

THE BIG IDEA

The journey of growing into Christlikeness compels us to get to know God. At the same time, getting to know God results in getting to know ourselves as we truly were created.

"Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists in two parts: the knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves."¹

"Grant, Lord, that I may know myself that I may know thee."²

"God calls us to know Him, but that cannot happen unless we know ourselves. The most important spiritual journey and act of discipleship is in shaping our own identity in response to the call of God to be who we are supposed to be, someone created in God's image. It is a call not to settle for what we are or to be thrown off course by what happens to us, but to shape life in response to God."³

This week we focus on one part of this principle: **KNOWLEDGE OF SELF.**

"Self-knowledge is and must be an act of discipleship"⁴

KNOW

“*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*”
Psalm 139:14

WHAT IS IDENTITY?

"Identity is the sum of everything that pertains to us and shapes us. Identity is that sense of being and self-understanding that frames our actions, communicates to others who we are, and sets the agenda for our acts. Identity drives life; it provides the energy and motivation for all else. It is the well from which life is directed and sustained. If you know who you are, you know what you must do, and if your identity is healthy, it provides a confidence that enables action. We live out of a sense of identity."⁵

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, Chapter 1, "The Knowledge of God and of Ourselves Mutually Connected."

² *Prayer of Augustine*, 4th-5th Century bishop of Hippo (North Africa).

³ Klyne Snodgrass, *Who God Says You Are*, p 31.

⁴ Klyne Snodgrass, *Who God Says You Are*, p 32.

⁵ Klyne Snodgrass, *Who God Says You Are*, p 9.

When we see ourselves wrongly, then we cannot fulfill the unique purpose God has given to each one of us.

Where do you tend to get your sense of identity?

Where did Jesus get His identity? | See Matthew 3:13-17 – 4:1-11

“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”
Mark 1:11, ESV

“Jesus underlines how important it is for us to know who we are. Because of his inward assurance that He is the Beloved of God, He is consistently His own person, able to pour Himself out in extravagant self-giving, and is finally free to lay his life down in complete self-surrender upon the cross. Secure in His interactive relationship with Abba Father, He resists the wilderness temptations to forge an identity based on the illusion of success, popularity, or power. Not once throughout His life does He need to prove Himself, win the approval of contemporaries or be involved in any manipulative power games. Knowing who He is, Jesus invests Himself single-mindedly in the realization of His Father’s kingdom vision for our broken world.”⁶



⁶Trevor Hudson, *Discovering Our Spiritual Identity*, p 27.

GOD GIVES US OUR IDENTITY.

- 1 Adam and Eve – All human beings are created in God’s image, and given a purpose in this world. We all have inherent worth, dignity, value, and potential. We are creatures, made by a Creator who has given us life and the provisions of life. We are utterly dependent upon our Creator God. We have been blessed by God as His image bearers. And, out of love, He has also given us boundaries, for our good. We live a flourishing life when we live within those boundaries.
- 2 Jesus – As Christians, we are “in Christ.” In addition, we are “adopted sons,” or “children of God.” These are aspects of our identity which are unique to Christians.

WE ARE THE
BELOVEDS OF GOD.
BECAUSE WE ARE
“IN CHRIST,” OUR
IDENTITY PRIMARILY
STARTS WHERE IT
STARTED WITH
JESUS.



“Being the Beloved expresses the core truth of our existence.”⁷

⁷Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, p 33.

“An identity grounded in God would mean that when we think of who we are, the first thing that should come to mind is our status as someone who is deeply loved by God.”⁸

“We don’t need to prove ourselves to God. We don’t have to do anything at all to be acceptable to him. That is what Jesus came to say, and for that He got killed. He came to say, “Hey, you don’t have to earn God’s love. It is not a matter for human achievement. You exist because God loves you already. You are a child of divine love.”⁹

“Explore this mystery-laden truth carefully. Jesus, uniquely the Beloved Son, attests to your and my infinite value as a child of God. From all eternity it has been God’s purpose that everyone discover their belovedness in the Beloved, for this is truly who we are: beloved children of the Most High.”¹⁰

BE

SILENCE & SOLITUDE

Jesus’ commands us: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matt 22:39, Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27) What if we viewed it as Jesus saying, “Treat others as “beloved” because YOU are “beloved”?” Being able to enact healthy love towards others requires that we have a healthy love for ourselves. God is the source of that love. Just as Jesus continuously needed to retreat to a quiet place alone to connect with his Source of love, so do we.

Last week we practiced intentional times of silence. This week we add **solitude**. Solitude is spending time apart from others, and it is intentional time alone with ourselves and God.

St. Bernard of Clairvoux (12th Century abbot) once told a new pope that he should be sure to find time for himself, he said, “...remember to restore yourself to yourself.” When we spend quiet time alone with God, we allow the opportunity for being restored to ourselves. It is a sacred time to just **be**.

⁸David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, p 47.

⁹Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in Trevor Hudson’s *Discovering Our Spiritual Identity*.

¹⁰Trevor Hudson, *Discovering Our Spiritual Identity*, p 27.

DO

HOLY EXPERIMENT

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record that Jesus heard a voice from heaven saying “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” Jesus knew his identity as the beloved Son of God the Father. Everything he did flowed from this identity. It kept him grounded in the assurance of his position and relationship with God the Father. Because of this assurance, Jesus was able to withstand temptation, gossip, slander, attacks from powerful people, distractions in His ministry. He was able to live obediently, and free from having to prove Himself or win approval from others.

As we survey the ways in which Jesus interacted with all the people with whom He came into contact, we see that He also extended to each person a sense of their own belovedness – He shared meals with sinners, ministered to Samaritans – and women! – healed the unclean, responded to cries and pleas of help. Through His words and deeds, Jesus communicated to each person: You are beloved. He truly lived out the words he spoke shortly before his death: “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you” (John 15:9).

*Throughout the Bible we can find
many scriptures which
affirm our belovedness.
There are many words and images
throughout the scriptures which
speak to us about our true identity.*



This week, our assignment is to create a personal “Beloved Charter.” It is a statement which strings together some of your favorite scriptures which affirm your belovedness. These are words which help us see ourselves through the eyes of our loving Father. They remind us about how God feels about us. Once we’ve created our Beloved Charter, we can turn to it regularly as a reminder that God has a love and a purpose for us. And the more we truly believe our belovedness, the more we live into the people God created us to be, and we are free from the messages, labels, and lies that we tell ourselves or that others tell us about us.

For next week – write your own Beloved Charter.

EXAMPLE:

*Shannon,
I created your inmost being. I knit you
together in your mother’s womb.
You are my handiwork, in whom I
take delight.
You are a holy, chosen, and beloved
daughter after my own heart.
I have given you a unique purpose.
I have called you, and because I am
faithful I will do it.
Know that nothing can separate you
from my love.
I am with you until the end of the age.*

EXTRA:

Try this at least once over the course of the next week:

Think of the person you are most likely to meet next. She or he may be your spouse, a close friend, a work colleague, or a complete stranger. Consider the uniqueness of that person, a true handiwork of God. Like yourself, this person is unconditionally loved and accepted by God in Jesus Christ. As you prepare to meet or interact with him/her, ask God to help you affirm their belovedness. There are ways to go about this. You can communicate this affirmation by actively listening and taking an interest in the person; by expressing courtesy and respect; or by some specific helpful action. Later, you may want to reflect on your encounter and talk to God in prayer about it.

