IDENTITY:

The Beloved of God



True Christian discipleship is always a response to our true identity.

Personhood is not an accomplishment; it is a gift. Our true self – the self we are becoming in God – is something we receive from God. Any other identity is of our own making and is an illusion. Knowing ourselves must therefore begin by knowing the self that is known by God. Genuine self-knowledge begins by looking at God and noticing how God is looking at us.[1] – David Benner



- How do you respond to this quote? What challenges or encourages you about it?
- According to Benner, genuine self-knowledge begins with how God sees us. How does this shape your understanding of Christian discipleship?
- If you paused to consider how God is looking at you right now, what do you think He sees? How does that affect your sense of identity?

LOOK IN THE BIBLE: LUKE 3:21–4:13

3:21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized
and was praying, the heavens were opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him
in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved
Son; with you I am well pleased." 23 Jesus, when he began his ministry, was
about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of
Heli, 24 the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the
son of Joseph, 25 the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son
of Esli, the son of Naggai, 26 the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of
Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, 27 the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the
son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, 28 the son of Melchi, the son
of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, 29 the son of Joshua,
the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, 30 the son of
Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of
Eliakim, 31 the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son

of Nathan, the son of David, [32] the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, [33] the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, [34] the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, [35] the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, [36] the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, [37] the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, [38] the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God. [4:1] And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness [2] for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. [3] The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." [4] And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" [5] And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, [6] and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. [7] If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." [8] And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" [9] And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, [10] for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' [11] and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" [12] And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" [13] And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Read "Appendix 2: Inductive Bible Study" and follow the steps in the "Stages of Study." Take time to mark your observations, impressions, and questions in the space provided. In this first chapter, we will walk through these steps together:

- Begin with prayer for your time of study and for your heart as you approach God's word.
- Read the passage several times, slowly and attentively.
- Write down the context of the passage. What happens immediately before and after? Where does it fit within the overall message of Luke's Gospel?[2]
- Divide the passage into thought units and give each section a short descriptive title.
- Circle, mark, or underline your observations about the content of the passage:
    - Who are the major characters? What are their descriptions and activities?
    - What are the primary events? How are they described?
    - What Old Testament references or allusions appear? Read each reference in its original context and consider the connection with this passage. (Note: Deuteronomy 6:13–16; 8:3; Psalm 2:7; 91:11–12.)
    - Define any key concepts (for example, baptism[3]).
    - What literary connections do you notice that help you understand the author's message (repetition, comparison, conditional statements, images)?
    - Is there anything that seems unexpected or unusual in the passage?
- What is significant about Jesus' baptism and the events surrounding it?
- What is significant about the ways Satan tempts Jesus? In what ways are they temptations?
- What is significant about the way Jesus responds?
- Why do you think Luke includes the genealogy where he does?
- Summarize the main point of this passage in one or two sentences. What is God's personal word for you from this text, and how will you respond?

IDENTITY: THE BELOVED OF GOD

Mark the statements in the following section that impress you, that you have questions about, or that you want to discuss further.

A FATHER'S AFFIRMATION

When I was young, I "played" soccer. My dad wanted to spend time with me and thought this might be a way for us to bond and grow closer. He took me to all my team practices and games, and he even volunteered to be one of the assistant coaches. I was not very good (that's the reason for the quotation marks). I am not very athletic; I am also allergic

to grass and suffer from asthma. Honestly, I think my dad was more excited about the game than I was, but it gave us some father-son time every week.

The head coach had pity on me and let me play defense from time to time. This meant I never got to score any winning goals and was never voted the most valuable player of the game… except for one day. I am not sure what came over me, but when the ball came to me, I did not pass it along to one of the good players like the coach had taught me. Instead, I dribbled the ball all the way down the field myself. It was like one of those sports movies where everything slows down and the athlete gracefully weaves his way through the other players. And by some miracle, I actually scored.

My team cheered, my coach cheered, and the stands cheered. But what I remember most about that day were the loud shouts of praise from my father on the sidelines: "That's my son! That's my son!" I was ecstatic to have made my first goal, but I was prouder still that my father wanted everyone to know that I was his son. There was nothing more I needed than to know that my father saw me and delighted in me.

