THE IDENTITY EQUATION

Apostolic Christian Counseling and Family Services
877-370-9988
www.accounseling.org
info@accounseling.org

Theme Verse
“But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.”
Isaiah 43:1

Purpose

• To help individuals recognize strengths and challenges that can contribute to their sense of identity.
• Review Scripture to gain a clearer picture of how God views us.

Ephesians 4:12-16

• “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:
• Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:
• That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;
• But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:
• From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

Identity Equation

Sense of Belonging + Stability + Healthy Expectations + Purpose
= Healthy Identity in Christ

Sense of Belonging
Designed to Connect

- **We were created for communion with God.**
  - Gen. 2:26-27, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him: male and female created he them."

The Problem...

- When man fell in the Garden, it created a void…a disconnect- Gen. 3:22, “And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil:…”

- We still desire:
  - To be understood
  - To be loved
  - To be special
  - To fit in
  - To be part of something bigger than ourselves

- When it doesn’t feel like our need for belonging is being met, some people turn to **quick fixes** instead of taking their desires back to God.

Connection Problems

- "I try and try, yet I’m never good enough for people…”
- "How is it that I can walk into a church full of people and feel so alone?"
- "He’s the only one that understands me! No one has ever made me feel the way he makes me feel."
- "Betty has a new best friend every week."
- "I would love to be used as a Sunday school teacher, but I never get voted in as a single person."
- "Why can’t I ever be happy? Why can’t I ever be what people want?"

Quick Fixes

- Find someone that thinks just like you.
- Pursue a person that will love you.
- Find a way to stand out- through behavior, accomplishments, etc.
- Compromise your standards to fit in.
- Let primary emotions drive…anger, bitterness

- Unfortunately, **quick fixes** end up leading to a **lifetime** of unhealthy patterns because they don’t address the root issue that started in the Garden.

Unhealthy Patterns

Over time, unmet desires for belonging and quick fixes can lead to:
- Adapting in negative ways.
- Gaining our sense of worth from others.
- Losing our sense of identity, becoming a chameleon in social settings.
- Trying to gain acceptance through accomplishments and roles.
- Discontentment with life.
- Unhappiness

Levels of Connection in Scripture

**God to Us:**
- COUNLESS Scriptures show God’s desire and design to connect with us!
- Jer. 1:5 “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”
- Rom. 8:38-39 “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- Psalm 139
**Us with God:**
- We have been adopted into His family.
  - Romans 8:15-17, “For ye have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”
- 1 John 4:19, “We love him, because he first loved us.”
- He extends the invitation, we must reach back through worship, prayer, spending time in His presence.
  - Psalm 107:1-43, “O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy:…Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD.”

**To the Church:**
- Eph. 4:16 “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

**To Friends:**
- 1 Sam. 18:1 “And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”

**Starting at the Heart**
- Connection is ultimately a heart issue.
- If we try to fill a disconnect from God any other way, it is always inadequate and will lead to dissatisfaction over time.
- Sense of connection goes 2 ways- both sides must pursue and respond.

**God ↔ Me**

**Restoring the Connection**
- We must restore the broken connection before we can move forward- this is something that can only be done through Christ!
- Satan will try to deceive us, telling us “quick fixes” are enough, yet our worth and identity have to be grounded in Christ before we can move forward in confidence, truly knowing where we belong.

Gal. 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

**Being Alone**
- Single people can feel left out in a couple’s world
- All of us, single and married, have to learn how to be alone...for it is when we are alone, we can connect with God.
  - “Because God has made us for Himself, our hearts are restless until they rest in Him.” - St. Augustine

**Stability**
The Problem

- People have a tendency to always be looking for the "next big thing," yet they still desire a sense of settled-ness.
- Influences from media, the job field, college, family, friends and the church will tell you that you are not in the "right" stage of life...should be doing this...shouldn’t be doing that.

Where do we go for our security?

- Constantly wanting “more” or “better” can result in endlessly seeking false security through relationships, money, titles, and the accumulation of things.

“Grass is Greener” mindset

- How do you think this can play out in our church and in our young groups?
- Why is this mindset dangerous?

