



Where does a person's identity come from? We will unpack the contrast of identity as defined by our culture, vs. identity flowing from what the Bible says; in our day, these are radically different views. At the core, the contrast flows from two underlying beliefs; that we are created beings with purpose and intentionality (biblical view) and we are evolved creatures who discover or choose our identity (cultural view). As we explore the biblical view we will discover who we were created to be, how that was broken, and how Jesus reconnects people with God's good plan and purpose.

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DISCUSSION #1: THE SOURCE OF OUR IDENTITY

Where does a person's identity come from? We will unpack the contrast of identity as defined by our culture, vs. identity flowing from what the Bible says; in our day, these are radically different views. At the core, the contrast flows from two underlying beliefs; that we are created beings with purpose and intentionality (biblical view) and we are evolved creatures who discover or choose our identity (cultural view). As we explore the biblical view we will discover who we were created to be, how that was broken, and how Jesus reconnects people with God's good plan and purpose.

In this discussion we will explore how, culturally, Identity is often tied to vocation, appearances, accomplishments and, most recently, sexuality.

MY STORY | Starting Place

Think through the big stages of your life (teenage years, young adult, etc...) Share what your identity was most tied to. Which was most dramatic? Which one still stays with you today?

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

Make a list of things upon which people easily base their identity.

Idolatry is defined as *extreme admiration, love, or reverence for something or someone*. Do any of the things on the list seem like "idolatry" to you? Explain.

Romans 12:1 powerfully instructs, "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*"

Do you consider your mind, hands, finances, and time as extensions of your body? Why or why not?

Do you experience fear in trusting God? How does that tie to our identity when what the world offers is so tactile?

How can one apply Romans 12:1, but still live in a world of other things seeking to give us an identity in exchange for allegiance or, dare I say, worship?

How can you “know” that the focus of your true worship is God, and that you’re not just deceiving yourself?

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

Think about identity on a continuum with one end being something that’s in this world and the other end being perfectly based on who God says you are. Where do you place yourself on that?

Talk about who or what else is pulling your attention and you’re seeking identity in.

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

As you discuss this, does someone in your circle come to mind who might struggle with putting his or her identity in the world or something destructive? Can you approach that person this week and encourage them that they are more valuable than ____ and God loves them and wants to cultivate a true identity to them?

DISCUSSION #2: CREATED WITH PURPOSE

Where does a person's identity come from? We will unpack the contrast of identity as defined by our culture, vs. identity flowing from what the Bible says; in our day, these are radically different views. At the core, the contrast flows from two underlying beliefs; that we are created beings with purpose and intentionality (biblical view) and we are evolved creatures who discover or choose our identity (cultural view). As we explore the biblical view we will discover who we were created to be, how that was broken, and how Jesus reconnects people with God's good plan and purpose.

In this discussion we will discover how, from the very beginning and through the ages, people were created with a God-given purpose, and that purpose is the source of all meaning and significance in your lives.

MY STORY | Starting Place

We've all been lost at some time in our lives. Do you have a good story to share?

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

Read Genesis 1:26-31. Discuss why God created humankind (men and women) and what our "God given purpose" is.

Does the purpose, or mission God gave to humankind, conflict with the agenda of some people in our culture? How should a Christian respond?

Read Jeremiah 29:4-14. Sometimes God's plans don't seem like prosperity and always "winning." Make a list of the complications God's people faced in this situation.

If you received this message (to settle into your captivity), would it be comforting or discouraging? What could a reader cling to for hope in this message?

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

How can a person know they are in the situation to which God has called them to and not something of their own creation? Are there tangible ways to discern the difference?

Does a season come to mind when you knew you were where God wanted you, but it was really difficult? How did you know? How did you stay faithful and hopeful in that season?

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

Do you have a friend who is in such a season? What truth from this discussion might you share with them as an encouragement?

DISCUSSION #3: EMBRACING OUR BROKENNESS

Where does a person's identity come from? We will unpack the contrast of identity as defined by our culture, vs. identity flowing from what the Bible says; in our day, these are radically different views. At the core, the contrast flows from two underlying beliefs; that we are created beings with purpose and intentionality (biblical view) and we are evolved creatures who discover or choose our identity (cultural view). As we explore the biblical view we will discover who we were created to be, how that was broken, and how Jesus reconnects people with God's good plan and purpose.

