

# BIBLE STUDY: iDentity

Leader's  
Guide

by Rev. Jay Reed

## Part One: iCreated (by God)

It seems like everybody is into *I* today—iPhones, iTunes, iPod, iThis, iThat—it's all about *I*. What is the problem with a society that so heavily focuses on *I*? When is it appropriate to focus on *I*? We live in a world that markets to *I* and wants to shape our Identity. So let's begin with this question: What makes up our identity—where do we get our identity? (*Allow time for answers. At this point students may not link their identity to who they are in Christ.*) Over the next four weeks, we'll look at our identity from God's point of view.

### My Plain Ol' Rock (5 min)

*You'll need rocks and a few sharpies for this section. Divide your teens into groups of six to eight and provide a one-to two-inch stone for each student. Allow them to each pick out a stone.*

Even as God's people, we can sometimes feel like we don't count, like there's nothing special about us or our lives. Have you ever felt plain, ordinary and pretty much insignificant, kind of like one of these rocks? Jot down on the student sheet under "My Plain Ol' Rock Time" when that was and share it with your group.

### All About My Rock (10 min.)

Take a few minutes to study your stone, taking in as much information as you can through all your senses. Give your stone a name and write it on the stone. Now, make up a history about it. Think about how your stone got its physical characteristics, what life events it has gone through, how it came to where it is today, etc. *Give students a few minutes to come up with their stories, then have them take turns sharing their stones' biographies.*

It's amazing how, in such a short time, some of you were able to give a plain old stone a unique identity—a personality, a history and even how it got its physical uniqueness. Today we're going to look at how we, as God's children, each have a unique identity that has been given to us by God—as you gave a unique identity to your rock.

### Psalm 139 (15 min)

Read Psalm 139:1-16. Discuss the following questions either as a whole group or in smaller groups.

1. Where can you ever go that God is not there? (*verse 7-10*) (*nowhere*)
2. What is a good thing about God being there, wherever you go? (*verse 10*)
3. What are some "not-so-good" things about God seeing and knowing whatever you do and wherever you go?
4. Biologically, we know that human conception happens when a sperm joins an egg. What do verses 13-16 say about how we are formed? (*by God's intention and knowledge*)
5. What does verse 16 indicate about every moment of your life? (*God knows every moment before a single one is lived out*)
6. Someone says to you, "All life is basically an accident; it's about luck and chance." From what you see in Psalm 139, how would you respond?

Psalm 139 gives us a picture of God creating us, weaving His purpose and design into each of our lives. Now take a look at 1 John 4:9-16.

7. According to these verses, the God who created us has an incredible love for us. What is the clearest indication of that love? (*verse 10*) (*Jesus Christ as the atoning sacrifice for our sins*) *Note: Most people assume God's love is a feeling, because that's how our culture understands love. However, in the Bible, God's love is an action—God does not feel love as much as He does love.*
8. Compared to how most people respond when you wrong them, how does God respond? How do you absolutely know you are forgiven and loved by God even when you don't feel it? (*We absolutely know that we are loved and forgiven through Jesus' atoning work on the cross that is applied to us individually in our baptism and as we*

*receive His body and blood, given and shed for us, in the Lord's supper. The truth of God's love, given to us in Word and Sacrament, is powerfully real, even when we don't feel it.)*

9. 1 John 4:16 tells us three things that God has created us for. What are they? *(to know, believe and abide in His love for us)*

*Have students fill in the blanks at the bottom of the student sheet. (I am created by God to know, believe and abide in His love through Jesus Christ.)*

**Wrap Up** (5 min)

How do Psalm 139 and 1 John 4 give you an identity that is different from that of someone who does not know that she is created by God and loved by Christ?

Write one good thing you have learned or been reminded of from this lesson under the section, "When I'm feeling like a plain ol' rock, I will remember..."

Say a prayer using what you just wrote as a prayer of thanks to God.

*Collect the rocks from your students to be used for the next session.*

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## Part Two: iChosen (by God)

We learned from Psalm 139 that our first identity is that we are created by God. No matter what else we become in our lives, our first identity is always as a child of God. Today we want to look at what that means.

### Another ID: Nickname (10 min.)

Pick up the rocks that you named from the last session and get into groups of six to eight again. Think of a nickname for your rock and come up with a story of why you gave that nickname to their rock. Share in your group.

Now place your stones in a pile. One person from the group should close their eyes while the others mix up the stones in the pile. The object is to see if the person with their eyes closed can identify their own stone by feel, without looking. *Allow everyone to have a turn.*

### Sticks and Stones (5 min.)

1. As a kid, what were some of the nicknames people called you? Which ones did you like? Which ones didn't you like? Why?
2. What are some negative names that people your age commonly use to put each other down?
3. What are some names that you and your friends use for each other that are positive and encouraging?

