

youthESource Bible Study

Piecing Together My Identity

By Jennifer Probst

Part One: Family Matters

Activity Challenge:

Construct a family tree. See how many names of family members you can write down.

Where Did I Come From?

My grandmother loved investigating genealogies. The discoveries she gleaned from records of family members past allowed her to better understand who she was in light of those who came before her.

Information about her ancestors was also a gift that my grandmother wanted to give to future generations in our family. She wanted us to know who we belong to and where we came from. She wanted to show us that family matters.

1. **What purposes do genealogies serve?**
2. **What tools can be used to discover who is a part of your family?**

In taking the Bible as God's Word of truth, we can trace the origin of all people back to Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were individually and uniquely created by God. And from them, we can discover our birth and heritage.

3. **How would your self-concept change if you discovered that your ancestor was a criminal?**
4. **How is your identity impacted by knowing your family line was created by God?**

Not only are people given an earthly father, but they possess a Heavenly One as well. We are connected to God the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ. By the saving acts that Jesus did for all people on the cross, God the Father has adopted us as His very own children.

"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:4-7)

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ," (Romans 8:14-17a)

"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. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." (1 John 3:1-3)

5. **Describe what characteristics "the ideal" father would have.**
6. **List some things that God the Father does for His children.** (See Psalm 36:6; Psalm 145:15-16; Matthew 10:29-30)

As God's children, we stand to inherit treasure beyond what the world can provide. What do the following verses state are gifts God gives to His children?

"And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." (1 John 5:11-15)

"Being strengthened with all power, according to [God's] glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:11-14)

A person can find a portion of his/her identity in family. Families were created to provide children with a sense of belonging and stability. Families establish where people find their origin. Regardless of whether a family truly provides these needs, it impacts a person's identity considering those relationships.

Due to sin, our earthly families will never be perfect. Family actions have the power to shape our self-concept. I know I can depend on my spiritual family. With God as my Father, I am confident that I have been created with care, rest secure in my needs, and am given a purpose. Through the saving actions of my brother, Jesus Christ, I stand to inherit an eternity of communion with a loving family.

Close with prayer.

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Part Two: What's in a Name

Who Am I?

I have always loved to learn definitions and meanings. Given my inquisitiveness, it was natural for me to ask my parents what reasoning they had in naming me.

- 1. Look up and write down the meaning of your name.**
- 2. What is the story behind your naming?**

According to the dictionary, a name is, "a word or set of words by which a person, animal, place, or thing is known, addressed, or referred to." A person's name plays a significant role in identity. A name takes us from being a general member of society to a specific individual.

In Bible times, the naming of a child was an integral part of who they were. Not only did it indicate a person's family heritage, but it sometimes indicated a special task or character trait that person possessed. Check out these special Biblical namings:

"Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, 'Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God'... And God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.'" (Genesis 17:3-8, 15-16)

"And there appeared to [Zechariah] an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared... Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, 'No; he shall be called John.' And they said to her, 'None of your relatives is called by this name.' And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, 'What then will this child be?' For the hand of the Lord was with him." (Luke 1:11-17, 57-66)

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'" All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus." (Matthew 1:18-25)

After a child is named, those words become a part of his/her identity. It is by those words a person is called. As choices are made and character is developed, a person's name takes on a unique meaning or triggers a series of memories. A name sets a person apart and identifies them as one of a kind.

3. List some well-known names.

4. What reputation is associated with those names?

Due to the fact that a person's name is interwoven with their status as a human being, reference to a person's name is deserving of respect.

5. How would you define respect?

Man and woman were created in the image of God. Living with God's image meant that Adam and Eve knew God as He wished to be known and they lived as righteous and holy people. We have since lost God's image because of our fall into sin. God still makes Himself known to us. One way we can know of God is through His name.

"Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' And He said, 'Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.' God also said to Moses, 'Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.'" (Exodus 3:13-15)

6. In the Gospels, Jesus shares with us many "I am" statements, telling us more about Himself. List those "I am" statements. (Look at John 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15 to get you started)

7. What do these "I am" statements tell us about God?

God's name tells us of all the wonderful things He has done and continues to do for us. God has created us and we are given the hope of regaining His image in Heaven, thanks to the saving acts of His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. God's name tells us about His identity and also has the power to add to our identity. What does God give to us in His name?

"For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" (Romans 10:13)

"And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:11)

"For where two or three are gathered in [God's] name, there am I among them." (Matthew 18:20)

The power of God's name adds to who we are. In God's name we are justified, redeemed, and saved. Through the gift of a name, we can rest in God's promise, "But now thus says the Lord, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine...Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you,...Fear not, for I am with you;" (Isaiah 43:1, 4a, 5a)

Close with prayer.

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Part Three: I Have Skills

What is My Purpose?

I love getting to know new people. After the exchanging of names, I have discovered that the next piece of information offered is what that person does for a living. I tend to identify myself by what I can do.

- 1. List some of the things that you enjoy doing.**
- 2. What occupies most of your day?**
- 3. What kinds of skills would other people say you possess?**

A person's skills and abilities are a contributing factor in establishing one's purpose in life. Some abilities come naturally and some skills are learned. I have heard many people ask the question, "What is my purpose in life?" Discovering our purpose through what we are able to do can help us add to our identity. God has created each person, given them special abilities, and provides a purpose in which to use those skills.