Though we were created with purpose, by our own personal choices, and those of our "sin nature," our original design was broken. In this discussion we will explore how painfully humankind was cut off from our original glory to a path of confusion and disorder.

MY STORY | Starting Place

Consider the "stupid mistakes" you've made in your life. Are some of them funny now? Share one of them!

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." Romans 3:23

This is a difficult verse for people living in a world where most believe people are mainly good. Has this verse been a stumbling block for you or someone close to you? Please share.

In Romans, the Apostle Paul beautifully explains the fallen state of mankind and the remedy we find in Jesus. (We're not going there this week). Read the following passages about the cause and nature of man apart from God's saving work.

Read Romans 1:18-32 and Romans 3:9-18.

List and share observations from these passages. What is Paul saying on the topic of whether or not humankind is good by nature?

Do you receive the idea people are not "good" as pure truth, or does your heart or mind wrestle or disagree? Unpack those thoughts and feelings.

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

Clearly all of us have done things that were not good. As you look back on the worst things you have done, do you regret them, or see them as somehow positive because of how God used it in your development? Explain.

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

As we saw in Romans 1, humankind has rejected God and grown in greater boldness in our rebellion. Pray this week that people would feel and discern this reality and that God would use it to turn their hearts to Him.

DISCUSSION #4: RESTORED IDENTITY

Where does a person's identity come from? We will unpack the contrast of identity as defined by our culture, vs. identity flowing from what the Bible says; in our day, these are radically different views. At the core, the contrast flows from two underlying beliefs; that we are created beings with purpose and intentionality (biblical view) and we are evolved creatures who discover or choose our identity (cultural view). As we explore the biblical view we will discover who we were created to be, how that was broken, and how Jesus reconnects people with God's good plan and purpose.

In this discussion we will unpack how God (Jesus) rescued humanity by coming to us and dying to restore us back to God. This restoration is central to Christian salvation, as through Jesus God makes us new.

MY STORY | Starting Place

Who is your favorite character in a movie or book? What are some similarities you have with them? What do you love about them and long to see in yourself?

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Romans 3:23-24

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."
2 Corinthians 5:17

The Bible teaches that, when people believe and accept the finished work of Jesus on cross, God makes them into new creatures. The idea is that God "positionally" restores us to who he created us to be before the fall of humanity. From this position, the Christian life becomes an adventure of discovering the newness of life God has prepared for us!

How does this truth impact the various "positions" of identity (socioeconomic, race, gender, sexuality, season of life, etc...)?

Consider and share your story of this transformational process. What are some highlights of what God has revealed to you as a new creation? What are some things you still long to see God do?

Embracing and living in our new identity can be a fragile process. Early on it can be hard to believe and even as we progress, a negative conversation or bad situation can spin us into chaos. How have you experienced this? How can you safeguard yourself from this or get back to your true identity quickly if you are?

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

In Luke 15 Jesus' ministry was criticized for his love and restoration of sinners. He didn't engage the critics directly, but rather told three stories of lost treasures (lost sheep, lost coin, lost son) who had been found and celebrated. Read any or all of these short stories.

Where were you when God found you?

What did He restore you from?
What did He restore you to?

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

In his powerful book, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Henri Nouwen challenges us that, by God's design, WE are the hands and feet He wants to use to pursue and restore those who are lost. Who is that in your life? What would it look like for you to be an ambassador of God' restoration? Even to people who do not desire restoration?

DISCUSSION #5: CHILDREN OF GOD

Where does a person's identity come from? We will unpack the contrast of identity as defined by our culture, vs. identity flowing from what the Bible says; in our day, these are radically different views. At the core, the contrast flows from two underlying beliefs; that we are created beings with purpose and intentionality (biblical view) and we are evolved creatures who discover or choose our identity (cultural view). As we explore the biblical view we will discover who we were created to be, how that was broken, and how Jesus reconnects people with God's good plan and purpose.

