



The Seven: Identity

November 19 | Weekly Devotionals

Day 1: Fully Known & Fully Loved

Who are you? Not a question we'd like to be asked early on in a new relationship. We're comfortable with "what do you do?" and other pleasantries, but the question of "who we are" requires a more substantial answer.

This week we'll be discussing our church's fifth priority: *identity*.

So many things compete to find their way into the fabric of our identity. Sometimes the message is "I am what I do" or "I am what I have." Other times it's "I am who others say I am" or even "I am who I say I am." Our culture, life experiences, and the messages we received along the way all contribute to the way we view and ultimately define ourselves. Maybe one of these messages resonates more deeply than the others. Maybe they all have a voice.

All of us long to be fully known, to be told we have value, to be loved as we are, but underneath it all, we fear it might never happen. So, we parade around, silently begging for the approval of others or trying to convince ourselves that we really don't care — when we really do. We produce and perform, doing our song and dance, hoping someone will really see us, all while fearing we might never be known, valued, and loved at all.

We wrestle with belonging. We fear we aren't enough and never will be. We fear failure because if we fail, then who are we? We grapple with putting forth enough effort to be

valuable in God's eyes, as though we have to earn his love. The enemy whispers that it's impossible for us to be loved in our broken state. He hisses, "You're not worth anything." *And we believe it.* We may believe God knows us, but it's difficult to imagine God actually knowing us and loving us anyway. It seems too good to be true.

But it *is* true. God made a way for us to step off the stage. We no longer have to live afraid. The God of the universe knows you fully and delights in how he made you. You are the beloved of God — fully known and fully loved.

Read these words by Henri Nouwen in his book, *Life of the Beloved*:

"Aren't you like me, hoping that some person, thing, or event will come along to give you that final feeling of inner well-being you desire? Don't you often hope: 'May this book, idea, course, trip, job, country, or relationship fulfill my deepest desire.' But as long as you are waiting for that mysterious moment you will go on running helter-skelter, always anxious and restless, always lustful and angry, never fully satisfied. You know that this is the compulsiveness that keeps us going and busy, but at the same time makes us wonder whether we are getting anywhere in the long run. This is the way to spiritual exhaustion and burn-out. This is the way to spiritual death.

Well, you and I don't have to kill ourselves. We are the Beloved. We are intimately loved long before parents, teachers, spouses, children, and friends loved or wounded us. That's the truth of our lives."

Today we're going to sit with the truth found in Psalm 139. This may be a passage you've heard before and it may be a brand-new Scripture for you. Either way, take a moment to invite God to show you something new about your identity in the words you read today.

Throughout the Psalms you will see the word *selah* printed in your Bible. The Psalms were a songbook of sorts for God's people. This word indicated a place where, as you read the text, you would take a pause or a break.

As you read through this text, take a *selah* or a short pause between each stanza or paragraph as it's listed in your Bible. Ask God to show you what he'd like to say to you through the passage.

Read Psalm 139:1-16.

Questions for reflection:

- How do you feel as you read this text? Is it easy to believe God loves you even though he knows you so well?
- What do you think about God knowing you the way this Psalm describes?
- How is God inviting you to think differently about your identity from this passage?

Allow these questions to dig under the surface a bit. Invite God to show you what's underneath.

Take one last *selah* or pause, inviting God's presence to anchor you in this moment. Thank him for his love, grace, and the truth that you are the beloved of God.

