

Identity in Christ (3)

The reason so many Christians are not enjoying maturity and freedom is because they hold wrong self-perceptions. They don't see themselves as God sees them and therefore suffer from a poor self-image. Our identity in Christ is the key to wholeness. Many of us fall into a trap. When we fail, we tend to see ourselves as failures, which in turn cause us to fail more. We are not failures. While we may slip up every now and then, our behaviour does not make us what we are. This is a false belief that can send us into a tailspin of hopelessness and defeat. There is a battle going on for our minds – the truth of God versus the deception of Satan. We need to change the way we think about ourselves. We need to begin looking at ourselves the way God does.

In the Bible, Jesus used this illustration: *“If you had one hundred sheep, and one of them strayed away and was lost in the wilderness, wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine others to go and search for the lost one until you found it? And then you would joyfully carry it home on your shoulders. When you arrived, you would call together your friends and neighbours to rejoice with you because your lost sheep was found. In the same way, heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!”* (Luke 15:1-7).

This story shows God's grace toward those who have strayed and His great delight in finding them. Though our past may be tarnished, we are extremely valuable in God's eyes, which is reflected symbolically by the sheep. Because each sheep was of high value, the shepherd knew that it was worthwhile to search diligently for the lost one. God's love for each individual is so great that He seeks each one out and rejoices

when he or she is “found.” A God who tenderly searches for sinners and then joyfully forgives them must possess an extraordinary love! This is the kind of extraordinary love that God has for each one of us. If we feel far from God, we are not to despair. He is searching for us.

When we suffer from feelings of inferiority, we must remember that we are children of God seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6). When we feel insecure, we must remember that God will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). When we feel inadequate, we must remember that we can do all things through Christ (Phil 4:13). When we feel guilty, we must remember that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Rom. 8:1). When we are worried, we must remember that God has offered to trade His peace for our anxiety (Phil 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7; John 14:27). And when we are in doubt, God provides wisdom for the asking (James 1:5). Satan has no power over us except what we give him by believing his lies. Our best defense against him is the truth. When we expose Satan's lie with God's truth, his power is broken. *“The truth will set you free.”* (John 8:32).

Will God ever give up on us? Is there a limit to God's tolerance for failure? Are we near that line? There *are* times when our walk of faith is interrupted by periods of personal unbelief or rebellion. During those times, we think that God has probably given up on us and so how do we respond? We give up too. But God says to us: “No matter what you do in life, I'm always going to love you. You can be honest with Me and tell me the truth. I may not approve of everything you do, but I'm always going to love you.”

I renounce the lie that I am worthless, inadequate, helpless or hopeless because IN CHRIST I am deeply significant. God says...

Matthew 5: 13, 14

I am the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

John 15: 1, 5

I am a branch of the true vine, Jesus, a channel of His life.

John 15: 16

I have been chosen and appointed by God to bear fruit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control)

Acts 1: 8

I am a Spirit-empowered witness of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3: 16

I am a temple of God. God lives in me.

2 Corinthians 6: 1

I am God's co-worker.

Ephesians 2: 6

I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realm.

Ephesians 2: 10

I am God's workmanship, created for good works.

Ephesians 3: 12

I may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Philippians 4: 13

I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME!

Questions for reflection and Discussion

1. In what ways do I see myself as a failure?
2. How does my self-image affect my behaviour?
3. What is my reaction to knowing that God is searching for me and that He considers me valuable?
4. How do I respond to negative feelings (inferiority, guilt, anxiety, inadequacy, worry, doubt, etc.) ?
5. Have I ever believed that my behaviour was beyond what God would deem acceptable? How did I feel? What did I do?
6. How do I begin to learn God's truth about myself?
7. How do I feel when I learn that God will never stop loving me?
8. Which “identity” statement do I have the most trouble believing?
9. What one thing can I do this week to help change the way I think about myself?