I should tell you that my days of soccer glory quickly ended. A week later I tried the same stunt, but I confused the goals and scored for the wrong team!

Years later, I have come to realize that this memory matters to me because there is something very special, even essential, about a father's affirmation. We long for it and work for it. I know I am one of the lucky ones, but many people carry deep pain because they never received it. We were created to know and experience the affirmation and protection of a father.

YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON!

Our Bibles use many wonderful words to describe the person of Jesus. He is holy and righteous (Acts 3:14), gracious and true (John 1:17), glorious (Hebrews 1:3), humble (Philippians 2:8), and loving (Ephesians 3:18–19). Likewise, the Scriptures have given Jesus many titles. We know Him as:

> *Christ (1 John 2:22), Lamb of God (John 1:29), Resurrection and Life (John 11:25), Word (John 1:1), Image of the Invisible God (Colossians 1:15), Immanuel (Matthew 1:23), Savior (John 4:42), Teacher (John 3:2), Good Shepherd (John 10:11), Bread of Life (John 6:35), Light of the World (John 8:12), High Priest (Hebrews 6:20), Head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23), Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16), Alpha and Omega (Revelation 22:13), Bright Morning Star (Revelation 22:16), the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6)…*[4]

I am captivated by the fact that of all the things God the Father could have shouted from the heavens, He chose to declare that Jesus is His Beloved Son: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Of course, this does not deny or diminish any of the other characteristics and titles which we know and celebrate to be true about Jesus. He is certainly all those things mentioned above and more! Yet what seems of utmost importance to the Father is that Jesus would

know, first and foremost, that He is the Beloved Son of God. Before He is the Lord of lords, the High Priest, the Savior, or the Head of the Church – before everything else – Jesus is God's Son. This is His primary identity, which God affirmed on that day, affirms today, and continues to affirm throughout all eternity.

Before moving on, two important things must be said about the significance of this identity.

First, it is relational. It is not based on accomplishments, titles, gifts, or abilities. His sonship rests solely on an intimate relationship marked by companionship, care, provision, and love.

Second, it is unconditional. It does not depend on what Jesus has, what He has done, or what people say about Him – or on any condition we might imagine. The Father did not say, "You are my Son because…," nor did He say, "You will be my Son if…" We should note that this affirmation comes at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, before He has done anything at all. He has not yet performed a miracle, called a disciple, or gone to the cross. His identity is not something He must prove, but rather something He is invited to enjoy and live out.

This is key for this passage and for our discipleship: the identity of the Son was the source of all that Jesus did, rather than the result of what He accomplished. In a world where we are so often defined by our abilities, our positions, our status, our possessions, and our accomplishments, God bestows on Jesus an identity that is relational and unconditional!

IF YOU ARE THE SON…

Immediately after this powerful scene, Jesus went into the wilderness, where He was tempted by Satan. We should not forget that it was the Spirit of God who led Jesus into the wilderness for His time of testing. "Being baptized in the Spirit meant He was endowed with power and equipped for mission."[5]

This mission would necessarily include Jesus being led into places of darkness, suffering, and temptation so that He might transform them and carry with Him His gospel message of hope, love, and life. Being filled with the Spirit of mission did not mean that Jesus would live protected from the world or from the path of pain and suffering. Rather, He would be sent out in mission to a world filled with pain and suffering.

This truth should cause us to be skeptical of any theology claiming that a life of discipleship eliminates temptation, suffering, or contact with the world. Temptation and suffering need not be seen as a sign that God is no longer with us or that we have done something wrong. They are a normal experience in the life of a Christian being led by the Spirit into mission. The good news is that we don't do this alone! The Spirit gives us power, love, and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7) so that we might fulfill His mission and that He might fulfill His mission within us.

On the day of Jesus' baptism, God the Father shouted from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son." In contrast, the cunning words of the Deceiver in the wilderness are, "If you

are the Son of God…" Why if? Is it not because the Enemy sought to put seeds of doubt into the heart of Jesus about His identity? Was it not because he wanted Jesus to believe that His identity was in question and conditionally based? The heavenly Father had confirmed Jesus as His Beloved Son without any condition. The Father of Lies, in contrast, would have Jesus believe His identity was more safely placed in what He could do, what people said about Him, or what He had. That one little word "if" is of monumental significance! It changes everything; it turns an unconditional promise and identity into something based on accomplishments, abilities, and titles.

