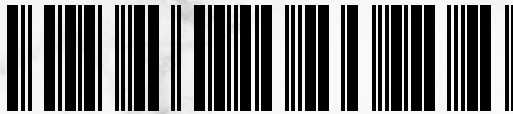




Show Me Some ID

Real Life Studies



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Real Life Studies
Show Me Some ID

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Preface

This study is about identifying our identity. Many people are confused about who they were made to be. We live in a world that allows us to redefine who we are. However, God wants us to fully embrace who we were made to be. This study will start with who God is and move us towards who God has called us to be.

For some, this study will help you discover your identity. For others, it is a reminder of who we are in creation and in Christ. As you work through this Real Life Study, reflect on the principles presents and ask yourself, "How am I living out my God-given identity?"

As we embark upon this study, we will be confronted with real issues that real people face. Throughout this study there are reflection questions that will encourage you to dig deeper. Whether you are a Gen Z-er, Millennial, Gen X-er, or Baby Boomer, this study will challenge you to examine your life and grow where God desires growth. It is our prayer that God uses this series of lessons to transform lives for His glory! We also trust that those who are not connected to God in Christ will see the importance of being a Christian. It is because God is and Christ lives that we can embrace our true identity!

*Note: All scripture references will be from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise stated.

Lesson 1

Unmistaken Identity

Lesson Text: Isaiah 43:8-13

There is a new victim of identity theft every 2-3 seconds. At some point within the last few years, it is highly likely that someone has tried to steal your identity. It could be that they tried to take money out of your bank account or attempted to open new lines of credit using your name. Maybe the scammers started a fictitious social media account using your name and profile picture. Some may have even tried to claim your tax refund. Identity theft is not new. However, thieves have gotten more sophisticated in stealing your identity.

One of the first incidents of identity theft is recorded in Genesis 27 when Jacob poses as Esau in order to secure the blessing from Isaac. While the tactics today are more advanced, the results of identity theft are the same: what rightfully belongs to you has been stolen by someone posing as you.

As a result of the frequency of identity theft, it is not uncommon for you to be asked to prove that you are you. This may involve answering a security question, entering a verification code sent to your phone or email address, or presenting a photo ID. Occasionally, there are cases where one must prove his or her identity in a court of law.

The scene in Isaiah 43 is one of a trial involving the identity of the real God. In Isaiah 41:21-24, the gods of the nations are summoned to court to prove that they have divine power. These gods were unable to prove their identity. The evidence did not substantiate the claims of the foreign nations that their gods had any power at all.

Now it is the God of Israel's turn to prove His identity. The LORD gathered some foreign nations who served false gods. Their gods were unable to prove that they were who the people claimed they were. God then calls Israel to the witness stand.

Israel had been granted spiritual insights and perception, but chose to be blind and deaf. They refused to see and hear the Lord. Yet God calls them as His star witnesses in this identity case. God poses a rhetorical question to establish the difference between Him and the imposter gods of the nations.

God asked the participants to identify who could foretell this that now exists and who could describe how past events explain the present things. The nations were unable to bring forward competent witnesses who could testify that the claims of these false gods were true and reliable. They were unable to prove their identity as real gods.

After the false gods failed to prove their identity, the God of Israel presents His case to prove His identity. In so doing, we learn about some of the divine attributes that make the God of Israel the true God.

The true God is purposeful and personal (verse 10)

The history between God and Israel reveals that the Lord is the true God. God chose a people so that He may be known. God was purposeful in choosing a people. His purpose was personal. God chose a people and moved in history so that others would know Him, believe in Him, and understand that He is God.

The Lord wants to be known. He wants relationship with His creation. God is not hiding. He is not avoiding relationship. As the people of God, we are proof positive that God wants to be known. God made Himself known to humanity.

God has chosen a people so that He can be known and so that we would believe Him. If God does not reveal Himself, we

could not know who He is. God moves in the lives of His people so that we may know that He is the LORD!

God already knows you. He wants you to know Him. God also wants us to be comfortable trusting Him. God moved in Israel and moves throughout history so that we learn to trust Him. The witnesses all testify that we can believe God. What God says He will do. What God promises will come to pass.

Throughout scripture we see a great multitude of witnesses who can testify in a court of law that you can trust God. Adam and Eve are witnesses to the fact that you can trust God to cover your shame. Joseph can testify that God can bless you with favor and turn the evil that others do to you into good. The children of Israel can testify that God hears the cries of a people in bondage and can deliver you from oppression. Rahab can testify that God can use you despite your past. David will tell you that God can give you favor even after a failure. Deborah can declare that God will give you victory over the enemy. All throughout scripture there are witnesses who can testify that God can be trusted.

God moves so that we will understand that He is God. He wants us to grasp, comprehend, appreciate, and value Him as God. The Lord is at work so that we can distinguish between Him and the counterfeit gods of this world. He is God alone and He alone is God. God is purposeful and personal.

