

IDENTITY

Discovering Who
You Are in Christ

LINDSEY CARLSON



P U B L I S H I N G

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A Scripture quotation from the New Testament uses the ESV’s alternate, footnoted translation of *adelphoi* (“brothers and sisters”).

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

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Introduction

WHO DOES GOD SAY THAT I AM?

Who am I?

As a teenager, I attempted to define myself by my great hair, my flowered Dr. Martens, and my stellar sense of humor. I tended to base my sense of self-worth on the externals. What I saw in the mirror—how my hair looked, how straight my teeth were, and how much weight I'd gained or lost—regularly dictated whether I felt loved or accepted. But really, how we look isn't who we are, and it should never determine whether or not we feel loved.

Sometimes we describe who we are by pointing to our relationships. Someone at my church might say, "Oh, that's Lindsey Carlson. She's Collin's mom and the pastor's wife." But though you may love your family and friends, they don't define *who* you are.

What makes you *you*? Where do you find your identity or your sense of belonging? What values or factors guide you as you consider who you are? Maybe it's not your looks or your sense of humor that make you feel special. Maybe it's your performance at school or your extracurricular activities. Do you want to be known by others as smart, talented, or impressive? Why?

We live in a culture that's obsessed with knowing and finding yourself. We're taught to "be true to you." We identify with people who are like us. We start groups and clubs. We love to "find our people" and "discover our tribe."

But when we seek our identity in the people who "get us," we may fail to find understanding from the God who made us. To truly know ourselves, to identify our purpose, and to flourish within a community who loves and accepts us, we must discover the identity *God* gives us.

Merriam-Webster defines *identity* as “the distinguishing character or personality of an individual.” And what distinguishes a Christian? They have professed faith in Christ, and they are in the process of becoming more and more like Jesus.

We all belong to God because he made us. As our Creator and Ruler, he commands us to obey all his laws perfectly, all the time. But we don’t. Our hearts are filled with thoughts and desires that don’t please God. We sin. We can’t fake perfection or become perfect through hard work. We can’t measure up to God’s standard or reflect his righteous character.

We often try to ignore or lower God’s standards, but whether we like it or not, God will judge all humanity according to his perfect standard. When he does, only one person will measure up. And we must identify with him.

Jesus Christ came to earth to *identify with us*.

Jesus came to earth to humbly do his Father’s will. He was tempted in every way and never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). He lived the life we couldn’t live—one of perfect obedience—so that, through faith, we could exchange our wretchedness for his robes of righteousness. We find our identity in his life.

Instead of punishing us for our sins, God punished Jesus in our place. When God’s wrath against sin was poured out on Jesus at the cross, we exchanged our punishment for everlasting life. We find our identity in his death.

Three days after Jesus’s body was buried and sealed in a tomb, God raised him back to life and conquered death forever. Because Jesus lives, we too will be raised to a new and better life, when we trust in Jesus. We find our identity in his resurrection.

Romans 10:9 says, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” God grants sinners like you and me a new identity. Because Christ lived, died, and was raised to new life, you can die to sin, be made like Christ, and be raised to live with him forever. When you come to him by grace, through faith, you take

on the identity of Christ. You are chosen, beloved, and redeemed. Now you are distinguished by Christlikeness.

Friend, do you believe that Jesus is Lord? Have you ever acknowledged that out loud?

When the grace of God appeared through Christ, God made a way for you to be what you could not be on your own—a beloved son or daughter. You no longer have to work to earn God’s love or acceptance. You are loved by God (1 Thessalonians 1:4), chosen by grace (Romans 11:5), holy and beloved (Colossians 3:12), rich in faith (James 2:5), and part of “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” (1 Peter 2:9). This is who you are, *in Christ*.

Puritan pastor Robert Murray M’Cheyne wrote, “For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ.” When you wonder who you are, look to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and gain *his* valuable perspective. Looking to Jesus helps you discover who you are. You have the privilege of being identified with him and made like him! Fix your eyes on Jesus, for he is your steadfast, unwavering source of acceptance and love.

This book is broken down into three sections that will help you discover who you are on your own and who God says you are now that you are in Christ. By looking to Scripture and considering the life and character of Jesus, we will explore three essential identity questions:

- Who does God say that I am?
- What is my purpose?
- How does who I am impact how I live?

It is my prayer that through these readings, you might discover who you are in Christ, find a biblical sense of purpose, and then entrust yourself to the work of God’s Spirit in and through you. I want you to know what it means to “find your identity in Christ,” so that you can begin to rest in who he is. The gospel frees you to live with your confidence and joy in Jesus.