As the Son of God, Jesus would surely experience the provision of God, know the protection of God, and share in the purposes of God. The sustenance of bread, the care of angels, and the rule over nations are not sinful desires for the Son of God. On the contrary, they are natural and good; Jesus would experience all of them. Because He is the Son of God, He could trust without any fear that God would give Him every good and perfect thing in the right time and in the right way. The temptation of Satan was not in having or experiencing any of these things in and of themselves. Jesus was being tempted, instead, to take them by His own means, in His own timing, and in contradiction to God's ways.

Each of these is a great gift, but these gifts become void of meaning and a terrible curse when sought apart from God. The temptations of Satan could only succeed if Jesus doubted that He was the Beloved Son of God, who would fully experience God's love and blessing. In contrast to the great promises of God, these temptations are empty and absurd. If, however, Satan could get Jesus to question His identity, then he could also get Him to doubt God's provision, protection, and purposes.

None of this is new; it is the very same tactic that the ancient serpent used in the Garden of Eden. I believe it is for this reason that Luke takes the time to recite the lineage of Jesus in the very middle of our story. He wants to connect the ideas of identity and the temptation of Jesus with the story of the very first man and woman. Adam was the son of God, and as such he could trust that God would give him all that he needed. In His blessing, God had promised the man and woman provision and protection; He even shared His rule of the garden with them. Knowledge of good and evil, likewise, is a great gift for the children of God, but it becomes a burden and a curse when sought apart from God.

Yet the Deceiver came along to put seeds of doubt in the hearts of Adam and Eve about God's goodness and their secure identity as His children. Once this was in question – once they were unsure about who they were and whether God would always give them what was best – it made sense for them to seek knowledge in their own way and in their own time. They, unfortunately, were deceived. They doubted their identity as God's beloved children and rebelled against God to get what they feared would be withheld from them. This deception stuck and began a universal pattern among their descendants of doubting God's goodness and seeking provision, protection, and purpose apart from Him.

The deception stuck, that is, until Jesus walked on the earth and heard the words from heaven: "You are my beloved Son." Jesus chose to believe these words. He chose to believe

that He was not primarily defined by what He had, what He did, or what people said about Him, but by the words spoken by the Father. He chose to believe this was unconditionally true. Because He believed, it made no sense for Him to seek provision, protection, purpose, or anything else apart from God.

What I hope is becoming clear is that Jesus, though tempted, lived faithfully and righteously because He chose to believe the words God spoke over Him about His truest identity.

In discussions of this text, I often hear people say that Jesus overcame these temptations because He is the Son of God. While this is certainly true, I am convinced that it is more appropriate to affirm that He triumphed over the temptations because He rightly believed that He is the Son of God. The choice was real; otherwise it would not have been temptation. In fact, I will go further and say that Jesus was able to live out His entire mission on earth – including His radical obedience on the cross – not only because He is the Son of God, but because He chose to believe and live out of that identity.

The words on the day of His baptism, "You are my beloved Son," prepared Him for the words on the day of temptation, "If you are the Son…" They became the origin and source of all Jesus ever did. He is our Savior, the Righteous One, the good Teacher and Shepherd, and everything else that we affirm about Him. And He fulfilled all that was true of Him because He chose to believe God's word about His identity that day by the Jordan River.

MEMORY VERSE: 1 JOHN 3:1

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

If you have not done so already, read "Appendix 3: Memorizing Scripture" to find some helpful ideas about why it is important to memorize God's word and how to do it. I would also note that in our passage, each time the Deceiver tempted Jesus, He answered with Scripture.

- How does this verse deepen or clarify Luke's account of Jesus' identity and temptation?
- If you are honest with yourself, do you truly believe that you are a child of God? What helps or hinders that belief? What would change in your life if you lived from that identity?

THE STARTING PLACE FOR CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

Now here is the great news of the Bible – and unless it were written down in black and white, it would be too good to believe – the words the Father spoke to Jesus by the Jordan River are now extended to each of us who choose to believe. You are a beloved child of God!

