

youthESource Bible Study

Losing My Identity

By Jennifer Probst

Merriam Webster defines identity as, "who someone is; the name of a person; the qualities, beliefs, etc., that make a particular person or group different from others." Based on the definition, different factors comprise a person's identity. This study will review one of five different attributes (family, name, abilities, beliefs, and appearance) that help to build identity and how its loss can impact a person's self-concept.

Part One: Family

"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart." (Matthew 13:19a)

Regardless of the dynamics within a person's family, those relationships have an integral affect on a person's identity. Family establishes a person's heritage. The community within family is designed to provide for needs and teach the fundamentals of life. One way to undermine identity is to isolate a person from his or her family. A person can be taken away from their family by stealing time spent with them, respect given to its members, and the type of communication shared.

One of the priceless commodities that we possess is time. Units of time cannot be accumulated and saved. Once used, time is gone and cannot be retrieved. How a person spends his or her time can be indicative of what they value and establish as a priority.

- 1. List some things that can steal time away from family.**
- 2. How does lack of time spent together impact the family?**
- 3. What are some things that can protect a family's time together?**

Respect is the manner in which a person communicates value and honor. While society may underscore certain behaviors that demonstrate respect, individual people may hold certain characteristics as a personal acknowledgement of esteem. These individual standards impact the ways in which one gives and receives tokens of respect.

- 4. What actions communicate respect to you?**
- 5. Compare and contrast your definition of respect with that of your family.**
- 6. What makes a person worthy of respect?**
- 7. Why should a person be respectful, even when the recipient may not deserve respect?**

Communication is a gift given to build relationships. Communication serves to provide information necessary for individuals to learn of and trust others. Lack of communication serves to distance individuals and cause misunderstandings.

- 8. What mode of communication is easiest for you to use and understand?**
- 9. How do each of the following contribute to communication?**
 - a. Words**
 - b. Tone**
 - c. Body Language**
- 10. How can poor communication isolate you from your family?**
- 11. How does the removal of family rob you of your identity?**

On this side of heaven, sin will always rob people of the time, respect, and communication needed to participate in the earthly family God has created for them. The devil and the world will always attempt to isolate individuals from their families so that they will not benefit from the strength found in familial identity. People who seek their identity can find their confidence in God's promises of who they are. God's promise: by the saving acts of Jesus on the cross, each person has been given gifts through a perfect family, headed by God the Father.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory." (Ephesians 1:3-14)

Another divine promise: Those who abide in God's family are safe.

Jesus said, *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."* (John 10:27-30)

11. How does being a part of God's family prevent theft of your identity?

Close with prayer.

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Part Two: Name

"[Jesus] put another parable before them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, 'Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" (Matthew 13:24-30)

Another strategy that breaks down a person's identity is contaminating facts with lies and causing doubt. A person's name identifies him or her as an individual, establishes a reputation, and infuses meaning towards character. A name is not limited to a simple word, but it also includes the way that a person is addressed and respected.

- 1. How do you prefer to be addressed?**
- 2. How are words and thoughts connected?**

Follow the path of these dictionary defined words:

Mean - to serve or intend to convey, show, or indicate: signify

Meaning - the idea that is represented by a word, phrase, etc.

Demean - to lower in character, status, or reputation

Verbal Abuse - a negative defining statement told to the victim or about the victim

A person's name is generally given with intent and careful thought. Every name has meaning. That name gains more significance and value as the person responds to life experiences. When a person's name is demeaned, what his or her name once meant has now been contaminated. When a name is mocked, it negatively defines the character of that person.

- 3. What strategies are used to mock someone?**
- 4. What would motivate someone to demean another person's name?**
- 5. How does abuse of a person's name affect:**
 - a. A person's thoughts**
 - b. A person's beliefs**
 - c. A person's emotions**
 - d. A person's identity**

While the use of a name on earth can hold great significance, there is a greater name by which a person can find his or her identity. There is great power in God's name. Through God's name, a person...

Is given a new name

*"For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,
and her salvation as a burning torch.
The nations shall see your righteousness,
and all the kings your glory,
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will give.
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate,
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her," (Isaiah 62:1-4)*

Jesus said, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give it to you." (John 15:15-16)

Is assured of His presence:

Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them." (Matthew 18:20)

Is given new life:

"For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in [Jesus] will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" (Romans 10:11-13)

6. How can God's name decontaminate your identity?

Close with prayer.

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Part Three: Ability

"[Jesus] put another parable before them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, 'Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" (Matthew 13:24-30)

There is a strange love-hate relationship that society has with stereotyping. While the word may have several variations, it all comes down to assigning general characteristics to a person or group of people. I have witnessed individuals who crave specific qualities to be identified in them, yet they despise those attributes attaching them to a certain group.