Friend, God already knows who you are. Do you? No sin or struggle with identity is big enough to keep you from the boundless love of God. Come to Jesus and ask him to show you who *he is*. He will forgive you, heal you, and make you more like himself. Let him help you discover who you are.

WHO AM I?

Who are you?

In this first section, you will discover who God says that you are, if you are in Christ Jesus.

As a child of the living God, you had value long before you drew your first breath. But as a forgiven, loved, and redeemed son or daughter of God through the work of Jesus, you now have every reason to live fully satisfied with who you are, because your identity is rooted in your relationship with Christ.

In the next ten daily readings, we'll discover ten ways God grants a secure identity to those who place their faith in Jesus.

Day 1

I AM CREATED AND KNOWN

God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. (Genesis 1:27–28)

Lily loved houseplants. After working at a plant nursery over the summer, she'd spent nearly all the money she earned to buy plants of every shape and size.

Lily learned the scientific names of each plant but gave affectionate pet names to every spider plant, snake plant, fern, and flowing English ivy. She used an app to diagnose diseases in their leaves and to remind her to fertilize the soil. She made watering schedules to ensure that each plant had proper moisture. She carefully rotated each plant baby throughout her bedroom, moving them from corners to windowsills, so that they could enjoy the appropriate amount of sunlight or shade needed to grow and thrive.

Have you ever wondered if anyone cares this much about you? Or wondered what you'd have to do to gain or hold on to this kind of attention? Do you long to be fully known? Guess what? You are already loved and cared for. You are *precious to God*.

God created mankind in his image. You belong to him. He designed you and gave you life. He didn't have to develop an interest in you or learn how to care for you; he's always had a plan. Our triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—tells us right from the beginning of the Bible why he created us. “God said, ‘Let us make [mankind] in our image, after our likeness’” (Genesis 1:26). God created you beautifully in his image so that you would reflect *who he is*.

God will till the hard soil of your heart and nourish you so that you will become more like Jesus. This isn't about how you look on the outside. Scripture teaches that Jesus didn't look special; he had “no beauty that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2). He was born

into a carpenter's family. His brothers' reputations could have poked holes in his kingly credibility. God accomplished all his purposes through Christ, despite how Jesus looked to the world. God knows exactly what you need to grow and flourish under his care so that your life will become a beautiful testimony.

When others look at your life, God wants *his nature* to show. As God cares for you, you mature in the faith and thrive under his provision. Less of you, more of him. No matter how it may seem, his attention never drifts away from you. Just as God cares for the flowers of the field, he always provides for you (Matthew 6:25–34). The light of Christ's presence always shines on you. His Spirit always waters you with his Word. Your Father knows when to shield you from the scorching sun and when to send rains in their season. He will shower you with his goodness.

Your heavenly Father knows you personally. You belong to him. He created you, he built you to reflect his character, and he called you by name in order to bless you and to set specific good works of grace before you.

Embrace who you are. You are created by God and made like him.

Ask: When has insecurity led you to believe that you are unseen, uncared for, or unloved? Can you think of any obvious ways in which God has cared for you or demonstrated his love?

Confess: Lord, I often fear that I am too _____ to be worthy of your love. Forgive me for wrongly believing that my life is meaningless unless I make something of myself. Help me to understand who you are and how you created me to be like Jesus, so that the world would see your love.

Discover: In Christ, I am created and known by God, in order to reflect the beauty of the gospel.

Day 2

I AM A SOUGHT-OUT SINNER

But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9)

As a teenager, I committed an act of petty crime that I regret decades later.

One afternoon, my friends and I went to the mall to try on clothes. In the dressing room, I slipped on a pair of plaid pajama pants with a Mickey Mouse patch on the back pocket. They were cute—but not \$18.99 cute. Before I could return them to their hanger, my friend reached over, grabbed the pants out of my hands, and shoved them in a bag beneath the clothes she'd already paid for. "Just take them," she urged me.

I knew shoplifting was wrong. But as horrified as I was by her suggestion, I did not protest. Instead, I walked silently out of the store without paying, feeling sick.

Back at my house, my friend victoriously thrust the pants in my direction. I sheepishly tore off the tags and put them on. When my mother asked about my "purchase," I panicked and lied, hiding that I'd picked up a new label too—*shoplifter*. That night, I attempted to bury my guilt and the pajama pants deep in a dresser drawer.

Thankfully, hiding didn't work.

In Genesis 3, we read the story of how the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, rejected God's plan for their identity. God had given them a good world to enjoy, but they disobeyed him. The Bible calls this rebellion against God *sin*, and every human being has followed in Adam and Eve's footsteps. We are all sinners.