You are a child of God by the grace and love of the Father, by the saving work of Jesus, and by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I hope you can see why this is good news.

You might be a student, but that is not who you are. You might be employed or unemployed, but that is not who you are. You might be rich or poor; you might be Bulgarian or American; you might be loved and respected by all or mocked and rejected by others. But that is not who you are. Just as importantly, you are not even the tragedies you have experienced, the mistakes that you have made, or the successes that you have achieved. These things may describe you and your experiences, but they do not define who you are.

Paul helps us to understand this truth when he says, "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith… There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26–28). In Christ, every one of us, women and men alike, is adopted as God's child and heir (Galatians 4:4–7).

The things that once defined us – our ethnicity, gender, social status, and so forth – are no longer the foundation of who we are. We have been given a wonderful new identity in Christ. To all who believe, He has given the right to become children of God (John 1:12). This is a gift from God, not something we must strive for or seek to control. Our identity is given by God and rests fully on Him. God, who never lies, has said that you are His child, and so this is who you are at your core. It is the unchanging truth about your truest self.

When we hear that God is our Father, we might look to our earthly fathers and assume that God is just like them. But Jesus knows that there are no perfect earthly fathers: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13). No earthly father can love, protect, and lead like God does. God is not simply like a good father we might imagine, nor is He merely comparable to the best earthly father who ever lived. God is not playing at father. He is the one true, ultimate Father, the prototype and standard of fatherhood. Every other father takes his name and meaning from Him (Ephesians 3:14–15). The affirmation you may never have received is exactly what He longs to give you.

Your identity as God's beloved child is true because God sees you through eyes of love. As David Benner writes, "An identity grounded in God would mean that when we think of who we are, the first thing that would come to mind is our status as someone who is deeply loved by God."[6] This is the good news that echoes throughout the pages of the Bible.

Incredibly, this is not something that will be true of you one day when you straighten out your life and do all the things you know you are supposed to do. You are God's beloved child now. You may sin and make mistakes, but there is something even more true about you: you are deeply loved despite all your sins and mistakes. God is pleased to call you His child.

THREE MISTAKEN IDENTITIES

Just as with Adam and with Jesus, the Deceiver will try anything to get you to doubt your identity. He will try to manipulate you into grounding your identity in other things so that you live out of anything but your truest self. Some have seen an intriguing connection between the temptations of Jesus and the most common deceptions about our identity:[7]

"Command this stone to become bread." This represents the "identity of doing," which is the false belief that our worth comes from what we are able to do. If we believe this, we will strive to do more and more, often wearing ourselves out, just to prove to ourselves and others that we have value. Our pride becomes rooted in the things that we do: our busy schedules, talents, good habits, and abilities. When we feel vulnerable about our identity, we justify our self-worth by replaying all that we do or have done. We might even look for the next project to undertake so that our busyness can drown out our sense of vulnerability. Even our service for God can become a way of proving that we deserve to be loved.

Some of us, on the other hand, never think that we are worth anything at all because we believe that our sin or mistakes (another kind of "doing") have made us unlovable and worthless. In both success and failure, the lie is the same: what we do determines who we are.

"If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." This represents the "identity of having," which is the false belief that our true worth comes from what we possess. This includes our material possessions as well as titles, positions, or relationships. If we believe this, we feel incomplete and vulnerable when these things are missing or taken from us. Often, when we feel most insecure about our identity, we seek to accumulate more possessions or hold on tighter to the things that we do possess. Some of us are tempted to question our worth because we don't have a spouse, a job, or all the other nice things that society says we should have. This deception is particularly dangerous in a culture of advertisements that daily preaches that happiness comes from having the next tool, gadget, or toy.

"Throw yourself down from here." Can you imagine what all the people of Jerusalem who saw this spectacle would say? Jesus would become an instant celebrity, and His reputation would quickly spread. For that reason, this final temptation represents the "identity of reputation," which is the false belief that our true worth comes from what others think or say about us.

