

## Identity in Christ Kept Simple

When I turned twenty-five, I puzzled over questions I couldn't answer. *Where did I come from? Why am I here on earth? How can I lead a life that counts for something beyond the time I have on earth? What happens to me after I die?*

### ***Who am I?***

I wasn't brought up with a Christian influence but had just married a beautiful Kansas farm gal who had. In a quiet time in the upstairs of her parent's farmhouse, this prayer came almost unbidden, perhaps my first prayer.

"Jesus these people in my wife's church believe you change lives. I know I can't run my own life. Here is my life, lock, stock and barrel, and I'll take yours in return. Thanks!"

Although I felt nothing, yet as I looked back, my life began to change significantly from that time on. I was so caught up in the rush of this new life through faith in Christ that those questions seemed pushed to the back burner. However, when I struggled with a trial (no one had yet told me that trials were a normal part in this new life), my mind reverted to that elemental question again.

### ***Who am I?***

Instantly, I became someone I never was before with my *identity in Christ!* Although I saw changes, I was clueless who I truly was. Slowly, incrementally my awareness began to shift as I centered my life around my two essential questions of life.

1. "What is God like?"
2. "How does God see me?" (or "what is my identity?")

As an all-in Christian looking for answers from God through Scripture, I asked myself where I could go to find out what God's ***original*** and ***unchanged*** intent for humanity is. Where could I go for firsthand information? I've lived all my life after the Fall in Genesis 3, so any answer had to come from outside myself. I came up with two, *just two*.

1. ***Genesis 1 and 2***, God's creation account before Eve then Adam went rogue and all of creation fell in Genesis 3. Eve had convinced herself that her choice would enhance her life, but instead it robbed her of life. Satan, our enemy, has a powerful weapon...*deceit*.
2. ***Christ Jesus our Lord***, who is both the *Last Adam* and the *Second Man* (1 Corinthians 15:45-47). Jesus came to earth to draw together all the negative results from Adam's sin and remove these through His death and resurrection. Jesus also modeled for us the perfect life always intended by our Creator God, the first completely human being since Adam sinned.

*"Father, we have questions only You can answer!" "You have revealed so much, yet lingering questions still remain."*

I began to immerse myself in these texts in Scripture, and others that flowed from it. Yet mystery still remains because this Christian journey is called the "*mystery of godliness*" (1 Timothy 3:16, *ESV*).

Let's quickly explore as far as God has revealed, yet no farther. After diligently seeking answers, I still throw the lingering questions into my "*Deuteronomy 29:29 Bucket*" where they remain, perhaps for a time and perhaps forever.

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law”  
(Deuteronomy 29:29, *ESV*).

The farther back we gaze, the farther forward we see. So, first turn in your mind’s eye to the creation account. Note quickly the repetition of this first inspired insight into the creation of humanity. First God revealed His eternal *intent* from before creating (Genesis 1:26), then He added the execution of His plan to further clarify (Genesis 1:27-28).

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (Genesis 1:26).

This One-God-in-Plurality (Jesus’ coming provided the fuller description as Father, Son and Spirit) initiates Note the “*us*” and “*our*,” plural pronouns for a singular God, oh mystery. **God always initiates** with His people. He takes the first step, and second and third. It’s who He is, the great Initiator and generous Giver. He constantly moves towards us because love *must* reach out to draw in. He fashioned us for intimate relationship with Him (“*image*” “*likeness*”) and gave us the awesome assignment of partnering with Him as intimate allies (“*so that they may rule over...*”). Keep this in mind as you explore the question, “*What’s my identity in Christ?*”

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over...” (Genesis 1:27-28, *NIV*).

At a specific historical point in time, this *good, great and generous* God created us and a universe in which to house us. Notice carefully what God **repeats** and also what He **adds**. He reemphasizes that humanity is made for *intimate and personal connection* with Him, so we can co-rule with Him as **His intimate allies**.

