolutionary process. This process of natural selection and the survival of the fittest is *ongoing* today! If this is true and our personal existence is merely the result of cohabitation between a male and a female and we have all been born into a ruthless battle for survival, how would that impact the way we live our lives - especially if you take into account factors such as global warming, overpopulation, drought, economic uncertainty, wholesale social breakdown, wars, rising disease and poverty?

Answer:

- **We believe that God created mankind on purpose i.e. it was a very deliberate, personal action.** Surely there can be no confusion about God's statement, "let us make human beings." God also acknowledged that he was very pleased with the result! (Genesis 1:26-31) It will be beneficial for us to briefly examine some aspects of this creation story because they are still applicable today! It is especially important to always remember that we were created in God's image, to be like the Trinity!
 - a. God does not have a body but is spirit so what does it mean that we have been created in his image i.e. in what way are we like God? (v. 26)

Answer:

- b. What mandate and gift did we receive at creation and how should this effect our approach to life? (v. 26, 28)

Answer:

- c. So God's instructed mankind to be fruitful and multiply until the whole planet was filled. Would you also agree that, in the church age, God has instructed us to be fruitful in a spiritual sense and multiply his kingdom until the gospel message reaches every corner of the earth? Read Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Acts 1:8. How does this shape 1. Your identity, 2. Your purpose and 3. Your confidence?

Answer:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

- d. Our identity in God is always supported or held in place by God's eternal, unchanging promises. We observe this pattern in Genesis chapter one: In verses 29-30 God is basically saying, "Okay, I have created you and given you an identity, a purpose and instructions, so now I am providing you with a support system to meet your needs." What blessing did God provide?

Answer:

- e. Jesus went out of his way to confirm this '*blessed*' aspect of our identity as God's special creation. Read Matthew 6: 25-26. What did Jesus specifically tell his listeners not to do and why?

Answer:

- f. In verses 31-33 Jesus made the point that Christians who worry about the material things of life have the same mindset and focus as unbelievers. What benefit is offered to Christians who live a righteous life and seek God's kingdom above all else?

Answer:

2. I was created by God with a free will.

- God would find no pleasure in creating a person who serves him like a robot. This also applied to the angelic beings in heaven, who serve and worship God out of **personal choice i.e. love, please and obey God without question!** For this reason, Lucifer and a third of the angels were allowed to exercise the choice to rebel against God. N.B. God constantly looks throughout the earth for those who choose to love, obey and serve him from their hearts.
- a. God sent Samuel to anoint one of Jesse’s sons as the future king Israel and Samuel was certain that the chosen one was Eliab, Jesse’s tall, handsome, eldest son. What reason did God give for rejecting Eliab? (1 Samuel 16:7)

Answer:

- b. David, Jesse’s youngest son and a shepherd boy, was God’s surprising choice to succeed Saul as king. Why did God choose him? (Acts 13:22)

Answer:

- Free will is actually a gift that God gives us. Read Deuteronomy 30: 19-20:
 - a. In your own words, what choice has God given each of us?

Answer:

- b. The words that God uses are interesting, especially “*blessings and curses*” What principle always follows our gift of free choice? (Galatians 6:7-9)

Answer:

- c. If you have made many wrong choices in your life, and your life is a complicated mess because you are experiencing the God-ordained consequences of your poor decisions, what can you do to change the ‘*curse*’ that is on your life so that it becomes a flow of blessing?

Answer:

3. I am Predestined by God

Predestination is

one of the most important biblical truths that each of us needs to understand and apply to our lives. To 'predestine' means 'to determine or decide something beforehand'. Let us read and discuss Paul's treatment of the subject:

Romans 8:28-30 NIV.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

- Verse 29 explains that God predestined the people that he "Foreknew". To foreknow means to know something beforehand. The Greek word used by Paul that is translated "foreknew" means '*being known intimately in a personal way*'. At what point in history did God have this intimate knowledge about us?

Answer:

- What very important knowledge did God have about us that led him to predestine us?

Answer:

- Explain in your own words what God has predestined us to be? N.B. What God wants us to "be" comes before what he wants us to "do". (v.29)

Answer:

- In verse 30 we note that God 'calls' those who he predestines. This means that God speaks to us individually in such a way that we hear him. Questions: What does God call us to do? Do you think our calling is connected to Ephesians 2:10? Have you heard God call you, and if so, what is he calling you to do?

Answer:

- God protects our predestination and our calling, despite our mistakes and failures and everything that comes our way. Read verse 28 and explain in your own words what God does on our behalf. (Read it in the NL, if possible)

Answer:

- In verse 30 Paul says that God 'justifies' those he predestines and calls. This is such an important aspect of our Christian identity! The word 'justified' is used in several passages in the NIV e.g. Romans 3;24, 5:1,9; 1 Corinthians 6:11. Justification is also described in 2 Corinthians 5:21. Explain what it means to be justified by God.

Answer:

Note down a bad situation in your life that eventually work together for your good.

Identity Statements:

- **My true identity is linked to my destiny in God.**
- **My identity is based on the truth of God's word, not on my circumstances.**
- **The truth can change the facts of my life, but the facts can never change the truth.**
- **I am God's specific and special creation.**
- **I am privileged to receive God's full support and supply of my needs.**
- **I was created by God with a free will, so I choose to love and serve God.**
- **Because I choose to obey God, I can expect a harvest of rich blessing.**
- **I am predestined by God to become like Jesus**
- **I am called by God.**
- **I am justified by God; declared righteous in his sight.**
- **God causes everything in my life to work together for my good**