When I was in high school, the skills people possessed instantly generalized how my peers identified each individual. Groupings were made of athletes, academics, artists, and so on. It did not matter if one's skills included several areas, one label was assigned. For those who posed a challenge to their stereotyping, a new category was made to group them. What a person did quickly became his or her identity.

- 1. How have you been stereotyped?**
- 2. How do these generalizations help or hurt a person's identity?**

With the passage of time, I have noticed that the skills I once participated in have changed. My abilities have become stronger due to consistent practice or they have diminished through the discovery of new interests. The biggest change in what I do has been affected by failure.

- 3. What sabotages success?**
- 4. How can failure contaminate a person's identity?**

Failure can be paralyzing. Mistakes can generate a fear that others will view us as unworthy, uncertainty of our competence in other areas, and subject us to mockery. While failure can attack confidence and loosen the foundation of a person's identity, the Apostle Paul had a different perspective on the power of difficulty.

"Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Romans 5:3-5)

- 5. How can suffering produce endurance...character...hope?**

6. What assistance are we given?

"But [Christ] said to [Paul], 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

7. How is God's power made perfect in weakness?

8. How can failure motivate you to not give up?

Skills will constantly change and grow. Some abilities will be stronger and easier to accomplish than others. While talents can identify a portion of who a person is, the strongest determinant of a person's identity is how he or she uses the gifts that God has given.

Close with prayer.

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Part Four: Belief

A person's belief system is a foundational component to his or her identity. What a person believes effects lifestyle, choices, and relationships. Beliefs establish morals and provides a community of shared values.

- 1. How easy is it for you to determine someone else's belief system?**
- 2. What helps you determine what a person believes in?**
- 3. How does knowing what someone else believes help your interactions with that person?**
- 4. What happens when beliefs are not shared?**

Someone once told me that there are two subjects that should never be discussed with others: politics and religion. While some may be quick to reinforce that our society holds a separation of church and state, I believe these two issues are rooted deeply in the heart of individual belief systems. These timeless topics will always garner an opinion, a reaction, and a fight because they are an integral part of a person's identity. This is the part of identity that is established by personal choice.

"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." (Romans 1:19-23)

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," (Hebrews 1:1-3)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." (John 1:1-4)

Jesus said, *"Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the Word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the Word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the Word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word, and it proves*

unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the Word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty." (Matthew 13:18-23)

- 5. What role has Christianity played in the world, throughout generations?**
- 6. How is Jesus Christ, the Son and Word of God, stolen from people?**
- 7. How effective is stealing God's Word as a tool to undermine identity?**

God continues to shower His creation with evidence of His existence and gives us the Bible to tell us about His Son, Jesus. What we also discover in Scripture is that God has created people as individuals, in His image, and to be loved by Him. With God as Creator of the Universe, people learn where they fit in the world. Our identity is found in the knowledge and belief in what God has done and continues to do for all people.

- 8. How can you protect Christ from being stolen in your life?**

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Part Five: Appearance

"[Jesus] put another parable before them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, 'Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" (Matthew 13:24-30)

Iconic fashions and trends have marked several decades of the last century. Stylish haircuts and name brand shoes had all walks of people marching to their favorite retail shop to emulate what others were wearing. And as one fad merged into the next, the success of a raging trend would be marked by its return, years later.

- 1. Who determines trends?**
- 2. How do you know what is current?**
- 3. What motivates you to follow or go against what is trending?**

During my teenage years, I always felt like my parents were the trend busters. Countless discussion on costs, practicality, and personal preference had me rolling my eyes and shaking my head. Yet, I discovered that the real bust when it came to my absorption with trends was the power that it gave others to judge me. What was once a motivator for me to look good became a desire to win the favor of those around me. The establisher of my identity shifted from myself to others.

- 4. How does the obsession with trends contaminate my self-image?**
- 5. How does the judgment of others affect my identity?**
- 6. Why is the approval of others so important?**

Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:25-33)

Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)

7. What perspective does Jesus give in regard to our appearance?

"But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." (Galatians 3:25-29)

Recognizing that appearance is an important factor in a person's identity, God dresses people with the greatest garment they will ever need. In Baptism, God clothes people with His Son, Jesus Christ. When Christ overlays the life of a person, the stains of sin are washed away and the individual is robed in righteousness. As a person wears these divine clothes, he or she participates in a unity that celebrates true identity as a child of God.

The power of our identity comes from God. Not only has He created our appearance, He has blessed us with family, shared with us His name, provided us with skills, and gifted us with faith. God supplies all that we need to know who we are and Whose we are.

Close with prayer.