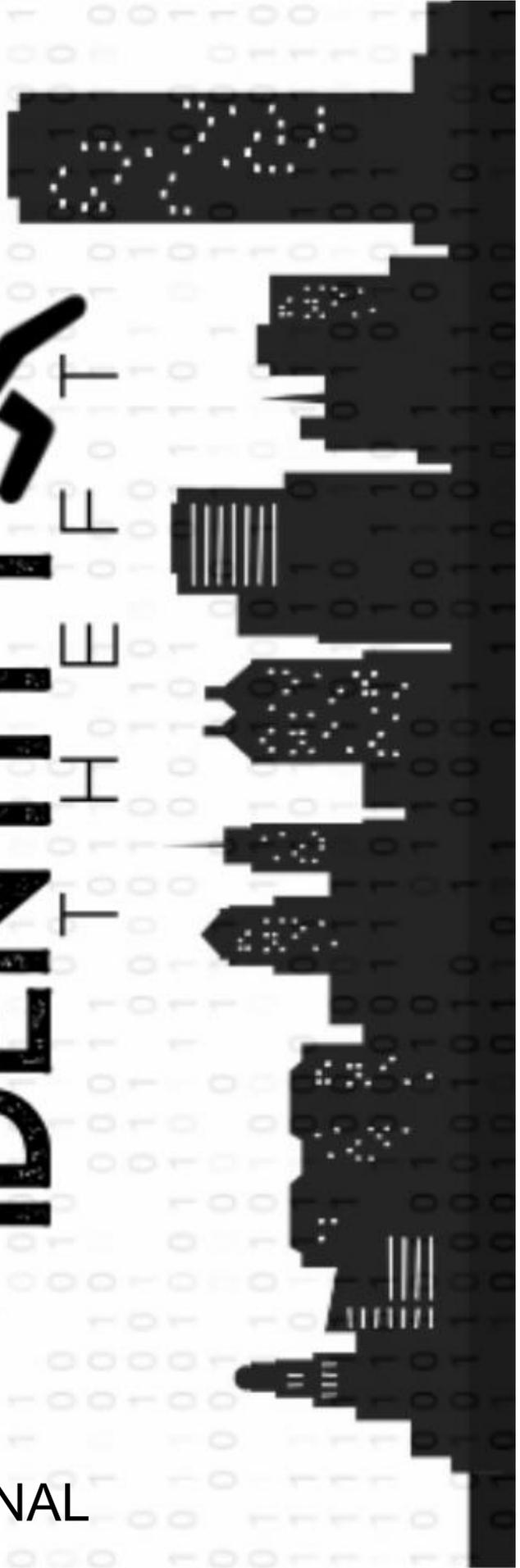


IDENTITY THE FUTURE



DEVOTIONAL

You are being told everyday who you are. Your friends, family, and media are all giving you messages like, “You are what you have, what you do, who you know, or who you are attracted to.” “Your identity is something that you create or discover.”

But what if these sometimes well-meaning messages weren't true? What if instead of helping to shape a healthy identity, they were actually stealing your identity and causing you to believe half-truths or outright lies about yourself?

So who are you? And who tells you who you are?

We believe that our loving Creator God knows us best and that He is the only one with the qualifications and authority to tell us who we really are.

Over the course of the next nine weeks, we want to go on a journey of discovery (or re-discovery) together. We will go beyond the general “every human being is created in God's image” identity (which is true), and will focus in on what is particularly true of those who have abandoned self and have put their trust in Jesus. In Christ we are:

New, Free, Wanted, Forgiven, Reconciled, Loved, Holy, Gifted, and Called.

Each Sunday morning you will hear a sermon about one of these truths. Messages are available the next day for listening at www.sevenoaks.org/podcasts/media/series if you miss one or would like to listen again.

We have developed this accompanying devotional because we know that it is easy to forget what we hear on Sundays. For each week we provide you with a Scripture and a truth to read and to meditate upon, some questions to consider and to pray about (alone or in community), and a few suggestions of how you might live it out that week.

May we more fully embrace our true identities in Christ and reclaim what has been stolen from us.