The true God is perpetual (verse 10)

This does not imply that God was formed like the wooden idols; it merely indicates that all the idol images that were formed by human craftsmen appeared on the scene long after God's creation and sovereign control of the universe were well established. The idols had to wait on God before they could be formed. They had to wait on the LORD to make the trees and metal. The idols had to wait on the LORD to make man. Then they had to

wait on man to forsake God, cut down a tree, or melt the metal, then shape the wood or metal into idols. The idol gods are younger than humanity and are not gods at all. There is only one God.

The God of Israel is the OG, the original God. Every idol god is not a god. The true God has no beginning. No one can remember when God was not, nor was there anyone present when God started being. The LORD is the eternal God who is from everlasting to everlasting. He has no birth date because He never had to be born. He always has been, presently is, and forever will be God. God is perpetual.

The true God is powerful (verse 11-13).

The question on the table for Israel as Isaiah is writing is this: If it was true in the past that Israel's God was a Savior, isn't His saving power still available for Israel as they face new armies and their false gods? Since Israel as a people experienced these things and knew them from their recorded history found in scripture, they now are able to function in the role of being firsthand eyewitnesses to God's great acts of salvation history. The telling of their story will only confirm God's real divine qualities.

God says, "I am He" or "I am that one". He is the one responsible for Israel's deliverance. No army (neither Egyptian, Babylonian, or Assyrian) and no other gods have in the past or can in the future save the people. Israel is God's affirmation that He will continue to show His divine power at this time and into the future. God's word comes to pass.

The LORD speaks of the future in the present and what He speaks comes to pass. That's power! God has declared, saved, and proclaimed. He said what He was going to do. He did it. He announced that He did what He said He was going to do.

When God decides to do something, no one can reverse what He plans to do. When God acts, no one can stop Him. No

nation or false god can interfere with the completion of the sovereign will of the Almighty God. The God who declared, saved, and proclaimed back then is the same God who demonstrates His power in the world today. That same God is active and moving in our lives today. God declares today, "I, even I am the LORD. I am He."

Don't think that the God of the Bible is different from the God that we serve, pray to, and proclaim today. The God who, as recorded in Genesis, created something out of nothing continues to create even today. The God who delivered His people from slavery in Egypt and captivity in Babylon continues to free us from the slavery of sin and the captivity of worry, anxiety, depression, and fear. The God who healed Hezekiah and gave Him fifteen more years to live is still healing and lengthening lives today.

He still delivers. He still saves. He still heals. He was, is, and forever will be God. And when God does what He does, no one can undo what God does. When God frees you, no one can bind you. When God delivers you, no one can enslave you. When God blesses you, no one can curse you. When God elevates you, no one can bring you down. When God promotes you, no one can demote you. No one can undo what God does!

Maybe you are in a place of captivity. Perhaps you need deliverance. You may be surrounded by enemies. Know that God can and trust that God will. His identity is unmistakable.

Reflection Questions

What are some false gods that you have been tempted to trust?

What are some of the ways that God has proven His identity in your life?

Lesson 2

Our Origin Story

Lesson Text: Genesis 1:24-2:9

Questions of identity and significance are among the most important questions of life. “Who am I?” “Why am I here?” “What is the meaning of life?” “How do we define who we are?” “How do we see ourselves?” “How should we see ourselves?”

How we see ourselves affects how we treat ourselves and others. The good news is that we do not have to find an identity for ourselves. Our task is to understand and embrace our God given identity. I exist. I know that I am. But do I really know who I am? To help us answer this question, we go back to the beginning to our origin story.

Genesis 1 and 2 provide two descriptions of the creation of humanity. The descriptions are not in conflict with each other. Each one is true and each one serves a function. Genesis 1 describes purpose. Genesis 2 describes process. Genesis 1 reveals our why. Why do we exist? Why are we special in creation? Genesis 2 gives us greater insight into God’s how. In Genesis 1 the power of God is front and center. In Genesis 2 the care of God is prominent. They both help us understand who we are as humans.

Genesis 1:24-31 teaches us that we are made in the image of God, according to His likeness. Humanity did not evolve from a lower life form. We were created by a higher life form.

Animals can only reproduce more of their kind. When two fish mate, you get a fish. When two birds mate, you get a bird. When two elephants mate, you get an elephant. When two chimpanzees mate, you get a chimpanzee. Fish don’t make birds. Birds don’t make elephants. Elephants don’t make chimps and chimps don’t make people. God made the fish, the birds, the elephants, the chimps, and the people.

In creating humanity, God distinguished us from the rest of creation. Up until the creation of man, God created by saying, “Let there be; Let the waters; Let the earth...” When God created man, God engaged in divine deliberation. In a conversation with Himself, God said, “Let Us make man...”

The conversation could have gone like this. “When I make man, I am going to give man what no other created being has. I am going to do for man what I did not do for the animals of the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle of the field, the creatures that creep on the ground or the beasts of the earth. I am going to make man in My image, according to my likeness.”

This was the first NIL agreement (Name, image, likeness). God named us, and created us in His image, according to His likeness. God distinguished us from the rest of creation in our form and in our function. We have a supremely higher level of reasoning than any other species. We create language and societies. We admire the wonders of nature and create artistic masterpieces. God designed us to imitate our Creator.

