

## SERIES: DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE?

## Discovering Your True Identity In Jesus

## PART 1: WHO I AM

In the thriller “Memento,” Leonard Shelby attempts to track down his wife’s killer. He is struggling in his pursuit because of a blow to his head by the murderer. Lewis suffers from what is called Anterograde amnesia which is a loss of the ability to create new memories after the event that caused amnesia, leading to a partial or complete inability to recall the recent past, while long term memories before the event remain intact.

In order to deal with his amnesia Leonard creates a sophisticated system of Polaroid photos, notes, and tattoos to remember facts and string together evidence to find his wife’s murderer and get his revenge. Regrettably, several unsavory characters tried to take advantage of his condition for their gain. They manipulated Leonard by telling him lies about his past, who he is and their intentions for him.

Memento plays with the concept of identity and truth. A ways into the movie doubt is cast on Leonard’s version of the story, and you begin to wonder if the Leonard the movie portrays is really the true Leonard. Towards the end Teddy, Leonard’s phony friend, says to him, “You don’t know who you are anymore.” Of course I do, I’m Leonard Shelby. I’m from San Francisco. “No, that’s who you were,” Teddy says. “Maybe it’s time you started investigating yourself.” By the end of the

movie information is discovered that causes him to doubt the identity he's built for himself. The result is that he suffers a severe identity crisis that leads to the shocking end—all because He can't remember who He is. During the movie Leonard states, "You see, I have this condition."

Unfortunately many Christians are like Leonard. We have a condition. We either don't know who we are in Jesus Christ, or, under the stress of living in a dark culture and experiencing the stress, chaos, anger, and insecurity that comes living today, we fill the void by placing our identity in almost anything else. This leads to the question that we all have asked, and many of us are still asking it at this moment in our lives, WHO AM I? As Mark Driscoll writes, **"The question is far-reaching, belief-revealing, life-shaping, and identity-forming."** How you answer this question determines your identity and whether you will grasp and engage in God's purpose and plan for your life, your family and the local church.

The Bible is very clear that how we see ourselves is what constitutes our identity. The culture discusses identity in terms of your self-concept or self-image or self-esteem. As your pastor I am convinced that knowing your true identity—who Jesus says you are—is the one thing that changes everything for you. As you walk out in your daily life who Jesus says you are and His purposes and plan for your life, it will cause you to lean into God's purposes as expressed in the two commandments that encapsulate the 10 commandments of the O.T. Jesus said it in Matthew 22 when an expert in the

religious law tried to trap Jesus concerning which law of Moses was the most important. Jesus' response, being God, was profound. <sup>37</sup>**'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.'** <sup>38</sup>**This is the first and greatest commandment.** <sup>39</sup>**A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'** <sup>40</sup>**The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."** Then Jesus' last will and testament to His disciples and to all of us who have confessed Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior is found in Matthew 28:18-20, **"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.** <sup>19</sup>**Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.** <sup>20</sup>**Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always even to the end of the age."** Jesus gives us His five purposes that also help us understand our identity in Jesus. To love God with our entire being is defined as **Worship**. To love and serve our neighbors as ourselves is called **Ministry**. To go make disciples is to **Evangelize**. This means to introduce people to Jesus Christ so they can surrender their lives to Him. To baptize people in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is what we call **Fellowship**. Baptism is the act of publicly identifying with Jesus Christ in His death, burial and resurrection with Jesus' family, the body of Christ, the Church. To teach new disciples and the church to obey all the commands of Jesus is what is called **Discipleship**. Over the next 16 weeks we are going to discover who we are in Jesus Christ. **When you hear Him say you are in Jesus, you are a saint, you are**

**blesed, you are appreciated, you are saved, you are reconciled, you are afflicted, you are heard, you are gifted, you are a new creation, you are forgiven, you are adopted, you are loved, you are rewarded, and you are victorious,** it will give you a confidence, courage and a concise and accurate picture of who you are. As you discover your true identity in Jesus, it will energize and influence how you fulfill God's purposes for your life and how you understand worship, ministry, sharing your faith with others, how to live out your unity with your church family, and how to commit and dedicate your life to Jesus on a daily basis. As our theme proclaims, In Jesus Christ and His cross **HERE WE STAND.**

Let's look at today's topic, "Who I Am."