*All Scripture quotations are from the NIV

WEEK 1—

You are New

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Cor. 5:17)

Work it in

- Considering that in Christ the old has gone; are you hanging on to any sins associated with your old self? Are you still allowing your old self to define who you are?
- Is there any past sin that you need to confess so that you can live in newness of life? If there is, confess it to God right now.
- What evidence does your life give of 'newness'?

Live it out

- Pay special attention this week to times when you fall back into old patterns of belief about who you are. Consciously meet the lies with the truth.
- Look for opportunity to share your story of how God has made, and is making you new with a friend, co-worker, or family member.

WEEK 2—

You are Free

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Gal. 5:1)

Work it in

- Christ has freed us from the **bondage** of sin because He has defeated its ultimate power. And he has also freed us from the **burden** of the law and trying to make ourselves acceptable to God by our performance. Considering that Christ has set us free from bondage and burden, are you living in freedom?
- Is there an unconfessed sin that still holds you in bondage? If there is, confess it to God.
- Are you still living under the weight of the law and trying to make yourself right before God?

Live it out

- Sometimes living free from a particular sin requires getting it out in the open and into the light. This happens as we “*Confess your sins to each other*” (Jas. 5:16). Consider confessing your sin to a Christian sister or brother this week.
- This week if you begin to feel burdened by the weight of spiritual performance, remind yourself of the gospel; the good news of how Jesus has freed you from such a burden. He lived the perfect life that you couldn't to make you acceptable before God.
- Jesus announced that one of the reasons he came was to proclaim freedom for the prisoners (Lk. 4:18). Listen for hints of bondage or burdens in people's stories this week, and join in proclaiming freedom in Christ to those people.

WEEK 3—

You are Wanted

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (Eph. 1:3-6)

Work it in

- Spend some time reading and re-reading this passage. What about God stands out to you? Make a list.
- Notice that the last line doesn't say, "God felt sorry for the poor little sinner so He decided He had to do something for her." It doesn't read, "God rolled His eyes and said, 'Fine, I'll take him.'" It doesn't declare, "God made the mistake of picking her and she's been a burden ever since." **No, God wanted you.** He pursued you. He delighted in making you His forever. You are a trophy of His glorious grace. Marvel at the wonder of being wanted and pursued by God.

Live it out

- God didn't just want you once in the past, he wants you every moment of every day. Spend time with the Father this week.
- Just as God wanted you and made a way for you to be adopted into His family through Jesus' death and resurrection, he wants others also. Look for opportunity this week to share this good news with someone, and to invite them into His family.

WEEK 4—

You are Forgiven

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. (Eph. 1:7-8a)

Work it in

- Some of us live in a perpetual state of fear of one day having to pay for our sins. We believe in our hearts that we are unforgiven or unforgiveable. Does this describe you? Do you actually believe that, in Christ, God has forgiven you of your sins?
- Scripture teaches that we have all sinned against God (Ps. 51:4, Rom. 3:23), and the punishment that fits the crime is death (Rom. 6:23). Imagine yourself standing before a just judge and knowing that you were guilty and deserving of a death sentence. But instead of making you pay the punishment, the judge sentenced his own Son. His Son died in your place allowing you to be declared “not guilty”. **You are forgiven**. How does one respond to such a declaration? Meditate upon this truth and marvel at God's grace.

Live it out

- Take time today to thank God for all the things he has forgiven you for in Christ.
- Considering the scope of forgiveness that you have received in Christ, is there anyone who has offended or hurt you that you have not forgiven?

WEEK 5—

You are Reconciled

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (Rom. 5:10)

Work it in

- The above passage talks of a time in the past when we were God's enemies. Our sin didn't just separate us from Him, it put us in opposition to Him. Have you ever considered this?
- The good news is that we did not remain God's enemies, objects of His wrath. He did not stay angry with us. He forgave us in Christ! But this was not a distant forgiveness, but an intimate forgiveness. He has welcomed us back into His arms. He has made peace. He has made a way for us to be in restored relationship. **He has reconciled us to himself.** Do you know God in such an intimate way?