It is in the context of being created in the image of God that we learn that God created humanity male and female. God blessed the coming together, the union of male and female. You will not find God bringing together and blessing the union of any other combination besides male and female. There is no other combination that is able to be fruitful and multiply.

In making us in His image, God gave us dominion. Both male and female are image bearers and both are responsible for governing creation. We were put on earth to rule over God’s creation. We were given the charge to care for and cultivate the land. Dominion carries not just power, but responsibility. In having earthly dominion, we were given the responsibility to steward, oversee, and manage creation and maintain order.

Psalms 115:16 states, “The heavens are the heavens of the LORD, but the earth He has given to the sons of men.” The earth is a gift to us from God and our responsibility to God. Concern for the environment is not a partisan issue. It is a stewardship issue as those who bear God’s image and are given the managerial duties of preservation and cultivation. We have a responsibility to care for what God created.

When God made us in His image, He made us for relationship with God. In Genesis 2:28 God spoke to Adam and Eve. There was communication between God and humanity. God doesn’t just speak about us, God speaks to us. Only humanity is

invited to reason and enter into relationship with the Lord (Isaiah 1:18).

Genesis 2:4-9 teaches us that we are formed by the hand of God. In Genesis 2 we have the phrase “The LORD God” or YHWH Elohim. Throughout Genesis 1 Elohim is the creator. He is the supernatural being who created and rules over the universe.

YHWH, rendered by the all caps “LORD” in our translations, refers to the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Israel. It is the name by which God enters into covenant.

The One who create the same One who desires a covenant relationship with humanity. The LORD, YHWH, is God.

God formed us from dust. When we hear the word dust, we typically think of it being dry dirt. But the description is closer to clay. God is the potter who shapes, sculpts and molds man.

It is He who made us and not we ourselves. The fact is that God did not stop forming when He made Adam. “Form” in Genesis 2 is the same word found in Jeremiah 1:5, where God tells the prophet Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.” God continues to form and shape us in the womb. God took special care to make you who you are.

We were made out of the dust from the ground (v. 9, 19). We are connected to creation, yet distinct from creation. While everything that lives and grows came from the ground, only man is said to come from the dust from the ground. God chose to make us from the very substance that supports our existence. It is from the ground that the plants and trees sprout. From the ground that the herds and livestock graze.

Being made from the dust from the ground does not make us insignificant. It is a reminder of our significance, because the ground is essential to the sustaining of life. Being formed from dust also reminds us of the superiority of God. Though we are made in the image of God we are not God, for God did not have to be made (see Isaiah 64:8).

Being formed from dust also reminds us of the fragility of life (Read Psalm 103:13-16). The Lord’s fatherly love for us is demonstrated time and time again. He knows everything about His children, including our limitations and deficiencies. He is not

ignorant of or surprised by our failure. He knows what we are made of and deals with us according to His knowledge of us and concern for us.

In addition to being made in the image of God and formed by the hand of God, we also live by the breath of God. The LORD God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life. This denotes intimacy.

Not only did God make us, He gave of Himself to us. He gave us His image and gave us His breath. We come from the dust of the ground. Yet we live because the divine, sovereign Creator who desires a covenant relationship with us breathed His breath into us.

In humanity, both flesh and spirit are brought together. In humanity, both earth and heaven are represented. In humanity, both now and eternity are present. In humanity, both the physical world and the spiritual world are experienced. Though it is our lungs, it is God's breath that fills them (Job 27:3). It is the breath of God that gives us life. Even though sin eventually broke the fellowship that humanity had with the LORD God, God continued to give us the breath of life.

When we attempt to live life without God, we come to realize the emptiness of existence without purpose. The human spirit cries out for the Spirit of God. The God who continues to give us breath has provided a way for us to experience new life. It is the Spirit of God that gives us eternal life. We live by the breath of God.

Genesis 2:7 is the first time it is mentioned that God breathed. But it wouldn't be the last time. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 states, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." The word inspired means God breathed. God breathed out His word so that we could live out His word. In John 6:63 Jesus states, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." We have new life in the Spirit of God. We live by the breath of God and have new life

through the Spirit of God. So we should live our lives for the glory of God.

You can find your identity in Christ Jesus. If you believe the gospel message about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, you can be saved. Be willing repent, to confess Jesus as Lord and be baptized, and you can have a new identity in Christ Jesus.

Reflection Questions

Why do you think there are so many questions about identity in our world today?

What is the significance to you about being made in the image of God?

Lesson 3

Fierce in the Face of Fear

Lesson Text: Matthew 10:24-31

Self-preservation is among the most natural and basic instincts of humans. We do what it takes to protect ourselves. When we hear anything that sounds like a gunshot, whether it is a car backfiring, a fire cracker going off or a balloon popping, it is not uncommon to flinch and look around to see if we need to take cover. Self-preservation is natural.

However, there is a select group of men and women who are trained to do what doesn't come natural. The members of the US Secret Service are trained to suppress the innate instinct of self-preservation in order to preserve the life of their protectees. Instead of running away from the threat, they run to the threat. When there is gunfire, instead of crouching and taking cover, the secret service agents make themselves bigger to provide a shield of protection for the president or any other protectee. They are willing to sacrifice self-preservation and take actions that can cost them their lives.