## **I. I am created to reflect God**

Would you please read out loud with me Genesis 1:26-27, **"Then God said, 'Let Us make human beings in Our image, to be like Us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.'** <sup>27</sup>**So God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them."** The first stage in understanding who you are is to know who God is and the importance of you being created in His image.

## A. God created you in His image and not the image of an animal

The concept of the image of God originates in the creation narrative from chapter 1-2:23. The narrative is intentionally in a way that proceeds from the most general, “the heaven and the earth,” to the most specific single or solitary human being, and as E.H. Merrill has written in the dictionary of the Old Testament: The Pentateuch, **“From the most inert (*sluggish in action and motion*) to the most complex and dynamic, the purpose is to highlight humanity as the climax, the most significant, of all of God’s creative work.”** This is seen to be true in the fact that the Trinitarian God—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—who lives in eternal friendship, fellowship and community with each other, created us to image Him. Church, God uniquely honored us, the human race, by creating us in His image. Nothing else on this planet was created in His image but us. For practical application purposes this means that you and I are meant to reflect Him, mirror Him and image Him. While our culture is immersed with themselves and constantly looking at themselves in the mirror—we are moved to look into the mirror of Jesus Christ, and we’re to mirror God to others. The fact that we are created in God’s image puts a lot of responsibility on us. Evolution promotes that we’re part of the animal kingdom. This is a direct assault on God’s authoritative word to us that we are in His image. This is key to you being able to understand who you are, and why it is so important that you build your identity on Jesus Christ and His Word.

## **B. You are compared to God Himself**

The Bible says that humans are not compared to creatures of the same kind, for there are none with whom to compare humans. E.H. Merrill writes, **“Rather, humanity is compared to God Himself that is, humanity is in the image and likeness of God.”**

## **C. You are given the responsibility to fill the earth and take dominion**

If you choose to marry, and you have children you are fulfilling God’s purpose and plan for Him creating you in His image. If you choose not to have children, or because of complications physically and you don’t have children, the fact is that you are created in His image, and that is where you get your value, significance and meaning. We are to influence for God’s glory the space He has given to us to live in. Dominion means we’re to be good stewards of the planet that He has given to us to live on.

## **D. You bear God’s image with the potential to mirror His divine attributes.**

We have been given the gifts of reason, conscience, self-awareness, and spiritual discernment, and these are the tools He has provided us with so that we may accomplish that goal rather than actually defining the image. We are not God, but the Bible tells us that we have been created in His image and

likeness. John Walton writes, **“It is only because God has given us these capabilities that we have the capacity to develop the image from its germ form. This is certainly in line with the N.T. perspective as redemption; sanctification and eventually our glorification all serve as additional factors to refine the image of God in us.”** When you surrender your life to Jesus Christ and you confess Him as your Lord and Savior His Holy Spirit comes to live in your life. Ephesians 4:22-24 says, **“Throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. <sup>23</sup>Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. <sup>24</sup>Put on your new nature created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.”** Colossians 3:10 says, **“Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like Him.”**

### **E. God created you as a worshipper**

Being created in the image of the triune God, it is at the very core of our beings to worship, adore, love and give our lives to whatever we choose to worship. One aspect of a worshiper is to adore and be affectionate to the one you're expressing your worship. The truth is our worship doesn't stop and start. Your worship isn't limited to a building and to sacred gatherings. As Driscoll so aptly puts it, **“Our entire life is devoted to pouring ourselves into someone or something. Saying it another way, we're ‘unceasing worshippers.’”** Here is the issue, church. Everything in life is sacred. Nothing is secular. One of satan's lies to us is that you can compartmentalize your life. But you can't. Everyone from

