

Lesson Five:

Our Identity in Christ

The homosexual struggle is not just a behavioral problem. At the root of these behaviors are needs longing to be fulfilled. One of the greatest needs is that of security in who we are—our identity. If this question of identity remains uncertain, we will reflect that uncertainty in the way we act, talk and think. If we allow wrong things to define us (such as job, friends, money, accomplishments, sexual preference), this will be reflected in our actions and thinking as well. Only one identity allows for true and lasting stability—an identity formed and rooted in Christ.

Security in our identity needs to be defined early on, and if it's not, we will search throughout our lives for something with which to identify. There will be a void from that lack of identification, and we will be driven to fill it. This search for completion may cause us to become people pleasers. We look to others to define us, and we gain our self-image through their acceptance or rejection of us. We also allow things we hear from others about ourselves to label us. But God is the only one who can give a true, clear definition of who we are. He created who and what we are. We must look to Him for identity, and willingly accept what He says about us as truth.

The Role of Definer

As in past discussions, we see that our parents have a large part to play in how we learned to view ourselves while growing up. If they instill in us a strong sense of identity and acceptance, we grow up with confidence and meaning. However, if our parents fail to speak the truth of our identity into our lives we will grow up as unsure and insecure people. As a child grows, no one has more influence than a parent. Unless outside forces intervene for the child, speaking to the contrary of what they are seeing at home, a child will grow up believing what their parents communicate to them.

In John Trent and Gary Smalley's book, *The Blessing*, the importance of a parent's role in giving shape and form to who we are through regular verbal affirmation is revealed:

We were made by God, for God. Our lives have meaning and value because of His love of us. He desires an intimate, passionate relationship with us.

“For almost all children who miss out on their parent’s blessing, at some level this lack of acceptance sets off a lifelong search The best defense against a child’s longing for imaginary acceptance is to provide him or her with genuine acceptance.”

—*The Blessing*, John Trent and Gary Smalley

The need to have affirming words spoken into our lives is seen not as a luxury in life, but as a necessity in the development of a healthy self-image. We all need that blessing. Left unmet, this longing will lead us to other sources we believe can bring us affirmation.

Filling the Void

If we have grown up not having a clear picture given to us about our worth and value, we will look to other sources to find definition:

- Talents and abilities.
- Physical appearance.
- Money.

In our attempts to secure a strong base for our value, we learn to take our cues from those around us.

“When my sense of self depends on what others say of me, anger is a quite natural reaction to a critical word. And when my sense of self depends on what I can acquire, greed flares up when my desires are frustrated. Thus greed and anger are the brother and sister of a false self, fabricated by social compulsions of an unredeemed world.”

—Henri J. M. Nouwen

The People Pleaser

Insecurity in ourselves becomes the prime breeding ground for living to please others. If we don’t feel solid in who we are, we will look to others to tell us who we are. We give people the power to define us through their acceptance or rejection. As we continue in this type of behavior, the true self is lost in the midst of the false impressions we give others and under which we ourselves live. This loss only enhances the feelings we experience about our value and worth, especially if our feelings are negative.

If you live falsely, assuming an identity that people will like instead of the identity you truly have, you will never feel good about who you were

created to be, and you will never know if people could like that other person—the real you. You begin to believe thoughts like:

- If you like the person you think I am, there’s no way you could like the person I really am.
- If you really knew me, you wouldn’t like what you see.

God, the Definer

At the heart of God’s redemptive plan was a change in our status from one of a “created being” to that of a “son or daughter.” As children, we have the right to share in the heritage of God’s family. God is in the business of reparenting each and every one of us. He is the only one who can accurately bless us and give definition to who we are.

Most of us would like to be “reparented” by someone on this earth - a physical surrogate parent would suit us nicely. But that might not be God’s plan. He reparents us not only through surrogates but also through His Word and His Holy Spirit. We have to allow Him the freedom to reparent as He sees fit and not refuse Him, even if it’s something we would not have chosen for ourselves.

The Power of Words

In the past, and maybe still, we have allowed words that were spoken to us, or labels placed upon us, to define who we are. These words can be like curses that hold us captive.

A curse is a statement or invocation intended to bring harm or injury upon the recipient. It may be words of anger spoken by a frustrated parent while growing up—or the taunts of school kids on the playground. Whatever precedence we give to these words can have a profound effect on our self-image. If we are constantly labeled, those labels may stick, if not met with a contrary point of view. We choose to let them bind us, though often that choice seems less than conscious.

We must surrender those words to Christ and no longer allow them to define us.

True Definition

God’s Word has the power to breathe life into you. He wants to be the one who gives you a sense of security in who He has made you to be.

We were made for a purpose. God did not make a mistake when He made you. Who you are is an intricate part of this purpose.

Change comes about through a renewed mind and heart. To attempt to change behavior without addressing the underlying issues is not dealing with the real problem. The Word of God changes our thought patterns and decision-making processes.