The call of a secret service agent is not all that different from the call of a disciple of Christ. As followers of Christ, we too should be willing to sacrifice self-preservation, for it is only in being willing to lose our life that we find it (Matthew 10:39).

In Matthew 10, Jesus is sending the 12 apostles out to do ministry. As He sends them He provides them with instructions and sets expectations for what they will encounter as His followers. The words of Jesus provide us with insight into our identity as disciples and as humans. In Christ we can be fierce in the face of fear.

Don't fear what people may say about you (Read Matthew 10:24-27).

Jesus told His disciples to expect people to talk about them because people talked about Jesus. We are not above Christ. We are not better than Jesus. We are His students and servants.

Don't think you are above persecution. Don't think that you won't face opposition because of your relationship to Christ. We often give up too easily because we don't expect life to be hard. We feel like there are certain things that we should not experience because we are saved. The opposite is actually true. We should expect certain challenges because we are members of the family of God.

Don't be surprised when cancel culture tries to cancel the church. Don't be shocked when others find Christianity offensive. Don't be surprised by the hypocrisy of a world that preaches tolerance, yet is intolerant of Biblical values. If they talked about, criticized Jesus, and even demonized Jesus, how much more will the world do it to us.

You should expect people to talk behind your back. You should expect spiritually immature religious people to misunderstand and malign you. Expect people to plot against you and throw shade your direction. Expect opposition.

Expect opposition, but don't fear the opposition. Fear makes us run. Don't run from the opposition. Walk in boldness, not fear. Jesus says, "Do not fear them."

God sees and hears what happens in secret and will bring it to light. People may scheme against you, but the scheme will be made known. They may have a secret meeting about you, but God will make sure that the notes from their secret meeting become public. God has attended every meeting and has heard every conversation. He will expose their plots and will bless you with insight and knowledge into their plans.

Don't let fear silence you. Don't let fear of opposition keep you from sharing the message of the gospel. Don't keep the word of God a secret. Speak openly. Speak boldly. Speak confidently. Speak powerfully. Do not fear what people may say about you.

Don't fear what people may do to you (Matthew 10:28-31).

Jesus does not tell His disciples that people will not harm us. He is telling us not to be afraid of the harm that people may do to us. We are more than body. We are also soul. Though people can kill the body, they cannot kill the soul. Don't fear what people may do to you.

Death was the threat that the early followers of Jesus faced. It is still a threat and a reality in many parts of the world today. People are killed because they are Christians. But that is not a major concern in America today.

While we don't live with the fear of death for our faith, we still live with fear because of our faith. We live with the fear of disruption and disturbance. We fear losing our jobs. We fear what speaking about Jesus will do to our opportunities for promotion and advancement. We fear the social ramifications of being too public with our faith. We fear how sharing our faith will affect our status and standing. We forget that God gave us the status and standing to be used for His glory. We tend to worry about the very things that Jesus tells us not to worry about.

We often fear what Jesus has said not to fear. Life is more than physical and material. We have a body, but we also have a soul. God placed eternity within us. The part of you that makes you you cannot die. Death is not the end of us. Death is the separation of the soul from the body (Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:4).

In the resurrection, there will be the uniting of soul to our heavenly bodies. The essence of who we are is not our body, it is our soul. Don't be so focused on the body that you neglect the soul. People can only reach and kill the body, so don't fear them. Instead, have a reverence (fear) of the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

To "destroy both body and soul in hell" does not mean that a person will cease to exist. It means that the person would live a worthless existence. It means the loss of well-being; not the loss of

being. Jesus is speaking of the destruction of all that makes for a rich and meaningful life.

Hell is a real place. Those who are destroyed in hell still exist, yet their existence is one of eternal destruction, ruin, torment, pain, and suffering. Even though hell is real, don't live your life in fear of hell. Live life in fear of God. It's the people who don't fear God who need to fear hell. Those who fear God don't need to fear anything or anyone else.

Obedience to God may cost us our livelihood or our lives, but that is nothing to be afraid of. Though obedience to God may cost us our lives, disobedience to God can cost us our souls. Once this life is over, there is still more living to be done. So, live this life like you are going to live again. Live so that regardless of what happens to the body, it will be well with your soul. God alone is to be feared.

Learn from the sparrow. Sparrows were one of the cheapest items sold for poor people's food in the marketplace. Two were sold for one cent or assarion. An assarion was 1/16 of a denarius. A denaris was a day's wage. Sparrows were cheap. They were of so little value that you couldn't just buy one, you had to get two for your assarion. They are deemed as cheap and insignificant.

Yet God sees them. God cares about them. God takes care of them. Though people don't value them, God does. God is not so busy running the universe that he has no time for little birds. If He cares about the sparrow, how much more does He care for us. God cares too much to neglect us. God is not so busy being God that He cannot take the time to be our Father.

Even the seemingly insignificant pieces of information about us matter to your Father. If God is interested in the smallest of His created beings, He is also interested in the smallest details of the people He has made in His own image. Not only does God have power in the world to come, God cares about and has power in this world as well.