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills." (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)

"And [God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," (Ephesians 4:11-13)

While the skills that God gives to each person can be used to work in a job where we can provide for our physical needs, our talents outline a greater "vocation." The dictionary defines vocation as, "a summons or strong inclination to a particular state or course of action." The Latin breakdown of the word shows us that vocation is a "voice" or "calling." When we look at vocation through a Christian lens, it becomes the means in which God calls us to action and how He can use our gifts to serve a greater purpose.

When I talk with others about their purpose, many tend to believe that it is limited to only one thing, for all time. When I look at my purpose, I see that I have been given the task and skill to serve as daughter, sister, wife, mother, friend, teacher, and so on. In these areas, I can serve God and others.

- 4. What different roles do you have?**

Some of these roles will always be a part of who I am and what I do. Other roles I have worked to achieve, but may not always have them. In the future, even more opportunities will come my way. My purpose in all these roles is to use my skills to the best of my ability and as God wills.

"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:17)

"Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand." (Proverbs 19:21)

"And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

The words of Scripture show me that I can fulfill God's great commission in any task that I set out to do. No matter what job I have, my words and actions can point others to Christ. This is my ultimate purpose in life and how I can find my identity.

5. What is the one thing in the world that you would love to fix?

6. What would you like to accomplish in 5 years? 10 years?

Close in prayer.

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Part Four: Foundation of Beliefs

1. **List the top 5 things you value the most?**
2. **What opinions do you have about...**
 - a. God
 - b. Respect
 - c. Worship
 - d. Authorities
 - e. Life
 - f. Marriage
 - g. Stealing
 - h. Gossip
 - i. Possessions
 - j. Manipulating others

What are My Values?

When I was younger, my concept of truth was tethered to what my parents and family taught me. I believed in what they had to say because I trusted them and they had life experience. As I grew older, more voices were added to my worldview. As I got to know people, I trusted them and I listened to their point of view. Each person carried a different perspective, a different opinion, and affected the foundation of my belief system.

3. **What influences what you believe in?**
4. **How are belief and truth related?**

Now that I am older, I have sifted and sorted through the values that were presented to me. When I add what I was taught to my own life experiences and filters, I build a foundation of beliefs. Where I stand and what I believe in influences the choices I make and helps to form my identity.

5. **How do your beliefs affect your choices?**
6. **How is it possible to determine what a person's values are by their actions?**
7. **On what issues am I unwilling to change my opinion?**

A Christian's belief system is built on the solid rock of God's Word. In the Bible, we can find the records of a historical Jesus and the source of an unchangeable truth. If we ever wanted to know what it would take to establish an ideal society, we would look to the tenants that God has established in Scripture. By using the Bible as my foundation for what I believe in, I know who I am. Decisions are clearer (not necessarily easier) in light of God's Word.

8. **Respond to the following statement, "Everyone believes in something. Some may put their faith in science, their favorite sports team, etc. Fill in the blank, everyone has a god of some sort."**
9. **How are faith and trust related?**
10. **What makes a person's belief system a key component to his/her identity?**

Close in prayer.

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Part Five: What You See

What Value Do Others Place on Me?

There are some things in life that I have no control over. One of them has to do with my outward appearance. I did not get the opportunity to choose the shape of my face, how tall I will be, or the size of my feet. I have no control over the pimples that grow on my face or birthmarks that create a unique visual of who I am.

1. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

Appearance is not only what the world sees, but it includes what I choose to reveal about myself. I can demonstrate that through the type of clothes I wear or how I choose to style my hair. I can also reveal my inward appearance through attitude, choices, and my response to situations.

2. What do you like best about yourself?

3. What would others say is your best quality?

"Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious." (1 Peter 3:3-4)

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." (Colossians 3:12-14)

No one in the world can know who I truly am, unless I reveal it in some way. This is the biggest part of my identity. People can do their best to observe what I show to the world and make some pretty good guesses about my thoughts and motivations, but they will never truly know unless I tell them. There is only one who knows exactly who I am and what is going on in my brain; that is God.

For those who cry out and plead for just one person to completely understand who they are, God does. God has made every part of us and knows what we are thinking. God's knowledge of us is reassuring because there is someone who understands and knows what we have been through.

*"O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay Your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.
Where shall I go from Your Spirit?*

*Or where shall I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, You are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there Your hand shall lead me,
and Your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
even the darkness is not dark to You;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with You.
For You formed my inward parts;
You knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are Your works;
my soul knows it very well.
My frame was not hidden from You,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in Your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.
How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
I awake, and I am still with You." (Psalm 139:1-18)*

The way that we are viewed by God is an important part of our identity. Due to our sinful nature, it would be easy for God to view us as His enemies. Instead, God looks at us through His son, Jesus Christ. By looking at us through Jesus, our appearance becomes that of a person who is justified, loved, and redeemed. Not only is our appearance made new through Christ, God clothes us for eternity.

"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:27)

"But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as He has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." (1 Corinthians 15:35-44)

"Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?' I said to him, 'Sir, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'" (Revelation 7:13-17)

4. How does knowing that God has taken care of your spiritual appearance help to reinforce your identity?

Close in prayer.