Day 2: The Cure for Sinners, part 1

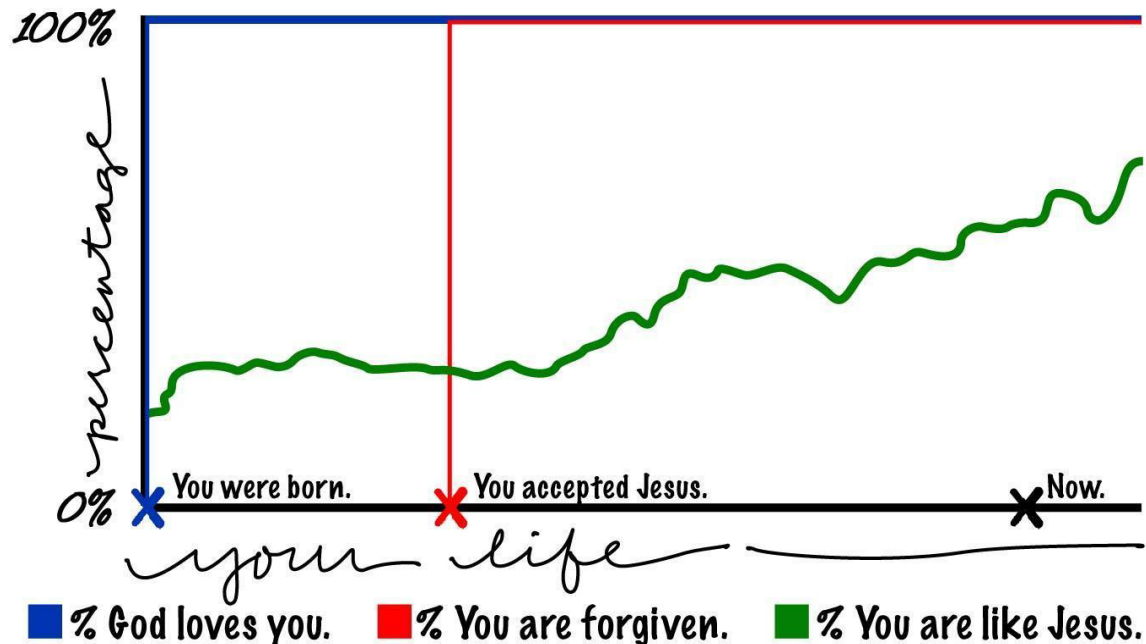
As we're building a complete picture of our identity, it's important to understand that our identity is a double-sided coin. Just like we discovered yesterday, we are God's beloved. He knows us intimately and deeply loves us. This truth is woven throughout the Bible. At the same time, however, we must be honest about the part sin plays in our identities. We are both the beloved *and* sinners in desperate need of a Savior. Today we're going to look at how sin plays a role in our identities.

Our culture's system of economics says we should get what we deserve, be paid whatever wages we have earned. The book of Romans tells us we have earned death because of our sin (Romans 6:23). This is where God's economy differs from ours. He exchanges the life of his son simply because of the worth he sees in us, because of his love for us. Christ demonstrates his love for us by dying in a heinous manner while we are still sinners (Romans 5:8). He went to the cross knowing we would choose sin. *Love held him there*. Understanding why he would do it is difficult. We don't love that way, but God does.

God gave us a gift of grace, unmerited favor. We do not deserve forgiveness or acceptance, but God gives it anyway. It is a free gift, available to all who believe in Jesus. We are saved by his grace, not by anything we have ever done (Ephesians 2:8). *Nothing* we can do will ever erase our sin and shame. Our sin can *only* be covered by the blood of Christ.

We regularly confuse God's level of love, acceptance, and forgiveness toward us with our rate of growth as we come to look more like Jesus. We misunderstand, thinking they are somehow dependent upon one another. They are not. This mix-up leads to confusion and prevents us from understanding how God loves us.

Take a look at this explanation:



Notice the blue line measuring God's love for us. Before you were born, out of love, God knit you together (Psalm 139). You bear his image and his likeness. When he formed you, he loved you. Before you were even born. Before you took a breath. Before you sinned and then even when you did. There is nothing you could ever do to make God love you more. There is nothing you could ever do to make God love you less. Ever. That line is non-negotiable. It's not up to us. It originates with a loving, gracious Father and is truly unconditional — not because we are lovable, but because it's God's nature to love (1 John 4:8).

God loves us, but sin forges a great chasm. Our holy God cannot be in the presence of sin. We need something — someone — to bridge the divide between a sinful people and a holy God. We need a cure. A cure that is two-fold is what God provides — a *double cure*. Today, we'll look at the first part of the two-sided cure and tomorrow we'll examine the second.

The first part of the cure we need is forgiveness. We need our sins erased and atoned for. Examine the line calculating our level of forgiveness. When we choose Jesus as Savior and surrender our lives to him, we jump from the 0 percent mark on the forgiven scale to the 100 percent mark on the scale — no stops along the way. The shift is drastic and radical. This forgiveness is only possible because of the cross.

There is no condemnation for those in Christ, only forgiveness, acceptance, love (Romans 8:1). His work on the cross takes away our sin and shame. Period. Nothing is

required on our part to receive forgiveness other than confessing we are sinners in need of a Savior and choosing to accept the gift of grace Jesus offers by being baptized into him. His pain covers our shame. Completely.