Don't fear life because God is our Father and as our Father He takes care of His children. You can be fierce in the face of fear because you have a Father who cares and who can.

Reflection Questions

Think about a time when you remained silent when you feel you should have spoken and about a time when you did speak up. What led you to speak up in one situation and not the other? What might this reveal about some of your fears?

What are some of the truths in this lesson that you find challenging to fully embrace?

Lesson 4

Look at God!

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

In the process of getting to know people, we share information about ourselves. We share pieces of information like occupation, education, family composition, interests, and hobbies. For many of us, our occupation and credentials have become synonymous with our identity.

Often people struggle to redefine themselves once they retire or no longer have the executive position with the corner office. There is a great degree of status that comes from matriculating at prestigious schools, having impressive job titles, earning a 6 figure salary, obtaining advanced degrees, and having letters behind your name.

Someone from ancient Corinth would feel right at home in America today. They, too, placed a high value placed on education, wisdom, influence, wealth and pedigree. Status was everything. It was all about who you knew and who knew you.

There is a swelling of pride and a boosting of the ego that comes with achievement and acquisition. We enjoy being able to say, "Look at me. Check me out." For many, status is everything.

There is nothing inherently wrong with status. But it matters where we get our status. As Christians, we have status. However, our status does not come from our accomplishments, achievements, and accolades. We cannot boast, "Look at me." Our boast is, "Look at God."

Paul calls on the members of the church at Corinth to remember where they came from so that they can truly appreciate where they are. The church at Corinth was made up primarily of ordinary people. Most of them did not have standing and status in the community. They did not have impressive resumes according to human standards.

Paul says, “Consider your calling.” When you think about where your life was before you obeyed the gospel compared to where you are now, you can say, “Started from the bottom, now we’re here.” God doesn’t wait until we become somebody before He invites us to be part of the body of Christ. God doesn’t judge us by the world’s standards. You don’t have to be wise by the world’s standards to be called by God. You don’t have to be on a Forbes’ list of top executives or richest people to be chosen by God. You don’t have to already be somebody for God to invite you to have a seat at His table.

God doesn’t call us because the world thinks we are somebody. He calls us to make us somebody. We don’t have to be well educated, influential, powerful, have political clout, or come from a wealthy family to be welcomed into God’s family. And even if we have the pedigree, pull, and popularity that is impressive to the world, they do not define who we are in the sight of God. God has flipped the script so that no one can brag in His presence. Intellectual prowess, political pull, and social position are not necessary qualifications to be chosen by God.

When we take everything that we would typically brag about and bring it before God, it is as if God looks at it and says, “I’m not impressed because that’s not the standard.” God makes all that the world would define as success irrelevant so that we find our identity in Christ. God desires sincere seekers. God wants true worshippers (see John 4:23).

Jeremiah 9:23-24 states, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the LORD.”

It is our relationship with God that makes us who we are. You may know dignitaries or be an expert in your field, but do you know God, His nature, His character, His love? Our identity is not

to be found in the world, in its wisdom, power, or riches. It is to be found in Christ. I am somebody in Christ!

And although I am somebody in Christ, I still can't brag on myself, I have to say, "Look at God!" For it is by God's doing we are in Christ Jesus.

In Christ we are more.

By placing us in Christ, God has called us to a level that we could not obtain on our own. In Christ we are more than we could ever be outside of Christ. In Christ, we are alive to God (Romans 6:11); we are new (2 Corinthians 5:17); we are near to God (Ephesians 2:13); we triumph (2 Corinthians 2:14)! Even if others dismiss you and discount you, God has plans for you!

God has a way of using the overlooked and looked over, and elevating them to places that the world doesn't think they belong. We see examples like Israel, David, and Jephthah throughout scripture. When the hand of God is on your life, the people who kicked you out are the same people who will come looking for you to lead them.

God uses unlikely people to do extraordinary things. Just ask the apostles. They were ordinary men with less than desirable professions. They were smelly fisherman and despised tax collectors. You wouldn't draft them in the first round if you were building a championship team. You would scroll right past their resume on Indeed. You would not send them an invitation to connect on Linked In. Yet Jesus saw something in them and used them to turn the world upside down (see Acts 4:5-14).

Amazing things happen when you have been with Jesus. God will put you in rooms that others don't think you are qualified to be in. He will bless you with influence that others don't think you should have. He can give you the job that makes others say, "How did she get that opportunity?" God can give you a confidence and a calling that is greater than your credentials. But once people hear you speak and see you work, they say, "I get it

now.” “There is something special about him.” “She’s an incredible talent.” “They have the intangibles; that it factor.” Proverbs 18:16 puts it this way: “A man’s gift makes room for him and brings him before great men.”

God does not leave us how he found us. He makes us more in Christ. He is the God of the upgrade. Wherever you were before you were in Christ, God wants to take you higher. In Christ we are wiser, stronger, and more significant. In Christ we are more!

In Christ we have more.

Christ is our wisdom from God. In Christ we have wisdom. This wisdom is evident in the righteousness, sanctification, and redemption that is in Christ. In Christ we have what we could never have in the world.