In this discussion we will unpack how, through Jesus, God makes us sons and daughters, thus reconnecting us with our original glory and purpose. It is a profound mystery to lean into the identity of a child of God and embrace this as our true identity.

MY STORY | Starting Place

On a continuum from 1-10, what was your sense of identity and security growing up as a child? (1-not good, 10-amazing). Share what contributed to your experience.

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

The Bible teaches that through faith in the work of Jesus we have the opportunity to be "born again" into a new reality as sons and daughters of God. Read the following verses and note observations as you build your own framework for this truth. John 3:1-8; John 1:12-13; Romans 8:14-15; Galatians 3:26; 1 John 3:1-3

What do you believe people are *before* they exercise faith and become sons and daughters of God? What should our expectations be of people who live apart from a connection with God?

What are some practical ramifications of believing you are born again and/or a child of God? What new hope, freedom, and security should this bring to a person?

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

Share practical examples of how you have engaged this truth in your Christian experience. How has God made your new identity tangible?

What deeper realities of your new birth and/or being a child of God do you long to see God do?

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

Pick three people in your life and discern an appropriate way to affirm and encourage their identity in Christ.

DISCUSSION #6: WALKING IN TRUTH

Where does a person's identity come from? We will unpack the contrast of identity as defined by our culture, vs. identity flowing from what the Bible says; in our day, these are radically different views. At the core, the contrast flows from two underlying beliefs; that we are created beings with purpose and intentionality (biblical view) and we are evolved creatures who discover or choose our identity (cultural view). As we explore the biblical view we will discover who we were created to be, how that was broken, and how Jesus reconnects people with God's good plan and purpose.

It's one thing to believe we are a child of God and a different thing to be and live in this reality. In this discussion we will unpack how to live out this truth. The central actions of the Christian life are: to live responsively to God's goodness by surrendering our fallen identity, and to discover our true identity which He has restored.

MY STORY | Starting Place

Being a new student or new on a job can be difficult. You have every right to be there, but believing that you belong can be hard. Share a story of a time you struggled to embrace a new position or role. What made it hard? Looking back, what could have made it easier?

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

Read the following verses and make a list of the various disciplines that are necessary for us to discover and truly live in our new identity. Galatians 2:20; Romans 12:1-2; Colossians 3:1-4; Titus 2:11-14

How can these disciplines be worked into a person's lifestyle and patterns of thinking?

What are some barriers that could hinder someone growing in these disciplines? What practical ways can you protect yourself from the pitfalls?

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

What have been the most helpful disciplines for you in discovering and living in your identity as a child of God?

As you've leaned into this, what difficult passes did you have to cross? What did you have to unlearn or strive hard to believe to be true?

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

Did a friend or family member come to mind as you discussed this discussion? What "word of truth" might you share with them this week?

DISCUSSION #7: MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

Where does a person's identity come from? We will unpack the contrast of identity as defined by our culture, vs. identity flowing from what the Bible says; in our day, these are radically different views. At the core, the contrast flows from two underlying beliefs; that we are created beings with purpose and intentionality (biblical view) and we are evolved creatures who discover or choose our identity (cultural view). As we explore the biblical view we will discover who we were created to be, how that was broken, and how Jesus reconnects people with God's good plan and purpose.

In this discussion we will explore how, once we discover our new God-given identity and purpose, our goal should be to assist others in discovering this for themselves.

MY STORY | Starting Place

Have you ever been involved in an intervention to help disconnected people come together? What was that like?

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

Though spiritual transformation is a deeply personal reality, the truth is that when God saves us, he invites us to join him in sharing this hope with those around us.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 to unpack the biblical invitation God has extended to us.

What did you learn about how we should see people from the passage?

How should we interact with people?

What should our chief priorities be as we do so?

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

Does this invitation to be a minister of reconciliation excite you or scare you? What excites you or causes fear?

Thinking of the circles you have influence in, what are some of the biggest hurdles you face in regard to the tensions that exist there?

Is there a sub-group of people with whom you have the most difficulty pursuing and connecting? Why?

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

Having a conversation with someone where you openly share God's love for an individual can be scary. Sometimes you can hinder the relationship if you come in "too hot" when talking about God. Is there a friendship in your life where you could turn this corner soon and share openly about God's love for them?