After Adam and Eve sinned, they hid. But God called to Adam in the garden, asking, "Where are you?" Through conviction and repentance, he calls to you too. Where are you?

What humiliating labels are you attempting to hide? Will you respond to God when he calls you out of the darkness?

God searches for sinners because he loves us. He knows the depths of our shame. And out of his generosity, he sent Jesus to preach peace to those who were far off and to those who were near (Ephesians 2:17). When we trust in Jesus, God removes our guilt and gives us a new label—*forgiven*.

Christ sought me out when I was a shoplifter. Today I'm forgiven. Instead of God's enemy, now I'm his friend. Instead of a rebel, I'm forever his beloved child. Christ never stumbles blindly into your brokenness; he enters willingly. He takes on the ugliest of offenses. You don't have to pretend that you're someone you're not. God fully understands the sinful depths of *your* heart. He knows *your* need for rescue.

Sinner, you are sought out by Christ. Stop hiding. Come to him. Believe and confess. Jesus will dress you in his righteousness. He will strip away every shameful label and gloriously clothe you in forgiveness and freedom.

Ask: What shameful label(s) do you need Christ to remove? Are there areas of sin in your life that you wish God couldn't see? How does it feel to consider that God already knows the full story?

Confess: Lord, I am tempted to hide my sinful thoughts, desires, and actions from you. I foolishly believe that they remain hidden from your sight. Help me to be honest about my failings—both to myself and to you—so that I might hide myself in the gospel of my salvation, given to me through Christ while I was still his enemy.

Discover: In Christ, I am sought out in my sin, so that I can be forgiven by God and freed from my shame.

Day 3

I AM A COVENANT RECIPIENT

He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from [their] transgressions. (Hebrews 9:15)

Have you ever made a deal with your parents? Maybe you agree that if you wash the dishes every day, they'll give you a little extra spending money for summer camp. Ideally, in this arrangement both you and your parents profit. In Scripture, God makes similar (but far more serious) arrangements with his people that are called covenants. A covenant is a relational agreement between two parties who promise to work together for each other's good. In the ancient world, two nations, groups, or individuals might enter a covenant for their own protection or security.

In the Bible, God—who is all powerful and needs nothing—generously enters into covenants with mankind, in order to do good to those who follow and obey him. Throughout the Old Testament, God routinely made and kept promises that displayed his perfect covenant-keeping faithfulness to his unfaithful people.

Humans are all promise-breakers. This could lead us to question whether God will keep his promises to us. In Deuteronomy 28:2, we read, “All these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, *if* you obey the voice of the LORD your God.” It's easy to stumble over that little word *if*. What happens when your actions don't line up with God's expectations? Will God bless you *if* you don't make time to read your Bible? *If* you forget to pray? *If* you struggle to forgive others?

We have a big problem: our sins aren't a matter of “if” but “when.” We're like students who want good grades but don't want to study. Even if we want to love and obey God, it is easier to follow

our hearts into doing what we want. We are natural covenant-breakers. Good thing we have the good news of the gospel.

Christ is the solution to our sin and our faithlessness. Specifically, Hebrews 9:15 assures us that Jesus is the “mediator of a new covenant.” God fulfilled all the old covenants through Jesus, the only covenant-keeper, who could perfectly satisfy all the “ifs” we failed to fulfill. And now, we await the day when God’s final covenant will be fulfilled and Jesus will share all the blessings of his inheritance with us—his undeserving brothers and sisters.

First John 3:1 says, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” We come to Christ as forgiven children, eager to receive good from our Father. We have a new identity that we didn’t work to earn! We are no longer wicked children awaiting God’s judgment and punishment. Now, we are beloved sons and daughters awaiting our full inheritance.

When you believe and confess that Jesus died to purchase your forgiveness, God no longer identifies you by your sin (Hebrews 10:16–17). Christ’s reward becomes yours, even though you can’t fully uphold his commands.

If you trust in the Son of God and look to him for salvation, then Christ is your confidence, and his inheritance is your reward. Through Christ, you are no longer a covenant-breaker—you are a covenant-keeping inheritor!

Ask: What do you assume God requires you to do before he’ll keep his promises to you? What blessings do you fear God will withhold from you when you break his commands?

Confess: Lord, I confess that I often attempt to impress you by keeping your law by my own strength. I foolishly want my behavior to be the reason you bless me. Forgive me, O Lord, when I forget that you have given me a better covenant of grace. Help me to trust the work of Christ on my behalf.

Discover: In Christ, because of his perfect work, I am a confident recipient of the covenant promises of God.