“Who am I?”

Every young person asks themselves this question. It is the challenge of childhood and hunt of humanity to discover one's identity. Due to the vital aspect of this question we will ask and answer it for children at VBS this summer. This document is being written to introduce you identity in Christ so that we may achieve the goal of helping young people understand and live out a God-defined, Jesus-centered, and gospel-driven identity. It is imperative that young people know who they are in and apart from Jesus and are reminded of these truths regularly.

Identity is a clearly defined definition of self. For the Christian, identity formation is when a young person seeks to understand who he or she is in relationship to Jesus. Few young people know what the Bible says regarding their identity in Christ and, as a result, substitute an identity from society, peers, achievements or failures, and from family.

What does the Bible say about identity in Christ?

The gospel provides truth about a believer’s new identity in Christ. Passages such as Romans 6:15-18, 2 Peter 1:3-9, and 1 John 3:1-3 explain this identity for us. We learn that we are children of God, adopted into his family, and receive all the benefits that accompany being in God’s household.

One section of Scripture that is especially informative on identity in Christ is the book of Ephesians. This book was written to help the people of God know who they are in Christ and to walk in a manner worthy of this calling (4:1). Paul references identity in Christ 21 times and identity apart from Christ 12 times. The apostle Paul is concerned with three aspects of identity. First, know who you are in and apart from Christ. Our knowledge of God, given by him, is foundational to identity. The first three chapters contain the bulk of this teaching and subtly remind us that there is lots of identity confusion. Second, live as you exist in Christ. If you do not know who you are in Christ you will be tossed about by all the messages and false doctrine that you hear daily (4:14). Living in sin is inconsistent with who you are in Christ (4:20-24). Thus, you are to be imitators of God (5:1). Third, remember who we once were without Christ and who we in Jesus. The New Testament is constantly laying out the gospel; and not to unbelievers. Young people need to hear the truth of who they are again and again, because they are apt to forget. When we forget who we are in Christ we live in a manner that is not Christ-like (4:26-5:5).

When a Christian does not exhibit Christian character it is because they have forgotten who they are. They have lost sight of their identity in Christ. Jesus lived, died, and rose again so that we could be forgiven and possess his character. When we forget our identity in Christ and the riches that are ours, we begin to live like a non-believer. This is why the apostle Paul consistently says, “Remember…” (2:11-12) and why it is never a waste of time to remind people who they are in Christ.
Wrong sources of identity

It is easy to take our eyes off Christ and our status as his child and take our identity cues from the wrong source. When we do an identity crisis is bound to be the result. Our definition of self is determined by the voices we listen to. If a young person listens to the wrong voices the outcome is a wrong identity of self. There are countless places a young person can find an identity. For our purposes we will consider three: society, temptation, and video games.

One of the wrong voices that young people listen to is society which tries to convince them that they can create their own identity through the clothes they wear, the car they drive, the house they will own, the person they may marry, and the job they will eventually have. As a result, identity can change with a new pair of clothes or a different iPhone accessory.

Another powerful voice of identity formation is temptation. According to Russell Moore temptations are about identity – the call of where we’re going to find identity, and who’s going to satisfy our cravings. Moore makes this insight into Jesus’ temptation, and implicitly, our own:

Satan was not trying to tempt Jesus; he was attempting to adopt Jesus. Satan, in all three temptations, is assuming the role of a father – first in provision, then in protection, and now in granting an inheritance. Satan didn’t just want to be Jesus’ lord, he wanted to be his father (Moore, Tempted and Tried, 137).

At the root of temptation is the question of who we’re going to serve and root our identity in. Is God or Satan going to be called father? Temptation is an unrealistic allusion that I can be someone I am not. For example, Satan tempted Eve by appealing to her identity. He said, “You can be god.” Eve momentarily forgot that she was a created being and as a result tried to usurp God’s place. We must remember who we are in Christ (1 Cor. 15:3) so that we break the allusion that comes to us from those voices that say, “You surely will not die” or “You are just an animal so follow your impulses wherever they want to go.” We need a gospel-centered identity to break that spell.

A gospel identity is a powerful defense against Satan, our sin nature, and the many voices told us by society. How people respond to Satan’s attacks depends on the identity they have embraced. Satan wins battles simply by confusing or attacking our identity.

Video games are popular with young people because they provide a way to take on a new identity. In real life a child may be bullied at school but in a video game they can be a courageous soldier who saves the world from aliens. While a child may not be talented at sports, in no time at all they can become a star athlete and win the super bowl. Video games provide the opportunity to be someone else—someone else with limitless powers and absolute control. One author describes the search for identity in video games this way:

But finding identity in video games carries a cost I didn’t understand until just a few months ago. First it detracts from the identity I am commanded to have in Christ. We are to look to him – the author and finisher of our faith – for our sense of self-worth and
purpose. Supplementing with something else is a mistake, especially because extra sources of identity demand time and resources. Apart from Christ, identity is not a gift – it is a return on an investment. Put another way, our identity in Christ is derived from what he did on the cross, what he does in our lives and the future he has promised us. My identity in the Legend of Zelda was derived from the staggering amount of hours I spent figuring out how to get to and defeat dungeon monsters. (Thomas Griffin, IV, “Video Gamers Anonymous: Unplugged From the Matrix,” Boundless, 2005).

