

**“Flourish”:** Creating a Culture of Transformation  
A Lifestyle of True Identity  
Ephesians 1:4-7



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**Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context...** (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

***Our Vision...***

*Woodinville Alliance Church... a community where every person discovers who they really are in Christ, experiences his goodness, and shares this life-changing encounter with their world so that others might value and choose Jesus for themselves.*

*This new life results in a movement from Self-reliance to God-reliance, Isolation to Belonging, Fear to Trust, Duty to Delight, Insignificance to Purpose, Brokenness to Wholeness.*

(4) demonstrations (gospel-realities) we experience:

**IDENTITY—ENCOUNTER—TESTIMONY—NEW LIFE**

*“That are some of the factors that you think are involved in understanding our ‘identity’? When asked to identify or introduce yourself, with what do you usually lead?” (e.g. Do you give your name, describe yourself, tell people where you work or what you do?)*

*“Do you have specific memories of a time/instance in your life when you felt the joy of being chosen/selected? Do you remember the pain of rejection? How did it affect your sense of identity?”*

*“What are some of the challenges with attempting to secure our sense of identity in temporal things like our job status, or our financial portfolio, or our abilities?”*

*“Would you agree with the suggestion that most of the temptations that we face are somehow a challenge to our identity? What do you think is the significance of each of the temptations that Jesus faced in Matthew beginning with the accuser’s challenge, ‘If you are the son of God...’?”*

*“What is the connection between our image of God and our own self-image? Do you think that it’s possible to have a healthy understanding of ourselves without an accurate image of God?”*

*“What role does our own identity, secured in the love of God, play in the ways that we respond to others? Does it make it easier to forgive? Do we think we tend to be less judgmental or competitive?”*

*“What false images of God might you need to abandon in order to better love him? How might the settled-ness of his love for you invite you to reject harmful images of yourself?”*

*“A lie my heart sometimes still hears is \_\_\_\_\_.”*

*“A truth that God wants me to remember is \_\_\_\_\_.”*

*Plant this truth in your heart this week...*

“God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.”

1 John 4:9-10

Here are some other scriptures for your consideration which speak to our identity, in Christ:

There is no condemnation (Romans 8:1)

We can never be separated from God’s love (Romans 8:39)

Our labor is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58)

We are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)

We become God’s children (Galatians 3:26)

We have the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7)

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## Teaching Notes...

“**Who am I?**” I think this is the perennial question of all of humanity. It happens particularly when we begin to become both “self-conscious” and aware of others.

**Our identity says something about the way that we experience ourselves and the ways that we experience others.** In fact, psychologists suggest that one of the primary challenges we face is the absence of any clear understanding of what it means to live the “good life”. In the absence of any clear structure/story, we become susceptible to other interpretations and our identity is “*up for grabs*”.

The God-Story being told in the Bible offers its own vision of flourishing: a way of seeing ourselves and our world from a “God’s-eye view”. It “restor(i)es” us.

**It means that I only discover who I am when I know who God is. Any other version of myself, or God, diminishes us both.**

All of God’s good creation is formed out of the sound of his voice. It’s how everything God started. “*Let there be \_\_\_\_\_ and there was \_\_\_\_\_.*” It means that God defines reality. Everything he speaks established for us an “authority”--- meaningful grounds for action. It’s the idea of the “*one God before you*”, in the commandments (Exodus 20).

*“Let us make man in our **image**...and God breathed into them the breath of life...”*  
Genesis 1-2

As creation, it seems that our understanding of identity is expressed in the voice/face of another. God was to ‘mirror us’, in a way. He would reflect back to us who we are, then we would reflect/represent them (“*May God shine his face upon you...*” Numbers 6:25).

Up to that moment, everything about their world--- their reality was informed and formed by God’s voice. It was formed over long evening walks around the garden.

In Genesis 3, we hear another voice. It’s not necessarily tempting us to “*do something*”, but to “*doubt something*”. To call into question the goodness and good intentions of God. God counters: “*Who told you that...?*” He is not chastising them or belittling them but turning their suspicion in on itself.

This relational dilemma is what we call “sin”. It is an intensely relational term, not simply a legislative one. It is essentially mistrust. It is to *fall short* (Romans 3:23) of everything that God desires for us. It is who we are in light of who we were created to be. “Sins” are simply all of the symptoms of that condition.