Read slowly through Ephesians 1:3-14.

What do you see about your identity as you read through this passage?

Read through the passage a second time. As you read, list out the words or phrases that define who you are and what you've been given in Christ. What do you notice about this list? Is it easy for you to live out?

Do you struggle with believing you've been 100% forgiven? Why or why not? What do you think about knowing you are 100% loved by God without any wavering on his part? Do you ever struggle to believe this truth? If so, how would your life change if you fully believed God loved you always?

Day 3: The Cure for Sinners, part 2

Yesterday we looked at how God loves us, how we are forgiven, and how we needed a double-cure for sin that God so lovingly provided. Today we will continue to dig into the second part of the cure for sin — *sanctification*.

Remember our graph from yesterday? Take a look at the squiggly, unpredictable green line. Notice its ups and downs. Do you see how there really is no pattern to it, no real rhyme or reason?

God desires to grow and change us. He longs for us to be formed into the image of Jesus. This line is the gradual, slow process moving us from our sinful state to looking more like Jesus. It measures our growth and spiritual maturity. This line is called *sanctification*, or the process of becoming holy — becoming more like Christ.

The problem we have, though, is we often mistake this unpredictable line for God's love and acceptance of us or our measure of forgiveness in Christ. It's not tied to either of those lines whatsoever.

When we measure our worth and forgiveness based on this line, we flirt with disaster. If we are moving in the right direction, we begin to think we are somehow more valuable than someone who might not be as far along as we are. We might judge them, elevating our own worth, allowing pride and self-righteousness to creep in. The opposite can also be true. If we believe others are further along in the journey, then we think we are somehow less valuable to God. Neither of these is true, and both are playgrounds for shame. Becoming more like Jesus is a slow journey with ups and downs. You can take steps forward and just as quickly spiral down again. All of us struggle in it. Sometimes we do it well, and other times, not so much. Basing our value and worth on this line will prove uncertain every time, leading us to an identity rooted in our performance and not in the love of God.

Sin is separation from God. Whatever your sin is, it separates you from God. God has no degrees of separation based on your offense; every single sin ever committed requires the exact same price to redeem it. No sin is exempt from needing the blood of Jesus to restore it. The same covering is required for us all.

Just as in the beginning when sin entered, God made a sacrifice and a covering for Adam and Eve; Jesus gave his life to cover you and remove completely the shame of your sin, once and for all (Hebrews 10:10). When we believe it takes our work and effort

to earn God's love, we begin to believe we had something to do with our redemption. "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it" (Ephesians 2:8-9). We cannot take credit for the grace we've been shown. God gifted grace. It's not a reward for good behavior. If it were, you better believe we'd all be thinking more about how great our performance was instead of how remarkable our God is. He is the source of it all, and we are the recipients of the gift.

Read Ephesians 2:1-13.

As you read, answer these questions.

What was your life like before Christ? What did it look like to be "dead in your transgressions...when you followed the ways of this world"?

When was the last time you felt the full weight of your sin, nailing Christ to the cross? In order to fully understand the gift we've been given as beloved sons and daughters of God, we must fully understand the weight of our sinful nature and what it did to Christ on the cross. Take a few moments to reflect on how Christ suffered to give you the gift of grace so freely. What is your response to that gift? Write a prayer to Jesus in response.

How do you view grace? Because of God's great love for you, you've been made alive in Christ. You've been forgiven, raised up with Christ, and seated with him. How do you feel in response to that truth?

If the definition of grace is "unmerited favor," how have you seen "unmerited favor" poured out by God into your life?

How does it change things knowing grace is a gift of God, something you cannot take credit for? Have you ever tried to take credit for your own salvation or tried to earn God's love or favor? What was that like?

What would you like to say to Jesus in response to this passage? Take a few moments to pray a prayer in response to Ephesians 2:1-13. You can even take a few moments to read through the passage again before you pray.

Day 4: Hidden in Christ

As we continue our conversation about identity, examining the truth Scripture gives, let's talk about an important word that contributes greatly in forming our identity in Christ.

Righteousness.

It's a word I'm sure you've heard before, but it may very well be difficult to explain to someone else.

Now, before you just put down your pen and Bible, quitting altogether, let's look at what Tim Keller has to say about this "churchy" word. I think you'll find it very interesting and vital to the priority we're discussing this week.