atheists to Christians worship unceasingly. From God's perspective, our choices, values, actions, thoughts, and expenditures are all acts of worship. These actions make up our identity. Here is the only question: What is the object of your affection and worship? Romans chapter 1 is very clear on this fact that all of humanity is divided into two categories: Those who worship the Creator and those who worship created beings and things. Because of sin, our inclinations are to worship anyone and anything other than the God who created us. The Bible calls this idolatry. In Romans chapter 1:18-26a Paul lays this out in perfect fashion. **"But God shows His anger from heaven against all sinful wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. <sup>19</sup>They know the truth about God because He has made it obvious to them. <sup>20</sup>For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see His invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. <sup>21</sup>Yes they knew God, but they wouldn't worship Him as God or even give Him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. <sup>22</sup>Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. <sup>23</sup>And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles. <sup>24</sup>So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. <sup>25</sup>They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the**



**things God created instead of the Creator Himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. <sup>26</sup>That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires.”** What Romans 1 proves is that we were all created as worshippers. We are drawn to want to love, adore, revere and be affectionate with someone or something. The Bible argues that we were created in His image and His likeness and that the triune God is the only one that you can completely give yourself to, and it only brings blessing, meaning, value, significance, identity, and purpose. When you allow your identity to be found in anyone but Jesus Christ you give yourself over to idolatry and your ultimate self-destruction.

## **II. What happens when your identity is not found in God?**

You succumb to **Identity Idolatry**. This term and much of the material I am sharing comes from Mark Driscoll’s book, **WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?** I love acronyms and I want to use Mark’s acronym for IDOLS.

### **A. Items**

The things we own is our way of publicly projecting our desired image. The examples are unending but a few are our homes, furniture, vehicles, wardrobes, technologies, furniture, and much, much more. In our American culture materialism and consumerism has become our American religion. Most of us don’t even think about it, but at some point this idolatry has a grip on most of our souls. When is the last time you simply went shopping or looking online and

didn't buy anything? You simply wanted to know what it cost. I run into more and more people when I asked what they paid for something, they don't even know. For many they don't even care. That is very dangerous to me. How can you be a good steward of the finances God gives you if you don't know what things cost? But that is part of our culture where advertising keeps telling you to buy things you don't need, with money you don't have, to impress people you don't even know. Driscoll lists three leading characteristics of what I'm calling the idol of consumerism. It is driven by 1 John 2:15-17, **<sup>15</sup>Do not love the world, nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. <sup>16</sup>For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure (Hedonism), a craving for everything we see (Consumerism), and pride in our achievements and possessions (Materialism). These are not from the Father, but are from this world. <sup>17</sup>And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.**

1) It's a worldview that tells us who we are. In other words, brand names you wear and who makes your car are vital to your identity.

2) It drives us to gain status and prestige from our peers. Sociologist Thorstein Veblen, who coined the phrase "conspicuous consumption," argues that the chief way we obtain social prestige and power is through "conspicuous display of leisure and consumption."

**3) Products now maintain our identity.** In other words, **“When things become the source of our identity, we become guilty of idolatry.” (Mark Driscoll).** This is an incredible way of stating what I just read to you in Romans 1 and 1 John chapter 2.

## **B. Duties**

Life is filled with duties starting with learning how to pick up after yourself when you are young—then homework in school, career requirements in the work place, ministry opportunities in the church, relational responsibilities in marriage and family. Our duties and responsibilities can be part of our worship to God, or they can wrongly be turned into a god we worship. If you choose to build your identity in the achievement of your work and success you will forever be searching to excel in an effort to out-perform others so you can demonstrate your superiority. This leads to hubris (excessive pride) and arrogance. Winning becomes all important, and all along you lack passion for others. When you fail or lose you become depressed, and it makes you miserable and uncomfortable to be around. Here is the Good News. You are not what you do. God has given you Holy Spirit gifts, talents and unique abilities. You have responsibilities and duties, but these things do not define who you are, because you’re not defined by what you do. Rather, who you are and God’s purposes for your life helps you faithfully pursue God’s plans for your life, and it is your obedience to His Word and call on your life that leads to your

