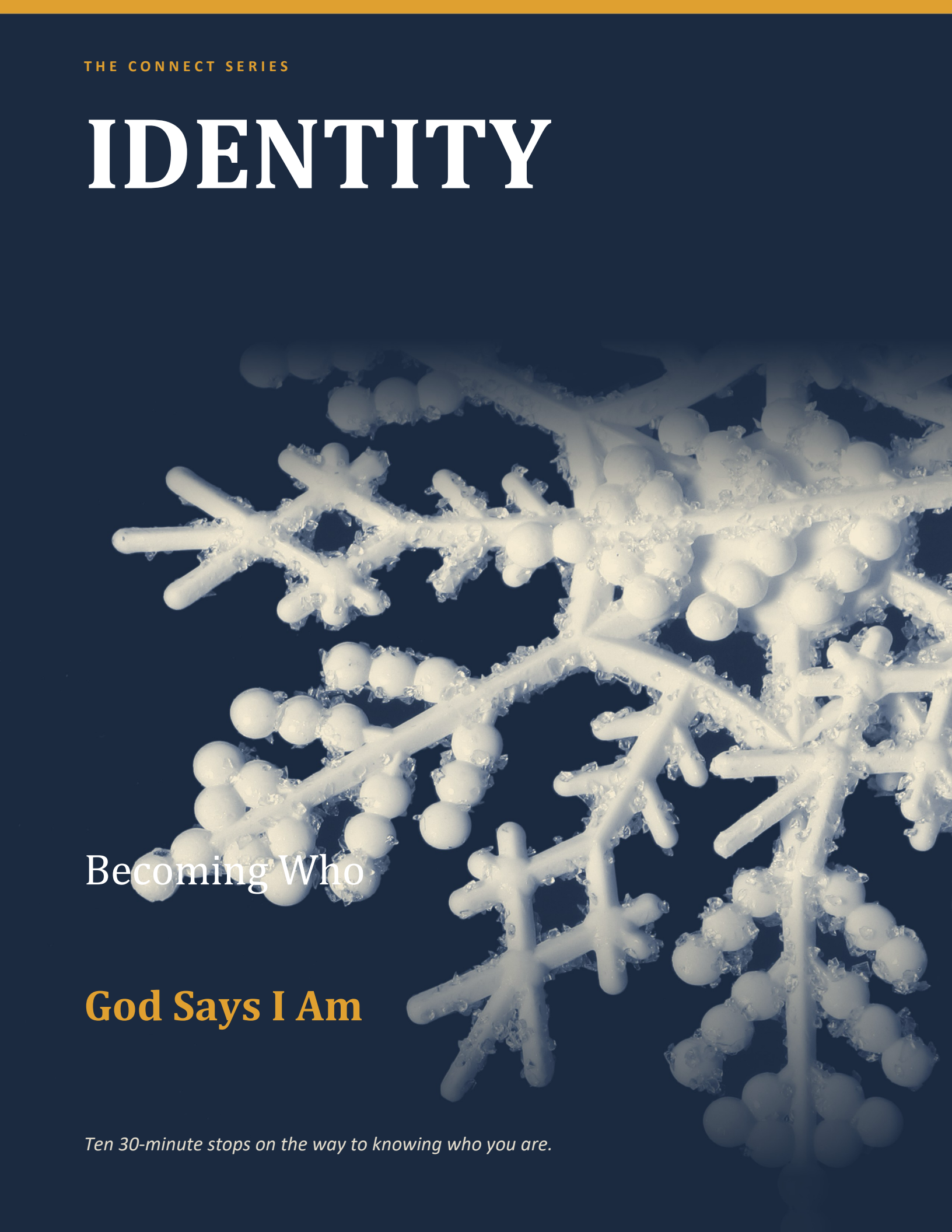
THE CONNECT SERIES

IDENTITY



Becoming Who

God Says I Am

Ten 30-minute stops on the way to knowing who you are.

A personal and small-group study of who God says you are

THE CONNECT SERIES

IDENTITY

Becoming Who God Says I Am

Ten chapters, 30 minutes each

by Ralph Ennis, Judy Gomoll, Dennis Stokes and Christine Weddle



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Content development team: Ralph Ennis, Judy Gomoll, Dennis Stokes and Christine Weddle. **Original cover and interior design:** Christine Weddle. **Original consultation:** Sara Wevodau. **This edition:** adapted for younger readers, with shorter chapters, plain language and new images.