"Now the trouble with the word righteousness is, I'm a person (a regular American type), and when I think of the word righteousness, right away the first thing I think of is a stiff, starched shirt...That's not really it. In the Bible, the word righteousness is a relational word. It's a word that really means to be right with somebody. It means to be received. It means to find favor. It means to be welcomed, and the opposite of righteousness is not immorality. The opposite of righteousness is rejection."

Keller goes on to list examples of what this "rejection" looks like. He includes being dressed inappropriately for some official occasion. When you're wearing inappropriate attire, you feel naked, vulnerable, anxious. It seems as though you're not "right" with the host or the others at the event. Keller also uses the example of a job interview. At every job interview, they are looking at your attire, your references, your resume, the answers to your questions. They are looking at every little thing about you they can.

Ultimately what we need is a verdict. We want to know where we stand. Are we "right" with others? We're looking to others to find the answer and to give us a verdict.

Keller tells the danger of this others-referenced verdict:

"What happens is over the years, thousands and thousands and thousands of these verdicts are coming in, and they accumulate. As time goes on, you develop your own standards for what you believe will make you acceptable. You see, righteousness is a sense of being acceptable...It starts to come on in, and it

becomes part of that standard of righteousness...You can shrug off a lot of things people say, but over the years what your parents have said, what your friends have said, what those people who didn't want to marry you said, what those people who turned you down said, or the people who told you did a great job at the audition or in the contest or on the job application, all those things have sunk in, and you have come up with your own standards...This is what sin is. Sin is we will go and establish our own righteousness. We'll say, 'If I achieve that standard, if I can do that, then I know I exist. Then I know I'm acceptable in my own sight and in the sight of significant others and, in some general way, in the sight of God.' Everybody does that. Everybody has a set of standards. Everybody goes about seeking to establish their own righteousness."

Paul, of all people, had every right to brag about the standards his life met, but he had something to say about his own righteousness.

Read Philippians 3:3-11.

How do you respond to Keller's definition of righteousness as you read this passage?

Read through the passage again, putting yourself in the place of Paul. How do you "hustle" for your own righteousness? Where do you need to lay down seeking to establish your own righteousness and accept the righteousness you've been given in Christ?

Is there anywhere you need to be "made right" with God? Is there an area of sin in your life that needs to be confessed? Take a moment to bring it before our loving God, inviting his forgiveness — the gift that is already yours in Christ.

Read Philippians 3:3-11 one last time.

Spend time praying the words of this Scripture as you invite God to redefine your identity as the beloved in him.

Day 5: Who Does God Say I Am?

A big part of fighting and winning the battle with our identity comes in understanding who God says you *really* are. Knowing you belong to Christ and you are his own child brings a freedom no other truth can.

Take some time today to read through this list of statements and the scripture references rooting them in truth. Allow these truths to really soak into your soul. Ask yourself if you really believe this is true. Spend some time writing your responses to these truths under. Be honest with God. Be honest with yourself. You may be struggling to believe some of them. Tell him. Ask for help understanding what he says about who you are. Spend time thanking him for his word and his truth.

Who You Are In Christ:

Truth: I am a child of God.

Jesus came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:10-12 NLT).

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are (1 John 3:1a NIV)!

My Response:

Truth: I have been bought with a price. I belong to God.

You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NLT).

Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. Others were given in exchange for you. I traded their lives for yours because you are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you (Isaiah 43:1, 3-4 NLT).

My Response:

Truth: I have been adopted as God's child.

Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son (Ephesians 1:4-6 MSG).

My Response:

Truth: I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins.

For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins (Colossians 1:13-14 NLT).

My Response:

I am complete in Christ.

For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. So, you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority. For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead (Colossians 2:9-10, 12 NLT).

My Response:

Truth: *I cannot be separated from the love of God.*

I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39 NLT).

My Response:

Truth: *I have not been given a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, love, and a sound mind.*

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord...With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer for the sake of the Good News (2 Timothy 1:7-8 NLT).

My Response:

Truth: *I am God's workmanship and am wonderfully made.*

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago (Ephesians 2:10 NLT).

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (Psalms 139:13-16).

My Response:

Truth: *I may approach God with freedom and confidence.*

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence (Ephesians 3:12 NLT).

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16 NLT).

My Response:

Prayer for the Day: Choose your favorite truth statement and write a prayer thanking God for making it true in you. Which one is the most difficult to really believe? Write a prayer asking God to help you understand this truth about who you are.