If we believe this, we will strive to make others like us by pleasing them, and we will seek fame and power to prove that we have value. Our pride is found in the titles we carry, the kind words others say about us, and the number of "likes" we receive on our social media pages. Likewise, we begin to feel vulnerable about our identity when others say unkind words or gossip about us. We begin to fear disapproval more than we fear losing our integrity.

I know I often get caught up in these deceptions myself. Of the three, the lie I most tend to believe is that I am what I do. I notice it especially when I am unsure of myself – wondering if I am good enough or if God is pleased with me. At those times, you will often find me spending hours upon hours at my computer, trying to do more and feeling guilty whenever I stop to rest. I become highly critical of myself and am not satisfied unless everything is "perfect" (which it never is).

I remember one evening working on a sermon. Though it had been finished hours before, I went over it again and again, trying to make sure that it was just right – or that I was just right. But those extra hours of work neither made my sermon better nor made me feel better about myself.

Our activities, possessions, and reputation are not bad in and of themselves. In fact, they are very good. But their goodness is turned into a curse when we believe that our identity is defined by them. The Deceiver will constantly test us to see what we truly believe. Will we believe his words that we are what we have, what we do, or what others say about us? Or will we choose to believe the good news of the Bible, which declares that God's love for us is what truly and completely defines us?

THE ANNOUNCEMENT COMES FIRST

The root of sin is a mistaken identity. When we believe that we are anything but God's beloved child, we will do whatever it takes to feel that we are people of value. And if we are not completely sure that we are God's child and that He will provide for us, protect us, and give us purpose, then we will seek to get these things in our own way and timing. We will lie and cheat to get ahead; we will gossip to make ourselves look good in comparison to others; we will have sex outside of marriage to feel loved and connected to others. We will be found doing any number of things that don't please God and only hurt us.

But the opposite is also true: the root of Christian discipleship is a true identity. When we believe we are God's beloved child and that our value is not in question, then we are able to follow His ways faithfully. When we believe He will provide for us, protect us, and give us purpose, we can trust His timing and His way and can have confidence that He will give us every good gift. This trust and confidence, rooted in our belief that we are God's children, is the only way to live a life of righteousness.

So here in the very first chapter of this book, I want to share with you where I think most Christian discipleship goes wrong. And it goes wrong from the very first step. We think righteousness comes first and the heavenly announcement follows. That is, we think that once we begin living well and doing all the right things – not giving in to the temptations of this world and living in obedience to Jesus – then God will call us His beloved children. But this is fundamentally flawed because we will never be able to earn God's gift of love and adoption. Never!

Instead, the announcement comes first and victory against temptation follows. In other words, you are declared a child of God, and only when you fully believe and accept this

truth will you be able to begin following Jesus and living the life God has for you. When you start really believing, just as Jesus did, that you are God's beloved, it will become natural for you to follow the ways of Jesus; then the ways of the world will be revealed as empty and absurd.

All of this is to say that we don't become disciples to earn God's love and identity. Rather, true Christian discipleship is always a response to our true identity. Discipleship is about knowing and responding to who we truly are and what God has spoken over us. Then, and only then, will we be able to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

- Of the mistaken identities presented (we are what we do, we are what we have, we are what others say about us), which do you most relate to personally? How has this shaped your decisions, emotions, or relationships?
- The chapter claims that the root of sin is a mistaken identity – not truly believing that we are God's beloved children. Can you see examples of this in your own life? If this is true, what might need to change for you to more fully receive and trust God's love?
- Summarize in your own words the main message of this chapter. What is the connection between identity and Christian discipleship? How do you sense God inviting you to respond?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

LECTIO DIVINA

You are a child of God. This truth must shape your discipleship. Yet unlike Jesus, most of us have not seen the heavens opened or heard the audible voice of the Father. Paul reminds us that it is the Spirit who bears witness with our spirit that we are God's children (Romans 8:15–16).

Too often, however, our lives are filled with noise, hurry, and distraction, making it difficult to hear the quiet testimony of the Spirit. For this reason, we must intentionally create space to listen.

To help cultivate this habit, I encourage you to set aside 30 minutes each day this week to practice Lectio Divina. Lectio Divina, or "sacred reading," is a historic Christian discipline used as a way of listening to God through a short passage of Scripture. Its purpose is not simply to analyze the text, but to let it remain in the mind and settle into the heart throughout the day. In this practice, we use Scripture and silence to become attentive to God's presence, His word, and His invitation.