Components of Stability

1. Grounded in Christ.
2. Actively seeking support and accountability from others, balanced with giving back to others.
3. Continuing to strengthen discernment- 1 Thes. 5:21, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”
4. Open hands to the future, yet acceptance of where you currently are in life.

1. True Security

- If we are busy chasing the idea of “settled-ness,” looking for the next stage in life instead of recognizing our true security has been set by Christ, we will miss opportunities around us.

- Phil. 4:1, “Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.”
- Gal. 5:1, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

2. Accountability

- We need each other!
  Rom. 12:5, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”
- What do you think are common barriers to an individual seeking mentorship or accountability?
3. Discernment

- It is a gift mentioned in 1 Cor. 12, and comes easier for some people.
  - “To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits...”

- It is good to ask the Lord to strengthen our discernment between right and wrong.
  - 1 Kings 3:9-10, “Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.”

- Discernment is an element of spiritual maturity.
  - Heb. 5:14, “For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

3. Discernment Example: Moving Out

Points to consider before taking this step:

- Relationship with the Lord
  1. Will this step strengthen my dependence on God?
  2. If living with non-Christians, will I be challenged to compromise my beliefs?
  3. Will my schedule allow me to maintain consistent and strong devotion practices?

Points to consider before taking this step:

- Self-Awareness
  1. What would it teach me about myself? About how I handle responsibilities?
  2. If living with roommates, what could I learn from living with another individual?

- Stewardship of Time and Resources
  1. Do I have the finances to cover my costs?
  2. How will I use my house/apartment to bless others?
  3. How will I stay accountable so I don’t develop poor habits or routines?
  4. Time management - how do I use my time?

Points to consider before taking this step:

- Connection/Accountability
  1. Do I have people in my life I will be intentional about contacting and who will be intentional about checking in with me?
  2. If living with roommates, it may allow for deeper connections, shared experiences.

- Conflict
  1. Conflict will arise among roommates.

- Location
  1. How easy will it be to maintain connection with my church family?

- Others?

4. Get to Know God’s Voice

Common question: How do I know if this is God calling me to step out in faith or my own desire?

- Remember God won’t ask you to do something that will contradict Scriptural principles.
- Spend time with Him so that you will know His voice.
- John 10:4-5, “And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.”

4. Walk the Middle Path

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fearful</th>
<th>Careless</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fearful of change, intense desire for settled-ness, afraid of what God will ask of you</td>
<td>Never content with where you are in life, always looking for the “next big thing”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enmeshed, dependent on others</td>
<td>No accountability, no sense of responsibility to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuck in a rut, not challenging yourself to grow spiritually</td>
<td>Mistaking maturity for change and new ideas</td>
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4. Finding Middle Ground

- Practice being present in the moment, not worrying about the future, not fearful of the past but being alert for where God’s leading and open doors.

Phil. 3:13-14, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Circle of Concern

Represents 100% of the things that concern you in life.

Circle of Influence

10% of the Circle of Concern. It represents the portion of your concerns you can actually do something about right now.

Plant Trees

- Look for opportunities to build relationships and serve those around you, even if you aren’t sure how long you will be in your current setting…be willing to invest and “plant trees.”

“Ruth, wherever you go in life, unpack your bags- physically and mentally- and plant your trees. Too many people never live in the now because they assume the time is too short to settle in. They don’t plant trees because they expect to be gone before the trees bear fruit. But if you keep thinking about the next move, you’ll never live fully where you are. When it’s time to go, then it’s time to go, but you won’t have missed what this experience was about. If you never eat from the trees, someone else will.”

And he followed his advice by planting trees all around their home in Kano, Nigeria. Twelve years after going back to the United States, Ruth made her first trip back to Kano. As she picked and ate an orange off one of his trees, she knew he had been right.

-Charles Frame

Healthy Expectations

Adapted from Third Culture Kids, p. 213
Looking at other’s positive experiences can lead to an expectation that life should work out for you the same way.

If left unchecked, our expectations can quickly turn into entitlements.

When our expectations for ourselves are unattainable and begin to interfere with our functioning.

When we superimpose expectations for ourselves on to others, including God.