Ephesians 4:22-24

*“Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.”*

Paul refers to, essentially, (2) ways of “being” in the world; of being “identified”: the “**old self**” and the “**new self**”. One is to be received and nurtured and one is to disavowed and to which we consider ourselves dead.

**Old self: self-reliance.** Seeing ourselves as our own point-of-reference. Life is subject to our will and our desires and our capacities for making life work for us. Because we are so consumed with our own survival, this way of being leaves very little room for you.

**New self: God-reliance.** This is a way of being which accepts its dependence; which acknowledges that we are not self-explanatory and self-sufficient. It is a way of being that was meant for vital union/connection with our Creator-God. We are the cared-for-ones.

► **We want to know that we are not alone, that we belong. We want to believe that no matter what we disclose about ourselves, it will not jeopardize our place... but our need for acceptance is often stronger than our desire for authenticity.**

► **If we can't learn to be-loved, we'll settle for being competent.**

It is the assumption that if you won't affirm me for who I am, then I must get really good at something in order for you to notice me.

► **In order for you to be loveable, your God must be loveable. A healthy image of self is the result of a healthy God image.**

*"It is always true to some extent that we make our images of God. It is even truer that our image of God makes us."*

Brennan Manning

A false image of God is perhaps the most detrimental idol we create. We take all the abuse and pain and disappointment and disillusionment we experience, and we transfer it onto God. Most often, what disappoints us is not God, but our image of God.

*"What do I discover in my identity with Jesus that centers and settles me? That I can find in no-thing or no one else?"*

**Worth and value that is conferred upon me, by God, which means that my identity/significance is never in jeopardy. It's never negotiable.**

Instead of insisting that we perform, it begins by conferring value and worth upon us and then simply invites us to live as if it's true.

*"Imitate God in everything you do because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love [as he loved us]..."* Ephesians 5:1

**Love that we experience which is not simply ‘in spite of’, but ‘because of’ our nakedness.**

Grace says that my weaknesses and failures are not minimized or covered up, but they are absorbed in love. Our efforts at pleasing God actually belittle him and underestimate grace.

*“It is by grace that you have been saved...”* Ephesians 2

**Chosenness as the only remedy for shame.**

*“Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.”* Ephesians 1:4

Shame is that sense of alienation and inadequacy, that sense of being judged and left to ourselves, that turns all of life into a “worthiness contest”.

Shame actually prevents us from seeing the truth about ourselves. It’s why God pursues Adam and Eve and lovingly attempts to draw them out from hiding. God would not, love could not, be content with the distance, whether real or presumed.

If your identity is not settled in this ‘chosenness’, we will spend the rest of our lives attempting to find it in everything and everyone else. We will become susceptible to other labels, each meant to devalue you and desensitize you to love.

Otherwise, *who will you be when you lose your corner office? Who will you be when your spouse is gone or your children have derailed? Who will you be when you can’t feed yourself or when someone has to help you with the simplest of movements?*

**A freedom to confess who we are while we are in the process of becoming who we are.**

Because grace is always unprovoked and self-initiated, it can never be secured by my compliance, and never withdrawn due to my inconsistencies.

*“Now let your unfailing love comfort me, just as you promised me, your servant. Surround me with your tender mercies so I may live.”* Psalm 119:76-77

*“He has identified us as his own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts.”* 2 Corinthians 1:22a

The potential for the life that we desire already resides in us through the Holy Spirit. We need not feel pressure to change in order to secure the love for which our hearts are longing, but simply accept that such love secures us enough to risk transformation.

**A means of bringing pleasure to God without trying so hard to please him.**

*“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”* Hebrews 11:6

Pleasing God is a valid desire, but an unhealthy motivation. Our stated desire to “please God” certainly sounds pious or virtuous and seems an admirable pursuit, but only as it is motivated from a heart that knows God is already pleased with loving them. (Ephesians 1:6).

If my motivation is to “please” God, all of my efforts at striving to do what makes him happy will simply result in resentment toward a God who is never satisfied.

If my motivation is to “believe/trust/put my faith in my identity in Christ, I am able to risk transformation not because love demands it, but because love anticipates it!