Then He adds, “*God blessed them.*”

It’s God’s pleasure since He is a lavish gift giver. He always initiates to bless us and do us good, even when we are blind to it (Ephesians 1:3-5). It’s who God is. God also settles the gender issues of our *identity* for all times...if we believe Him (created “*male and female.*”) Then He amplifies **how** we are to rule because after Genesis 3 many distorted illustrations of bad rulers abusing authority exist. We rule like a good gardener “rules” her or his garden. We cultivate the soil to flourish. A gardener attentively **adds** the necessary ingredients to the soil for thriving growth (nitrogen, potash, water, etc.; “*be fruitful*” “*increase*” “*fill*”) and **removes** what will diminish growth (rocks and weeds, insects and varmints; “*subdue*”).

**Abundance is on God’s heart since He created you and me to partner with Him.**

*Are you beginning to grasp a bit of the high calling God has for you and for me?*

Although God walked with them during prime time in the Garden (**Genesis 3:8a**), Eve then Adam went rogue in Genesis 3. They chose their own way of **in**dependence and control rather than knowing both good and evil from God’s direct teaching. Because God set humanity to rule with Him, all of creation fell at that instant when they declared their **in**dependence from God. Not only humanity died spiritually, separating themselves from God’s love, but the creation also groans, awaiting God’s final restoration to His Eden-intent (Romans 8:20-22).

Jesus Christ came to rescue, redeem and restore humanity through His life, death and resurrection. He makes His new life (called “*eternal life*”) available to *all*, yet it’s unfortunately

only embraced by *some*. The Father immediately ushers into His **Family all** who choose to yield their entire lives to Jesus as their personal Lord by faith. Since God created us to rule, we must submit our entire beings back to Him, body, mind, will and feelings, holding back nothing (Romans 12:1).

*Instantly our new **identity in Christ** is reestablished, although we must also grow in it.*

- I am now His beloved **child**, and He is my good **Father**.
- Now I am His highly valued **servant**-warrior, and He is my great **King**.
- I am now His cherished **bride**, and He is my generous **Groom**.

*This is our **identity in Christ**...plus more!*

Let's take a quick look at a powerful illustration Jesus uses to teach how connected we are so we can be fruitful, pointing back to God's original and unchanged creation-intent in Genesis 1:28. Notice how Jesus personalizes a common illustration from nature with His penetrating "*I am...*"

**"I am** the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (Jesus in John 15:5, **emphasis**).

*God the Son is the Vine.* The very life of the vine surging through the branches provides all that is needed for life and delectable fruit. Get in touch with Jesus' heart for His branches. *He initiates because abundance is on His heart.* Are you amazed and overwhelmed yet by the profuse outpouring of the fully satisfying provision of Jesus in your life? He's the Vine; we're the branches. He supplies; we open ourselves to receive. Jesus is "*for*" us...always!

*We are the branches.* Jesus always relates with us honestly. He calls us branches, little sticks of wood, not very impressive in ourselves. The power and life of the Vine, however, is perfected through the weakness of the branch and our **inter**dependence. This Big God created us as His image-bearers (Genesis 1:26-28). Through faith in Christ, He now re-creates us in Christ for the purpose of fruit-bearing flowing out of intimacy with Him. Fruit is always for others, and God changes us in the process.

Society attempts to divert us from this *simple* view of our *identity in Christ* and plaster its labels on us. Unfortunately, at times the church imitates society without being aware. Resist in the power of the Spirit.

And now I'm afraid that exactly as the Snake seduced Eve with his smooth tongue, you are being lured away from the **simple** purity of your love for Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3 in *The Message*, **emphasis**).

The passage continues to list some of the representative "*abiding fruit*" in John 15:7-17, like a settled home in God's Love-Letter, the Bible, answered prayer, abiding in the Father's love just like Jesus does, joy overflowing flowing from this love, and true friendship. Later, if you want to dig down a bit farther into John 15, my devotional book **Jesus Is Enough!** is available.

*Does this brief description set your heart on fire as it opens up further implications for our identity in Christ? It does mine, still after fifty years walking with Jesus, the most astonishing person I have ever met.*

For healthy growth *kept simple*, firmly keep in mind **God's part** and **my part** as we partner with the Spirit to do small things with God's great love. Exploring our true *identity in Christ* launches us on an exciting, lifelong adventure of exploration. In one sense, this defines our spiritual growth, as we "*put off*" the false identity with which others attempt to saddle us and "*put on*" our true identity in Christ.

*Let me whet your appetite with one more passage!*

**Ephesians 1:3-14** catalogs a small, yet astounding, sampling from God's vast treasury of provision from His presence, all centered around the Father, Son and Spirit.