In Christ we have been declared righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21). In Christ we have been sanctified, holy, qualified to be used by God (1 Corinthians 1:2). In Christ we have redemption (Romans 3:24). In Christ we have the grace of God (1 Corinthians 1:4), the blessing of Abraham (Galatians 3:14), every spiritual blessing in heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3), and God’s riches in glory (Philippians 4:19). In Christ we have more.

We have more than the world has. We have more peace than the world. Those in Christ have a peace that surpasses human understanding. We have indescribable joy. We have hope, both in this life and in the life to come. We have blessings that the world didn’t give and the world can’t take away.

In Christ we have something to brag about. But we can’t brag about what we have without bragging on the One who gave it to us. We must say, “Look at God!”

By God’s doing we are in Christ. It is He that has made us and not we ourselves. It’s like this: I’ve got it, but the only reason I have it is because God gave it to me. We wouldn’t have it if God didn’t give it. He gave us the education, skills, ability, influence, and platform! Look at God!

In Christ, I am all that God says I am. In Christ, all of the promises of God are yes (2 Corinthians 1:20). If you are not in Christ, you need to be in Christ because in Christ you can be more than you could ever be without Him.

You may be wondering, "How do you get into Christ?" Galatians 3:27 states, "For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ."

If you want to get into Christ, you must be baptized into Christ. Baptism is the proper response to faith in Christ and a commitment to Him. If you would like more information on salvation or the church, please contact us at (214) 941-2531 or through our website: marsalisavenuecoc.org.

Reflection Questions

How do you answer the question, "Who are you?"

What are some insights gained from this lesson regarding your identity?

What are some of the benefits of finding your identity in God?

Lesson 5 This Is Us

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Typically, as we contemplate identity, the questions that are asked are individualistic in nature. “Who am I?” “Why am I here?” “What am I supposed to be doing?”

These are relevant probing questions. However, I cannot restrict my sense of identity to who I am as an individual. In addition to who I am, there is a shared collective identity that defines who we are. You are you and I am me, but together, this is us.

God has called me, yet He has called me to be a part of the “we”. Being in Christ involves being in community. Being in Christ connects you to everyone else who is in Christ. God has called you to be part of a people.

Throughout scripture we see that God deals with and is concerned about groups of people. Even when God speaks to or calls a person, God does so with a people in mind. God spoke to Abraham that through Abraham all nations would be blessed. God spoke to Moses. And because God was concerned about the children of Israel, He told Moses to go to Pharaoh and tell him, “The LORD says, ‘Let My people go.’” Though God moved through Samson, He raised up Samson in order to deliver the nation of Israel. God sent Jesus because He loved the entire world. Those who are in Christ have a collective identity!

Even when scripture highlights our individual uniqueness, it does so in the context of community. Romans 12:4-5: “For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

You have a role and function but that role and function is not separate and apart from the rest of the people who make up the body of Christ. The individual cannot be separated from the whole.

Collectively, we are in Christ and individually we are connected to one another. Part of my identity, then, is a shared identity with other believers in Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Paul is speaking to the congregation in Corinth. The word “you” in these verses is plural. The Texas version then says, “Don’t y’all know that y’all are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in y’all?”

When Paul says, “Do you not know...” he is sharing a truth that the church should know but the evidence suggests that they don’t know it because if they knew it then they would be living like they knew it. Collectively, we are a temple of God. The truth is that all of you (plural) are a temple of God (singular). The emphasis is on the fact that collectively, we are a temple of God. We are not each our own separate temple of God disconnected from the other temples.

Collectively, we must embrace in our innermost being who we know that we are in Christ. We can know truth. However, we often know more truth than we live. When we say, “I know, but...” we really don’t know like we ought to know.

God is calling us to live our truth. I did not say that God is calling you to live your truth or me to live my truth. God is calling us to live our truth. And if we really want to experience freedom and empowerment, we must let God’s truth be our truth. Our truth is that we are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in us.

It is difficult to truly appreciate being a temple of God without knowing something about the temple in the Jerusalem. The temple was planned by David to be a structure to house the ark of the covenant. It would replace the tent where the ark was being housed. David wanted to build the temple, but God told him that he had too much blood on his hands to build it. So, David left the plans and materials so that Solomon could build it.

The temple was located in Jerusalem. That means that if you wanted to go to the temple, you had to go to Jerusalem.

Second Chronicles 2:4-9 teaches that the temple was for God, but was not the totality of God. It was made from the best materials. It was designed to show God how much the people valued Him. The glory of the Lord filled the temple. God approved of the temple as a special place where His presence would be experienced.

In the Jewish faith, there were times when the Israelites were expected to journey to Jerusalem and worship in the temple. There was the expectation that God would meet his people in a special way during those pilgrimages to the temple. The temple was God's chosen place for His name.

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul reminds the church at Corinth that they are a temple of God. There is a decentralization of the temple. The manifest presence of God is no longer restricted to a structure in Jerusalem. God has chosen for His presence to dwell, not in a place, but in a people. The church is the people within whom God has chosen for an expression of His glory to dwell. Like the physical structure that was the temple, we cannot contain the fullness of God. However, we possess His Spirit and reflect His glory.