Every young person has an identity and lives out that identity. If you want to learn a person’s identity watch how they act and speak. Or better yet, read their posts on facebook! What identity is the person trying to create for others? A revealing activity is to complete the sentence “I am ____.” The answers given disclose identity where a person gains identity. The identities we assign ourselves powerfully influence our direction and decisions in life.

Our biggest problem is that we seek to find our identity outside of God and his story of redemption. Sinful nature gives us the propensity to run after god-replacements, whether this is found in video games, temptation, or society. When we allow the lies of autonomy and self-sufficiency to inform our view of self we are operating incorrectly. The problem of sin is deep and pervasive. The Word of God confronts people with the God who is active and wonderful in his grace and truth, and who has a rightful claim on our lives. The revelation of God in Scripture is the only thing that exposes the utter emptiness of all other glories we crave and identities we embrace.

**Identity in God’s story, his character, and his son**

The Christian is to live with a God-defined, Jesus-centered, gospel-driven identity. Any other source and any other identity is a false identity and will lead to a faulty way of living. Our ability to navigate all the messages of the world is tied to our understanding of who Christ is and who we are as a result. Only as we understand our life in God’s larger story of redemption will we begin to live God honoring lives as imitators of Jesus Christ.

**Who I am is rooted in three areas:** Only in the context of these themes will our identity make sense.

1. **God’s story:** The Christian narrative, specifically salvation and judgment, establishes our identity in Christ as part of a new humanity. Those who come by faith to know the Lord Jesus Christ are incorporated into the life of the church as a foretaste of the fullness of life in Christ that will be fully known in the kingdom to come. The Bible describes our identity in straightforward terms – we are lost, dead in our sins, and the very enemies of God. But thanks be to God, we are not left there. The Gospel of Jesus Christ declares salvation and redemption to all who believe in him (Albert Mohler).

   a. **Creation:** I am created. I am not god. I am dependent. I am not self-sufficient. I am human. I am not animal. I am created in God’s image. I am not created to be any other.
b. **Fall:** I am sinful, corrupt, depraved, blind, lost. I am not good by nature, perfect, spiritually alive. I crave glory that does not belong to me. I am not the center of attention. Sin makes us glory thieves. There is probably not a day that goes by where we do not plot to steal God’s glory in some manner. We don’t need help because of something we did or something that was done to us, but because of who we are. Sin is our hearts desire for something or someone other than Christ.

c. **Redemption:** I am saved. I am not a child of wrath. I am a son of God. I am Satan’s enemy. Christ broke the power of sin over us (Rom. 6:1-14) but the presence of sin remains.

d. **Consummation:** I will be made new. I am not my problems. I will have a new home. I am not made for this world.

2. **God’s character**

How did I get my identity? We got our identity from God. It is the divine that defines. Who God is determines who I am. And the way I got my identity had everything to do with God and nothing to do with me. He called us out of darkness, he loved us, he possessed us, and he set us apart as holy by God (1 Peter 2:9-10). God gave us our identity by virtue of his irresistible call. Therefore, we cannot understand who we are until we understand who God is. When we finally realize that God is holy and I am not, that is when God’s identity becomes our identity through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Christian self is not defined in terms of who we are in and of ourselves. It’s defined in terms of what God does to us and the relationship he creates with us. According to John Piper, “as a Christian you cannot talk about your identity without talking about the action of God on you, the relationship of God with you, and the purpose of God for you” (Piper, *Sermon on 1 Peter 2:9-10*).

3. **God’s Son**

Identity is simply an understanding of myself in relation to Christ and living out this gospel-reality. This is why we can say that the most significant quest is to ground ourselves in the gospel and to teach our children to do the same. Our lives are either shaped by indulging the sinful nature or by abandoning ourselves to the sovereign grace of God. When identity is sought internally it leads to confusion, selfishness, and sinfulness. When identity is pursued externally in Christ self is defined by another and rests on what Christ did and who he is, not on our accomplishments or character.

There is much talk of self-identity and self-esteem. These notions must be rejected as these aspects of personhood can only exist apart from Christ. The only individual who needs self-identity is the person who has no identity in Christ. The apostle Paul reminds us that “to live is Christ.” Identity is always rooted in Jesus and is Christ-centric not man-centric. Our identity is correctly captured when our gaze is fixed on Christ. Our self-focus and self-centeredness must be confronted at its roots.
What is the purpose of our identity?

Our identity is not an end in itself, but for the sake of service to the King (1 Peter 2:9-10). God made us who we are so that we might proclaim the glory of who he is. Our identity is for the sake of making known his identity. We are given our identity so that God can be seen in us. Therefore, being a Christian (our identity) and making God’s greatness know (our purpose) are closely tied to one another.

Who we are is for the sake of God. God made us who we are to show the world who he is. Ones identity in Christ radically redefines ones agenda, values, priorities, passions, and purposes in life. Ultimately, the Redeemer lived, died, and rose again so that we would no longer live for ourselves but for him and his glory (2 Cor. 5:14-15).