### 1 Peter 2:9-10 (15 min.)

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." True or false? Why? *Allow them to share comments then have them read 1 Peter 2:9-10.*

Peter is writing to the Church during a time of suffering and persecution of God's people. In that time, persecution was not simply peer pressure or verbal attacks based on your beliefs, but often losing your freedom, property and even your life.

Today, persecution sometimes comes through names, put-downs and stereotypes. This passage in 1 Peter was written to bring encouragement to believers then and now to remind us of who we really are and what we really have in Christ.

In 1 Peter 1:3 Peter tells us God has caused us to be "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Based on the hope given to us by God in Christ, Peter points out a few blessings of being in Christ, as far as our identity goes.

4. 1 Peter 2:9 lists four blessings that come from our identity in Christ. What are they? (*see question 5*)
5. What does it mean to be a chosen people? How about a royal priesthood? A holy nation? People belonging to God?
6. This all sounds great, but when we consider our lives—our thoughts, words, actions and who we are, why might we be tempted to believe that God would not call or choose us? (*because we don't act like holy people so why would He call us*)
7. If we often don't deserve God's mercy, why does He still give it to us and choose us? (*see Romans 5:8-10*) (*as a gift, earned for us through Jesus' death that pays for our shortcomings, sins and failures and make us holy before God*)
8. In worship, how are we assured of our chosenness in God's sight? (*through the means of grace: the promise of God's Word in baptism and the Lord's Supper*)
9. If God were to say "(Your name) you are chosen by Me and belong to Me," what difference would that make in a) the way you see yourself? b) the way you act?

Many times in Scripture God calls His people by positive names before they act like His chosen people or realize who they really are because of Him. Think of times when God refers to His people in positive ways before they prove worthy of those names. Share a couple. (*Renaming of Abram- Ge.17:3-8; Jacob- Ge.32:22-28; Solomon- 2 Sam.12:24-25; Peter- Jn.1:42 and Mt.16:17-19*)

Peter reminds us that God has given each of us an incredible identity through Jesus Christ: Chosen by Him in love and belonging to Him as His very own.

Aside from looking kind of funny, what difference would it make in the way you see yourself and the way you act if you walked around with a huge sign around your neck that read, "Chosen and loved by God!"?

### **Wrap Up** (5 min.)

Many of you were able to pick out your rock even with your eyes closed. You're getting to know this rock by the stories you have created, the identity you are giving it. Imagine how much more God knows each one of us, who He has given shape to in the womb. Think about the fact that God was and is shaping your identity in His love for you through Jesus. That's why remembering that we are chosen and loved in Christ is so critical; because the world around us, sometimes the people closest to us and even we ourselves, might say or do things that will tempt us to believe our identity is something else.

Write the word "Chosen" on your rock. There are times when we will all feel like "plain ol' rocks." Think about the blessings you have received in the identity God gives you by completing the phrase at the bottom of the student page. Use your response as a prayer.

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## Part Three: iWorth (by God)

**What's It Worth?** (10 min.)

Claim your rock and gather into groups of six to eight.

Someone is interested in buying your rock for \$100,000, but you need to make the case for why your rock is worth so much. *Invite a number of students to present their cases for why they think their rock is worth \$100,000.*

Would you treat your rock differently if someone paid \$100,000 for it and then asked you to take care of it? How so?

*Ask students to assign value to the body parts listed on the student page, then share the following estimates gathered from an internet medical source (you might want to do a search if you want first-hand figures):*

*Lung: \$116,000*

*Kidney: \$91,400*

*Heart: \$57,000*

What makes something or someone valuable? Is it simply a sum of parts or something else? *(Allow for a few minutes of discussion.)*

Worth can be measured in a number of ways. Something's value may have to do with the sum total of its parts, what it is capable of producing or simply what someone would be willing to pay for it. (A Honus Wagner 1909 baseball trading card has been valued at \$2.8 million.)

When it comes to people, what we're worth is a much trickier question. In our world today, people often think some people are worth more than others. What things might make people worth more than others in the world's eyes? *(Give your students a few minutes to answer.)*

1. What about you? If you were measured by the world, would you be worth much?
2. Why do you think some teens (if not all) struggle with their self worth?
3. How does a low self worth affect the way people act and live?

Fortunately, our true worth is not dependent on what this world around us thinks, but on a different standard.

**Matthew 13:14** (10 min.)

Read Matthew 13:14.

4. There are a couple ways to view this parable. One is that the kingdom of God is the treasure. If that is the case, then what is the field and who is the man? What is the point for us as readers of the parable? *You might ask students here, "Why couldn't you buy the kingdom even if you sold all you have or gave up your life?" The parable has limitations in that the Kingdom is not for sale and if it were, you'd have to live a perfect life in God's eyes to buy it!*
5. Another view is to read the parable through the lens of John 3:16. In that case, we are the treasure. So then, who is the man, what is the field and what does the man sell in order to gain the treasure? According to this interpretation, what worth does our life have in God's eyes?
6. In Jesus' parables, fields represent the whole world. So what does the parable suggest that Jesus bought because He considers you a treasure? *(He was willing to pay for the whole world.)*
7. Why should this make a difference in the way we view ourselves?