When we expect God to work on our time table.

Acts 1:7 “And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.”

Do I treat God like a vending machine?

Do I “sacrifice/make a payment” and then expect God to give me something in return?

Do I believe that God should give me what I want, when I want it?

If something doesn’t turn out the way I want, do I get angry at God for not responding like I thought He should?

Do we become displeased with the Lord when He doesn’t “meet” our expectations?

Matt. 11:5-6, “The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.”

Offended: “to see in another what I disapprove of and what hinders me from acknowledging his authority”

The question before the house is this: “Will you follow a God you do not understand? Will you follow a God who does not live up to your expectations?”

“Many, but not all...”

“Many, but not all...” principle.

Mark 1:34, “And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.”

Did Jesus heal everyone?

In 2 Cor. 12:7-10, Paul speaks of a “thorn in the flesh” that was never removed.

We must recognize God’s ways are perfect.

Isa. 55:8-9, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

“Not a question of “Why”

“The question is not, “Why is God doing this? Why is He like this?” The question is not, ”Why does He not answer me?” The question is not, “I need Him desperately; why does He not come rescue me?” The question is not, “Why did God allow this tragedy to happen to me, to my children, to my wife, to my husband, to my family?” Nor is it, “Why does God allow injustices?” The question before the house is this: “Will you follow a God you do not understand? Will you follow a God who does not live up to your expectations?”
Life can change with a phone call...

Life Doesn’t Appear Fair
- Often times we try to make meaning out of events we will never fully understand.
- We must not look down on people whose expectations come true, this could lead to feelings of judgment or anger at our brothers and sisters. They are not "more holy" or "weaker and not able to handle difficulties" as we often try to categorize them.
- Sometimes the only choice we have is to change our attitude about the situation. Through this we can be an example to others.
- Psalm 40:1-3, "I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD."

A Look at Job...
- Job loses everything in chapter 1, his response:
  - Job 1:22, "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."
- After questions and reasoning by Job’s friends, God finally responds:
  - Job 38-41, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding…"
- God doesn’t justify Himself.
- At times the only answer we will get from the Lord is “I am still God and I am still here.”

Managing Expectations
- Sometimes expectations are spoken, other times they are implied…
- What do you think are common expectations felt by young singles?

The Next Step...
Due to our environment, family, and culture, we can feel there are automatic next steps that should be taken in life:

1. Repent/ Baptized
2. Get a job, work for a little while
3. Get married young
4. Have kids
5. Have grandkids

What happens if one of these steps doesn’t occur??

The Next Step...
What are the steps laid out in the Bible?

1. Repentance
2. Sanctification
3. Growth

1 Peter 5:10, “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”
### Having Good Self Awareness

- Be aware of your strengths and talents as well as your personal insecurities and weaknesses.
- Be aware of your needs and vulnerabilities so you can seek support and accountability.
- 2 Cor. 12:9-10, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.... for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

### Expectations to be Striving for...

- Personal integrity and biblical soundness combined with Godly wisdom and spiritual maturity. 1 Timothy 3
- A strong commitment to prayer and self examination.
- A genuine love for others and concern for their welfare, with pure motives (not a curiosity seeker...).
- Respect and support for the authority of the Word, the church and its four pillar mission.
- Love, Joy, Long-suffering...all the Fruit of the Spirit.
- Do NOT expect perfection!!
- Compare your expectations to the light of the Word. How do they measure up?

### Living Life on Purpose

### The Problem

One extreme:
- Single people may hope their current phase of life is short-lived, so this keeps them from investing in relationships and serving in different ways.

The other extreme:
- In some churches and settings, single people are asked to do everything, and after a while this can lead to burnout and resentment.

Which extreme do you tend to lean toward?

### Our Purpose

Mark 12: 30-31, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.”

### Loving thy God

- There is no magical formula to increase your connection to the Lord- take time and intention.
- Mix of worship, study, meditation, prayer and simply resting in His presence.
- Appendix 1

- Questions to consider:
  1. How would you describe to someone what loving the Lord looks like?
  2. If someone were to follow you around for a day, what would they pick up about a Christian’s devotion practices?
Coaches - someone pouring into you.