Here are some things God says you are:

- a child of God. (John 1:12)
- a friend of God. (John 15:15)
- a new creation. (II Corinthians 5:17)
- His workmanship, created for good works. (Ephesians 2:10)
- a citizen of Heaven. (Philippians 3:20)
- chosen of God. (Colossians 3:12, 1 Thessalonians 1:4)

Our biggest enemy to receiving these words of life is our doubt of their truth.

“ . . . Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

—Romans 10:17

God wants to restore the image of Himself within us, through the words He has spoken.

As we seek to know God and apprehend His promises, the picture of how we see ourselves is replaced by how God sees us. Before long, we believe what He says over what anyone else has to say—we allow Him to have the final authority.

“You aren’t an accident. You weren’t mass-produced. You aren’t an assembly-line product. You were deliberately planned, specifically gifted, and lovingly positioned on this earth by the Master Craftsmen.”

—Max Lucado

Day 2 — Filling The Void

Yesterday we looked at sources of our worth and value. As we attempt to fill the void in us we resort to “whatever works” to give us that sense of esteem and confidence.

Performance: Some of us choose to feel good about ourselves through our performances. The performance person is driven to succeed and to be “perfect.” They find it hard to accept failure in their lives. As long as they can achieve their goals and adhere to their self-imposed rules they feel good about themselves. They tend to avoid taking risks—better to live a “safe” life than to experience failure.

Approval: Another person may find they feel better about themselves if they have the approval of others. What others think about them becomes the underlying motivation for most of their behavior. They strive to please others and to win their respect in order to feel accepted. They find themselves trying to impress others and tend to conform their actions and attitudes to the expectations of others.

Blame: Still another way in which a person may choose to fill the void is to blame others (or self) for failing to find love and acceptance. They may be very angry and judgmental. Their self talk is very condemning, because they believe that because of their failures they are unworthy of love and, therefore, deserve to be punished. When things go wrong they tend to think that God is punishing them. They also tend to focus on the failures of others and to have a critical spirit towards themselves and others.

Pessimistic: Another false way we may cope with feelings of unworthiness and failure may be to approach life from a pessimistic point of view. Feelings of hopelessness about change prevail and keep this person from feeling joy. They have low expectations for themselves and feel resigned to just live out life with the cards they were dealt. Their sense of shame towards themselves and their circumstances results in guilt and eliminates their hope for change.

✓ Do you recognize yourself in any of these descriptions? If so, which one(s)?

- ✓ What have been the costs to you and those around you as a result of taking this approach to life?

Day 3 — The Power of Words

“Words have incredible power to build us up or tear us down emotionally. This is particularly true when it come to giving or gaining family approval. Many people can clearly remember words of praise their parents spoke years ago. Others can remember negative words they heard—and what their parents were wearing when they spoke them!”

—*The Blessing*, Gary Smalley, Page 49

Words spoken to us by family members, friends, teachers, and schoolmates have had a big impact on how we view ourselves.

- ✓ What are some of the harmful words or labels that you remember being spoken about you as a child?

These words take on the power of curses in our lives and reflect an evil assessment of our worth and value. The enemy delights in keeping us from walking in the truth of who we are in Christ.

- ✓ Are you cooperating with the enemy by agreeing with him about these names? Do you find yourself continuing to believe these things about yourself and even in your own mind using these same words to describe yourself? (For instance, do you call yourself stupid, worthless, ugly, etc.?)

Day 4 – God, The Definer

Our Heavenly Father is a God of Truth. In John 14:6 Jesus said that He is the truth. “I am the way and the truth and the life...” We were given the Holy Spirit to “guide *us* into all truth.” Jesus also tells us that once we know the truth, “. . . the truth will set *us* free.” The words we have heard since early childhood, including habitual self-talk that agrees with those words, hinders us from walking in the truth of our identity in Christ. We must renounce the lies and consistently choose to renew our minds with the truth according to God about who we are and our incredible value in the Kingdom of God. Your identity is not in your past, your struggle with homosexuality, and your role as a son, a daughter, a parent, or a spouse. Your identity is not in your job, title, position, or in your abilities and giftings. Your identity is not based in what you do or what you do not do. Rather, your identity is in who you are. So the question is, “Who are you?” according to God, the source of truth?

- ✓ Write a paragraph below that expresses what God says about your worth and value. Write down as many things as you can remember from His word that declare the truth of who you are in Christ.

- ✓ Now, spend some time with your Heavenly Father. Thank Him for what He has done in you. Praise Him for your identity as a child of God and your worth and value as a Kingdom citizen.

According to God, we were created in His image. We are to be image bearers of God—not anyone else.

✓ Beneath the Scriptures below, write out what God says about us being made into His image:

—Genesis 1:26

—Romans 8:29

—II Corinthians 3:18

—Colossians 3:10