The basic steps[8] are:

Prepare your heart (silencio): Find a comfortable place where you will not be distracted. Sit in silence long enough to slow your body and thoughts. Remember that God

is with you and looks upon you with love. Offer Him your distractions and ask for a receptive heart.

Read (lectio): Read the passage and listen to the overall message God is communicating. As you read, listen for one word or phrase that draws your attention. After reading, dwell on the word you heard. Sit in stillness and ponder the word or phrase God has for you.

Meditate (meditatio): Read the passage a second time. As you read it again, listen specifically for an invitation from God for you at this moment. Is there something He is inviting you to believe, to do, or to change? At the end of this reading, spend as much time as you need to consider God's invitation and what it will mean for you to respond.

Respond (oratio): Read the passage a third time. Then respond honestly in prayer. Speak to God about what you have heard – your gratitude, resistance, fears, or questions. Engage Him in real dialogue.

Rest (contemplatio): Read the passage one final time. Then simply remain in God's presence. Rest in Him. You may find it helpful to write down what you sensed, heard, or resolved during your time.

For the next week, practice Lectio Divina using one of the following passages each day: Romans 8:14–17, Romans 8:31–39, Galatians 3:26–29, Galatians 4:4–7, Psalm 139:1–12, and Psalm 139:13–18. Each of these passages speaks directly to our identity as God's children. On the seventh day, you may want to return to one of the passages that helped or provoked you this week, or you may want to spend time remembering and giving thanks for what you have heard.

As discipleship partners, commit to practice this discipline and then share about your experiences the next time you meet.

PRAYING FOR ONE ANOTHER

Take time to share honestly about how this chapter has challenged or encouraged you. Where are you tempted to ground your identity in something other than God's love? Where do you need help believing that you are His beloved child? Share also any other concerns or situations in your life for which you would like prayer in the coming week. After sharing, pray for one another. Commit to pray for each other regularly until your next meeting.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the love You have given us, that we should be called Your children – and so we are. Give us grace to believe this truth deeply. Help us to turn away from any false identities that we have chosen to believe. As we learn to trust who You say we are, shape us into people who walk in the way of Your Beloved Son. In the name of Jesus, we pray. AMEN.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

To look deeper into the subject of identity, study the following passages:

- Psalm 139: David's psalm about our identity and God's infinite care.
- Romans 8: Paul's reflection on our identity in Christ and the love of God.
- Ephesians 1: Paul's praise to God for every spiritual blessing we have in Christ, including our adoption as His children.
- "In Christ": Examine the verses that describe our relation to God and His promises for those who are "in Christ." Examples include: Romans 8:1, 1 Corinthians 15:22, 2 Corinthians 1:21–22, 2:14, 5:17, Galatians 3:26–27, Ephesians 1:3, 2:6–13, and Philippians 4:19.

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[1] David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (InterVarsity Press, 2004), 47–48.

[2] Luke was written by a first-century Christian and missionary companion of Paul. It was addressed to a largely Gentile audience in order to provide an orderly account of Jesus' life and to assure readers that the good news of Christ extends to people of every gender, culture, and social status. See Mark L. Strauss, *How to Read the Bible in Changing Times: Understanding and Applying God's Word Today* (Baker Books, 2011), 160.

[3] Baptism was a ritual well known in the Jewish world. It symbolized cleansing and repentance and was also used as part of the process for Gentiles entering the Jewish community. See Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), 136.

[4] These are just a few of the names and characteristics of Jesus given in the Bible. Altogether there are over 100.

[5] Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (InterVarsity Press, 1996), 87.

[6] Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, 48–49.

[7] This framework comes from Henri Nouwen's teaching on the lies we believe about our identity: I am what I do, I am what I have, and I am what others say about me. See Henri Nouwen, "Being the Beloved," sermons preached at the Crystal Cathedral, *Hour of Power*, 1992.

[8] Joy O'Byrne, *The Basics of Lectio Divina* (Imago Christi), https://www.imagochristi.org/abiding-prayer-resources.