- The **Father** initiates to bless us with every good gift imaginable, chose us before creation and adopts us into His **Family** because it's His good pleasure (**Ephesians 1:3-6**).
- The **Son** leaves heaven to meet us where we are to ransom our lives so we may freely partner with Him in His epic, cosmic adventure to restore others to our Father's heart. He longs for us to join Him (**Ephesians 1:7-12**).
- The **Spirit** moves towards us to include us permanently in Christ the instant we believe, and He becomes the seal and deposit guaranteeing our unending life (**Ephesians 1:13-14**).
- Each of the three is capped off by similar expressions to move us towards the ultimate purpose of our lives, *to live our lives so they will bring praise to the Father, Son and Spirit* (6, 12, 14).

I won't overwhelm you now with further New Testament (NT) passages supporting this truth because I want to keep this **simple**, yet not without our effort to partner. And why rob you of your personal, firsthand discovery of aspects of your *identity in Christ*?

Let me conclude with one short application from among many. In John 15 above, I mentioned that society, and even at times well-meaning Christians, plasters labels on us. If we don't strip those off, we will be detoured from our **simple identity in Christ**.

The *Myers-Briggs Preference Test* is a well-known personality tool with six excellent, contrasting preferences. One is *introversion/extroversion*. My self-life or flesh-life (who I naturally default to left to myself) is without question a classic *introvert*.

As a young Christian, however, I came to realize that Christianity is all about relationship, upwards towards God and outward towards people. Over time I made intentional choices to learn to also renew life from people, similar to how an *extrovert* does. Oh, not with my fleshly energy of "*fake it until you make it*." I try to put on no airs. I now genuinely get life from interaction with people because I'm interested more in them than in my own comfort.

I recognize that I still have an inner pull towards *introversion*. Yet it's no longer a single point on the Myers-Briggs continuum. This preference has rather become more of an elastic band stretching from my point towards more *extroversion*. To change, I must first accept who I am now, then remain pliable, elastic and adaptable like a new wineskin. God loves me where I am today and also loves me too much to leave me here. Other people are not my focal point, or I would be a people-pleaser (**Galatians 1:10**), although I readily learn from them.

***Jesus is my Model for life.***

Is Jesus an *introvert* or an *extrovert*? What is Jesus on the enneagram scale of 1-9? I'm unsure.

I am sure though that God's clear call is to become more like Jesus (Romans 8:29), so discover what the NT says about Jesus. For one, I know He's gentle and humble of heart (Matthew 11:29), so that's one life-focus.

***My identity in Christ is the one and only "label" I'm willing to embrace, as my Father's beloved child, my King's faithful servant and my Groom's responsive bride...plus more!***

Now, I certainly don't claim to understand how all this "*mystery of godliness*" works. That's why I still have a large "*Deuteronomy 29:29 Bucket!*"

*Here's my point.*

If we truly want to see ourselves like God does, we need to rip off the labels that we or others plaster on us, even though some provide great insight into our inner lives. ***Begin with His ideas about us!*** Embrace God's faultless perspective. You are a *child of your Father*, a *servant of your King* and the *bride of your Groom*, Jesus Christ.

*And we never again need feel abandoned like orphans since we are His forever children.*

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (Jesus in John 14:18).

Learn to love and embrace how God has uniquely wired you, as different from others as a one-of-a-kind snowflake. Yet precious in His eyes as we become as much like Jesus as we can on our journey. God is crazy in love with me where I am today and also loves me too much to leave me here.

If you want to dig down more deeply, I wrote another article called ***God's Presence Kept Simple*** that provides the launching pad for this article. *God's presence* and our *Identity in Christ* are foundational to our entire Christian journey. Begin with God's initiative, then partner with the Spirit to respond. Also I wrote a short, six-week study called ***Ephesians 1-3: Renewed Identity in Christ***. For more down the road, the first of the three books in my trilogy ***Big God, Bold Design, God's Initiating First Love*** focuses on Genesis 1-3 and our *identity in Christ*.

*I'm still very much in process.* The Good News shouts, "*I don't have to be next month the way I am this month,*" even though I like who I now am.

***Enjoy the journey and don't rush the process.***