Live it out

- To all those whom God has reconciled through the death of His Son, "*He has committed to us the message of reconciliation*" (2 Cor. 5:19b). The reconciled are to be reconcilers. Is there anyone that you have become relationally estranged from to which you can extend reconciliation? Ask God to search your heart and to speak.
- Are there people in your life who you know are at odds with one another? Start to pray for them and seek to work for reconciliation and peace in their relationship.

WEEK 6—

You are loved

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (Jn. 3:16)

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 Jn. 4:10)

Work it in

- Many of us believe deep down that our flaws make us unlovable. We worry that if someone knew the “real me” they would run away. Do you believe this? God knows the real you and loves you.
- The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 5:20b that “*He loved me and gave himself for me*”. God loved us in the past tense, which is true. But do you also know that he loves you right now, wherever you are and whatever you are doing? He loved you and He loves you!
- There are an estimated 7.7 billion people on earth right now. That is a lot of people! You are 1 in 7.7 billion. Now consider that out of that 7.7 billion you are actively known to God and loved by Him.

Live it out

- This week when you feel unloved, meditate on God’s love expressed for you in Jesus’ death.
- 1 John 4:11 says, “*Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*” Loving others is the right response to God’s love for you. Look for tangible ways to show love to those you come in contact with this week.

WEEK 7—

You are Holy

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Pet. 2:9)

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." (1 Pet. 1:14-16)

Work it in

- You are a part of a holy nation. To be holy means to be set apart from sin, and set apart for God's use; different from the rest of the nations. Holy is not a word many of us would use to describe ourselves. Why do you think that is?
- Holy is something that we are positionally, even though it is not something we always are experientially. In Christ you are holy. What difference would it make in your life to start to see yourself as such?
- As mentioned, holy is something that we are (positionally); but as the second passage above shows us, it is also something we are commanded to be (experientially). Notice how the command to be holy is rooted in our status as God's children? "Be like your daddy." Does reframing the pursuit of holiness in relational terms motivate you to live a holy life? What does holiness look like in your everyday life? Where do you see evidence of it?

Live it out

- Assess your life, and ask: "Is there anything different about how I live that differentiates me from everyone else around me?" Or more simply: does my life look any different from those who don't know Jesus?
- Living a holy life cannot be done on our own strength. Begin each day this week asking God to fill you with His Spirit to enable you to live a life of holiness.

WEEK 8—

You are Gifted

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. (1 Pet. 4:10)

Work it in

- It's easy for us to compare ourselves to others and to feel like we don't have anything to offer. We believe the lie that we are "less than", or that God would not want to use us. But Scripture is clear that God has given us each unique gifts to be used in service of others. You are gifted! That means that you have something to offer. Considering that you are gifted; what are some of your gifts?
- One way that the church is described in the New Testament is as a body with many parts. All of the parts are dependent on each other in order for the body to function in a healthy and effective way. Have you ever considered that others are dependent on you? That the church is most effective in her mission when everyone is using their gifts. How are you using the gifts that you have for others?

Live it out

- If you are unsure of the ways that God has gifted you, take time to ask those who know you well what gifts they see in you. Or take an online "gifts" inventory survey.
- Look for ways to use the unique gifts that God has given you to serve others both inside and outside the church.

WEEK 9—

You are Called

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:10)

Work it in

- In a game of basketball, 5 players are on the court while the rest of the team watches from the bench. Every once in a while, the coach turns, looks down the bench at the available players and calls one of their names to substitute them into the action. Is this how it is with God? Some play in the game while others wait to be called by Him?
- God has called **all** of his followers to be participants in what He is doing in the world. He doesn't only call a select few, while others spectate. God wants to use you! Consider this.
- If someone asked you what you believed you were called to, how would you respond?
- If you are unsure of what he wants you to do, here are a few general examples taken from Scripture: do good works, love God and love your neighbour, look after orphans and widows, feed the poor, visit those in prison. Declare the good news to the oppressed, be a light in the darkness...Which of these can you do with the Spirit's help?

Live it out

- Start seeing yourself as called, and live it out.
- Pray and ask God if there is anything specific that he is calling you to do (individually or as a community).