**1 Corinthians 6:19-20** (10 min.)

Read 1 Corinthians 6: 19 & 20.

8. This verse focuses on being bought. What have you been bought from? What have you been bought for? (*Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18-21*)

Basically, God bought us from the power of sin, death and the devil. He bought us from a life of hopelessness, fear and struggle on our own. He bought us for an eternal existence with Him that includes right now. He bought us for a relationship with Him that means we live with His purpose, His joy and His love.

This verse also focuses on the price that was paid that determines our worth.

9. What would happen if you weren't bought? (*would still be enslaved to sin*) What were you bought with? (*see 1 Peter 1:18-19*)
10. How does the fact that Jesus baptizes you into His death and resurrection—and then gives you His redeeming body and blood—show your worth in God's eyes?"

**Wrap Up** (5 min.)

If your rock was worth \$100,000, you'd definitely look at it and treat it with special care for the person who entrusted it to you. Thinking of your life in God's eyes, it's not just like a plain ol' rock. Thinking about the worth that God has placed in it through Jesus, complete the following statements:

Because of the price Jesus Christ paid, in God's eyes I am worth...

When I'm feeling like a plain ol' rock, I will remember...

Use what you wrote as a closing prayer.

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## Part Four: iNamed (by God)

**What's in a name?** (10 min.)

Look up the meaning of each of the names of the kids in your group or have them do it during the study if you have the means to research. Break them up into groups of six to eight and invite them to use smart phones or wifi connected devices to find out what their names mean. Have them note the origins and significance behind their names.

Were there any surprises in what you found? How many of you were named for a certain reason or purpose? Do you know how you got your name? Was your name significant to your parents for any specific reason. *Have them discuss the answers to the following questions on their student sheets:*

1. Do you like your name? Why or why not?
2. How does your name fit your personality? If you could choose another name for yourself, what would it be and why?

**Ephesians 1:3-14** (20 min)

Read Ephesians 1:3-14. List all the identity words/adjectives you can find.

*The list should include:*

*Holy, blameless*

*Adopted*

*Redeemed, forgiven*

*Chosen, predestined*

*Included, marked with a seal*

*Heirs of the Kingdom*

Now that you have listed these words, come up with a personal definition for each word. Then think of one way each of these identity names God gives to us might help us in our outlook on life.

For example:

Holy- Set apart by God for His special purpose

When I think that I am set apart for God's purposes, it helps me to make more positive choices with my words & actions at school.

Blameless- Because of Jesus dying for me, God is for me and not against me, it's as if I have no blame before Him.

This helps me to start each day new, not having to be burdened by yesterday's mistakes and past sins."

Redeemed- Bought back for a price.

As I think about Jesus' sacrifice to buy me back from sin, death and the devil, it helps me to realize that I am precious to Him and I want to show Him my gratitude in the way I live my life.

Predestined- God chose me to be His own before He spoke the first "let there be" at creation.

My life is in the strong hands of God. He has done all the work in giving Christ to die on the cross for the forgiveness of my sins, calling me by the Gospel, moving me to repent and trust in Jesus, keeping me in the faith and eventually bringing me into eternity with Him. It allows me to live confidently through any trial or temptation that God has my back.

Sealed- It's a done deal!

I don't ever have to fear rejection by God because in my baptism and by the promise of His Word, I am sealed with Him forever.

*Give students time to fill out their student sheets as a group then ask them to share their responses.*

### **A Name for Now (5 min.)**

This passage reveals many aspects of our identity in Christ which God has given to us as His people. For instance, there are times in our lives when we really need to see God as our Father, to comfort and strengthen us. There are times in our lives when we need to see God as Spirit to teach and guide us. There are times in our lives when we need to see God as our Savior to forgive and restore us. Although God is always all of these to us and more, certain identities, gifts and blessings of God may mean more to us than others, depending on our life circumstances and situations at the moment.

Considering where you are in your life situation right now, which of the blessings/characteristics from the Ephesians passage means the most to you right now? Why? How does it help you to understand your identity in Christ? How does it affect how you live in this world right here, right now?"

### **Wrap Up (5 min.)**

Fill in a response on your student sheets after, "The next time I feel like a plain ol' rock, I will remember I am \_\_\_\_\_" and share them in your groups. As you share, write the identity you picked earlier on your rock. Take your rock home and put it on your dresser or night stand as a daily reminder of who you are and Whose you are in Christ.

Close your time together by praying for the person on your left, thanking God for blessing them with the quality/characteristic they chose; asking Him to bless how they see themselves through Him each day.