As a temple of God, we are holy. To be the community in which God makes His dwelling implies separation from the ungodly. As a temple of God, what goes on in the church should be different from the sin that goes on in the world. When the church is gathered, whether in worship, in fellowship or in ministry, those who are among us should experience the presence of God in a way that it cannot be experienced elsewhere.

As a temple of God there is also sacrifice. In the temple in Jerusalem, animals were sacrificed on the altar. As a temple of God, the church is also to offer sacrifices to God (see Romans 12:1). We are to be living sacrifices. We make God's will our priority. We are willing to die to self so that we can live for God. We dedicate our lives to serving God and live transformed lives that do not conform

to the ways of the world. That's the least that we can do in appreciate of our salvation.

We offer praise, adoration and thanksgiving to God. The redeemed of the Lord say so. We share our resources and serve others. We look for opportunities to do good. We are a temple of God! The Spirit of God dwells in us.

We are a different kind of people because we have a different kind of Spirit. The Spirit of God occupies the temple of God. All of those who have been baptized into Christ possess the Spirit of God. It is by the Spirit of God that we have unity in the body of Christ. We are to be separated from the world; not separated from each other. It is the Spirit of God that brings about a spiritual fellowship. It is only as church members fellowship with the Spirit of God can we be drawn and bound together in a spirit of unity, oneness, and love.

God protects His temple. Those who would destroy it will be held accountable by God. Don't do harm to the church. Don't damage God's temple. An attitude of disgust, a spirit of ill will, an unwillingness to learn—grumbling, griping, complaining, quarreling, arguing, divisiveness—destroy the spiritual fellowship of the church.

We can work through our differences by heeding the word of God and yielding to the Spirit of God. When we allow the Spirit of God to work within us, our differences won't divide us.

The spirit of God builds up the temple of God by producing His fruit within us. This is us. God has given us our identity, we just need to embrace that identity. The world will not define who we are as Christians. We are not hypocrites, homophobic, or out of touch. We are a temple of God. It is time for us to live our truth and speak our truth. We are a people of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We are the light of the world, the salt of the earth, and a city on a hill that cannot be hidden. THIS IS US!

Reflection Questions

How does having an awareness of our collective identity affect how Christians treat one another?

How does the temple metaphor relate to the church today?

What would you say to those who believe that the church is not important?

Lesson 5 Be a Light

Lesson Text: Ephesians 5:6-14

Did you grow up in a house where your family kept the bathroom light on at night? The light served a few purposes. It served as a night light so that children who are afraid of the dark would not be in total darkness. Additionally, in the event that you had to get up in the middle of the night, you would have enough light to keep you from bumping into things. And of course, the light would let you see where the restroom was.

When you stay at a hotel, you may still leave the bathroom light on so that you can find your way to the bathroom in the middle of the night without bumping into anything in a unfamiliar place. Light eliminates darkness and illuminates our path.

In scripture, that which is of God is light and that which is not of God is darkness. God Himself is characterized as light (1 John 1:5). In John 1:5, Jesus is described as light. Paul picks up this theme of light in Ephesians 5.

The church at Ephesus was a primarily gentile church. That means that those in the church were first generation Christians. They did not grow up with Christian parents or in a home where they attended religious services in the Jewish synagogue. Prior to becoming Christians, they lived in darkness. They were used to darkness. But then were exposed to the light. They heard the gospel and obeyed the gospel. Once they obeyed the gospel, they became light.

Did you catch that? They were exposed to the Light, they believed in the Light, Jesus Christ, and were baptized into Christ, who is the Light. And now they are light because they are in Christ, the Light.

God wants us to know that we are light. It's not just that we are in the light, we are the light. You used to be in darkness. In

fact, you were in so much darkness that you were darkness. But now you are light in the Lord. You have a new identity. You don't just have a light, you are a light. So don't allow yourself to be fooled into believing that somehow light can be darkness or that darkness can emit light.

Here is the reality of being light. The conversion takes place within you, not around you. That means that though you have changed, there are people and places around you that have not changed. The temptation is to go back to the familiar.

We cannot allow ourselves to be deceived by empty words. Those in darkness promise, but are unable to deliver. We cannot embrace the message of the disobedient as if it is the message of light.

Ephesians 5:6 teaches us not to be deceived; because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience. "These things" refer to what is mentioned in verse 3-6. The explanations and rationalizations of the world are insufficient to justify living in sin. Those who live in sexual immorality, impurity, and greed will not have an inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and God.

We cannot rationalize sin enough to make it light or make it right. Darkness cannot remain in darkness and somehow be light. Lifestyle matters. Obedience matters. Holiness matters.

Ephesians 3:6 says that we are coheirs, members of the same body, and partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Ephesians 5:7 says don't be partners with the disobedient. We are to be examples of light, not partners with darkness. As partners in the promise in Christ Jesus we cannot be partners in the sins of the world. We are to be an example to the world. We do not isolate ourselves from the world. That would mean hiding our light. We don't hide our light. We shine our light. We exist in the world, yet are different from the world.