Comrades - people you regularly meet with that are dedicated to growth.

Casuals - someone you just like to hang out with.

Care - people we give to that have nothing to give back.

Chronic - people who just don't get it, want your advice but don't take it.

Contaminates - people that are destructive, manipulative.

We need to be intentional about the types of relationships we have in our lives.

Should have a balance, of both relationships:

- Those who are pouring into you.
- Those who you are pouring into.

Relationships can teach us:

- Humility as we learn from mentors.
- Transparency as we are accountable to peers.
- Selflessness as we spend time teaching and encouraging others.

What would be some ways you could give back to:

- Your family? Your church? Your community?

Who are you and what are you doing?

What is your mission?

What is God calling you to?

What three things are you going to do well?

Who is this important to?

What are you striving for which cannot be obtained?

Could I be doing more?

Three things you are going to step out of?

How important is…?

Moving Toward?

Moving Away From?

Prayerfully consider what God may be directing you to do.

Don’t be afraid to challenge yourself- the people that often need you the most are outside of our comfort zone.

If God is asking you to step outside of your box, remember you are not in this alone, He will provide the increase.
1 Corinthians 3:6-9
“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.”

To Review...

- What is one thing that I am going to take away from this weekend and actively work on in my life?

The Spiritually Mature...

- Know the Word yet seek to know it more fully.
- Have life experience in applying the Word.
- Have gone through painful or difficult life experiences and have found God to be faithful.
- Overcome their natural, human inclinations in order to submit to Christ,
- Exhibit wisdom to avoid sinful patterns toward which they are inclined.
- Display genuine authenticity in their relationships no matter who they are around.
- Maintain diligence and persistence in prayer through the ups and downs of life.
- Don’t have the focus of their lives on themselves.

The Spiritually Mature...

- View being at Church services as important (1) to their personal walk with Christ and (2) to their role as being part of the Body of Christ.
- Are less worried about what they “get out of” church (or any activity for that matter) than what they have to offer to God through worship, Godly-living, and service to others.
- Are active, engaged listeners in church.
- Look at all people within the congregation as being part of the Body of Christ and not just the people they are similar to or get along with easily.
- Are willing to talk to, sit with, and spend time with people who aren't their close friends.

Appendix 1: For Self-Examination and Reflection

- Believe Scripture memory is an essential Christian discipline that is neither optional nor a burden.
- Are quite aware they are imperfect and in need of grace, yet they live exemplary lives.
- Demonstrate an abundance of the Fruit of Spirit in their lives.
- Love people and love focusing on serving others.
- Develop habits and routines that are enviable.
- Seek to mentor or build-into the lives of others.
- Are aware of their weaknesses and seek to correct them.
- Spend time preparing their hearts to worship.

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• Look at all people within the congregation as being part of the Body of Christ and not just the people they are similar to or get along with easily.
• Are willing to talk to, sit with, and spend time with people who aren't their close friends.
The Spiritually Mature...

- Actively seek out others to encourage or support.
- See their walk with Christ as a process of ongoing growth with consistent maintenance (instead of seeing their spiritual walk as “set-it-and-forget-it”).
- Know how to rest in the Lord; especially during trials.
- Let God Be God.
- Take their thoughts captive and bring them to the obedience of Christ.
- Are willing to receive correction from others.
- Love others enough to exhort, correct, or admonish others after they have done their own self-examination first.
- Know their spiritual gifts and talents and are actively engaged in using them.
- Don't tolerate gossip, negativity, and criticism in themselves or others; can separate constructive feedback from unhealthy criticism.
- Are accountable to authority regardless of position in life.
- Reach out to and engage unbelievers.

The Spiritually Mature...

- Are aware their motives are clearly seen by the Lord and seek the Holy Spirit’s help to purify their hearts.
- Manage their time and priorities and have little tolerance for things that waste time.
- Know their spiritual gifts and talents and are actively engaged in using them.
- Don't tolerate gossip, negativity, and criticism in themselves or others; can separate constructive feedback from unhealthy criticism.
- Are accountable to authority regardless of position in life.
- Reach out to and engage unbelievers.