dignity and identity, not what you do. Paul nails this point in Philippians 3:1-11. Paul argued that it wasn't a faithful following of the rules of the Old Testament that God has given to the Jews that saved him, but it was what Jesus did on his behalf. Paul gives a list of all of the accolades he could boast of, but said, "these things were once valuable to me." Paul writes in vs. 8, **"Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ."** Your identity is not in what you do but your relationship with Jesus and what He says is true about you.

### **C. Others**

God created us to be in relationship and community with each other. It is true that we're better together. But it is possible that, with all good things, we can turn our relationships into a god thing if we allow others to become the source of our identity. The tendency to base our identity on others is refereed to as peer pressure, people pleasing, codependency and the fear of people. Proverbs 29:25 says, **"Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the Lord means safety."** If you give people too much control over who they say or think you are or should be, then you have given them a godlike place in your life. This is how our spouses, children, friends, and those who are in positions to help us get to where we want to be can become idols. We allow them to influence who we think we are.

## **D. Longings**

It is misplaced thinking to set your identity on who you will become, what you will do, and have it based on your own efforts rather than based in Jesus. Longings, desires and plans can give us a hope that tomorrow could be better, so we persevere. But when our longings become the source of our identity, it is too easy for our lives to be controlled by our emotions, feelings and our future rather than on Jesus Christ and His past, present and future purposes and plans for our lives. James 4:13-16 states this reality perfectly, **“Look here, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.’ <sup>14</sup>How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone. <sup>15</sup>What you ought to say is, ‘If the Lord wants us to we will live and do this or that.’ <sup>16</sup>Otherwise you are boasting about your own plans, and all such boasting is evil.”**

## **E. Sufferings**

We can easily allow our suffering to become our identity. Jesus is to be our only source of our identity. We can suffer spiritually. We can suffer emotionally. We can suffer relationally, financially, vocationally, intellectually, and physically. Here is the problem. When we suffer, especially if it is a long-term suffering, we can allow our hurt to become our identity. Our pain can become all consuming and overwhelming. It’s true that it is extremely difficult to tell a

cancer patient, divorcée, or rape victim that his or her pain isn't the defining aspect of who that individual is. I believe if we don't take our suffering to Jesus and experience His grace, love, patience, and perseverance, it is inevitable that we take on the identity of our suffering. It is way too easy to take on the role of the victim or to become incredibly passive or to overreact and become angry, aggressive and incredibly self-dependent. Driscoll writes, **“But if we truly love those who suffer, we must humbly, graciously, and patiently explain that to be a Christian is not to live a life free from suffering, but rather, suffering is meant to lead us to identify with Jesus, who suffered more than anyone in history on our behalf.”** Paul addresses this issue powerfully in Philippians 4:11-13, **“Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup>I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. <sup>13</sup>For I can do everything through Christ, Who gives me strength.”** The rest of this series is to help you and me to discover the power, purpose, poignancy, and potency that comes having your identity forged and founded and sustained in and by Jesus. **My prayer for all of us is that during this series and this year, 2019: HERE WE STAND, that you will find the answer to the question WHO AM I? in Jesus Who is the great I Am.**

### **III. The Christian's Identity Credo**

I want to close our time with you reading with me out loud what I have written for you on the bottom of your notes. I put it in your notes because you will want to memorize this. Let's begin, **"You aren't what's been done to you but what Jesus has done for you. You aren't what you do but what Jesus has done. What you do doesn't determine who you are. Rather, who you are in Jesus determines what you do."** Let's pray.

## **COMMUNION:**

**"Then He took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. Then He said, 'Take this and share it among yourselves. For I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come.' He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then He broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, 'This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.' After supper He took another cup of wine and said, 'This cup is the new covenant between God and His people—an agreement confirmed with My blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.'" Luke 22:17-19**