When scripture tells us that we should not be partners with those in the world who live in disobedience it is not saying that we

are to avoid being around people who are not Christians. We are to distinguish ourselves from the world, not distance ourselves from the world.

Do you know why Jesus was able to eat with sinners and still remain sinless? It is because He never stopped being light. The purpose of light is to eliminate darkness. If I only shine when I am around other lights, then I am not fulfilling my purpose. You don't just have a light, you are a light, which means that the environment does not change who you are.

The darker the environment, the more noticeable the light is. You should expect to stick out. You should expect to be noticed. The problems you are having on your job may be because darkness is bothered by light. Your family members may have left you off of the invitation list for the Christmas party because you shine too brightly for them. The solution is not to turn off your light. The solution is to keep shining. Walk as children of light.

Live out your new identity. Remember that you are in Christ and since you are in Christ, you are light, so do what light does and shine! Don't cuss them out, shine. Don't get drunk with them, shine. Don't engage in sexual immorality, impurity, or greed, shine!

We walk as children of light by learning what is pleasing to the Lord. We are examining and evaluating issues, ideas, and situations in order to determine the right course of action. When we make pleasing God our focus, we will always walk in the light. We must be active participants in seeking the will of God.

Study the word. Pray for wisdom. Ask questions. Ask, "Is what I am doing or what I want to do reflective of light?" In other words, "Is this what light does?" God wants us to approve what He approves.

The text reminds us that being light has its benefits (v. 9). Light produces fruit in our lives. That fruit includes goodness, righteousness, and truth. A light that illuminates will give off

goodness, righteousness, and truth. When we check the fruit of our lives and we should see goodness, righteousness and truth.

Truth, righteousness, goodness are not one thing in one age and another thing in another age. One of the greatest lies of our time is that goodness and righteousness are irrelevant and that truth is relative. What is good, right and true do not change because God's standard does not change. The only progress possible is to enter more deeply into these three.

Light produces fruit. However, darkness produces nothing. Nothing healthy grows in darkness. Darkness means activity without productivity. The works of darkness are ultimately a waste of time because they do not have lasting value. They do not produce the results that are desired in life.

As light, we can't help but expose darkness for what it is. When light produces goodness, righteousness, and truth, then evil, unrighteousness and lies become apparent. Light exposes sin for what it is, but we don't have to give sin more press than it deserves.

Those whose secret sins are exposed experience a level of shame due to the exposure. They are ashamed before people when their sin is exposed, although they were not ashamed before God who saw what was being done in secret. Guard your heart and the hearts of others by not sensationalizing the sins of others. The goal of exposure is not embarrassment, but repentance. God often allows secret sins to be exposed in order to awaken the conscience of the one in sin.

Darkness hides the ugly realities of evil; the light makes them visible. In light evil is seen for what it is without any possibility of concealment. The exposure to light not only reveals, it can also transform. Light transforms what it illumines into light.

As you shine, you help bring others out of darkness so that they can become light. Your light has evangelistic power. It may bring people, as they see the ugliness of evil, to conviction of their sin and a repentant faith in Jesus. Don't doubt the power of the

gospel. Don't think that light cannot transform darkness because that is our testimony.

We were darkness but now we are light. We are proof positive that your past doesn't have to be your future. We are the evidence that people can change. We have been transformed by the Light, Jesus Christ, and now we are light.

To all who are darkness, there is hope. So "awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine in you!" The realities of sleep, death, and darkness are transformed into awareness, life, and light because of Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

Why do you think so many Christians continue to live in darkness after obeying the gospel?

In what ways has your walk with God changed over the last few years?

How can this lesson impact the way we share the gospel and think of evangelism?

About the Marsalis Avenue Church of Christ

We pray that this study has been a blessing to your life. If you are in the Dallas area, we invite you to come and experience the power of connection at the Marsalis Avenue Church of Christ!

Connect to God

We worship because God is worthy! We believe that worship connects heaven and earth. As we worship God in spirit and in truth, it is our prayer that even the unbeliever among us *will bow down before God and worship Him, declaring, "God is really among you."* (1 Corinthians 14:25)

Connect to the Church

Brother and sister are not merely terms of respect; these words define our relationship with each other. We are family and as God's family we have fellowship. Through our worship, Bible classes, ministries, connection groups and more, we connect to one another.

Connect to the World

The Marsalis Avenue Church of Christ seeks to glorify God by making a difference in our community. We find opportunities to impact lives through ministry and community focused activities like our Family Conference, Community Fair, working with area schools, and providing counseling and life management skills.

To obtain copies of other editions of *Real Life Studies*, contact the Marsalis Avenue Church of Christ at 214-941-2531 or marsalisavenuecoc.org. Other studies include: *Defeating Family Dysfunction; In Times Like These; Help for Our Hurts; Unstuck; Money Wise*, and *From Stress to Success*. You can find additional resources at our website, marsalisavenuecoc.org, and on our YouTube Channel, Marsalis Avenue COC.



We are continuously striving to be a God focused, Christ imitating, and Holy Spirit filled household of faith that is multicultural and intergenerational.

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