Some of the stories in this book are true to life and are used with the permission of the people involved. All other stories are composites of real situations, and any resemblance to people living or dead is coincidental.

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INSIDE

Your ten stops

Each chapter starts with a question you may already be asking. Each one takes about 30 minutes.

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WELCOME

Who are you, really?

You're handed a hundred labels before you're old enough to pick one. Student. Athlete. Funny one. Quiet one. The one who messed up. Your bio, your grades, your followers, and what others say about you all try to answer one question: Who am I?

This study asks a better question: **Who does God say I am?** Not who you've been told, or who you fear you are. Who the One who made you says you are.

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God, and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:30–31). It's hard to love people well if you don't know who you really are. This isn't about being self-absorbed. It's about seeing yourself the way God does, so you can love Him and others from a secure place.

> **WHAT THIS STUDY IS, AND ISN'T**
>
> - **It is** ten short chapters about who God is, who you are in Him, and why you're here.
> - **It is** a place for honest questions, including the ugly ones. Doubt is welcome.
> - **It isn't** a test. Nobody is grading you, and there are no right answers to impress anyone with.
> - **It isn't** a self-improvement plan. God isn't asking you to fix yourself first. He's inviting you to see yourself as He does.

You can work through it on your own, with a friend, or in a small group. If a question hits a sore spot, that's okay. Skip it, come back later, or talk it through with someone you trust.

HOW IT WORKS

Think of each chapter as a short trip

Every chapter follows the same path, so after the first one you will know what to expect. You stop four times along the way. A timer helps: the whole trip is about 30 minutes.

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

The story	A short, true-to-life story to get you thinking. Some are real, and some are composites of real situations.
Pause 1 *Exploring what God says*	You look at what the Bible actually says. Most verses are printed for you, so you don't have to hunt. Nothing beats opening your own Bible too.
Pause 2 *Exploring your reality*	You get honest about where you are right now, and how you got there. No one has to see your answers.
Pause 3 *Coming alive to God*	You respond to what you've read, in prayer, in a few words, or in a creative way. This is where it moves from your head to your heart.
Pause 4 *Journeying forward*	You decide one small step to take this week, and you work on memorizing the chapter's key verse.
Digging deeper *(optional)*	Extra questions and ideas if you want more. Skip it and you won't miss anything.

ABOUT THE PICTURES

Each chapter has photos and art. They're not decoration. Take a moment to look at them and picture yourself in the scene, especially when words fall short. If an image bothers you, that's okay. Ask yourself why.

THREE HABITS

Get the most out of every chapter

1

Read slowly

Read each verse like a message meant for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand it.

2

Mark it up

Underline, circle, highlight, draw arrows. Make the page yours, or use your notes app.

3

Pray as you go

Not only when a question says "pray." Tell God what you're thinking, even if it's "I'm not sure about this."

Finding your rhythm. Most people finish a chapter in one 30-minute sitting. If that's too much, try three 10-minute sessions, or one Pause a day. After a chapter or two you'll find what fits your schedule.

If you're doing this in a group

A group works best when everyone feels safe. Read these agreements out loud together at your first meeting.

1. **What's said here stays here.** Don't repeat what you hear in the group to anyone outside it.
2. **Share only for yourself.** Use "I" statements. Talk about your own life, not "we" or "you."
3. **Listen, don't fix.** Skip the advice and the "me too" stories. Let each person finish.
4. **Go at your own pace.** Nobody has to share. Nobody gets pushed. Silence is okay.
5. **All feelings are allowed.** Tears, anger and quiet are all welcome. Ask before you hug or touch.
6. **God does the changing.** The group's job is to make a safe place. The Holy Spirit does the rest.
7. **Know the limits.** A group isn't therapy. If someone needs more help, encourage them to talk to a pastor, counselor or trusted adult. If someone is in danger or being hurt, tell a trusted adult right away.

> **TALK ABOUT IT TOGETHER**
>
> After you read these agreements, finish this sentence out loud: *"One thing I can do to help make this group a safe place is …"* Then pray together before you start.



THE STARTING LINE

Before you start

Take about five minutes. Be honest. You'll come back to this page after Chapter 10 to see what has changed.

1 Finish this sentence: *When I think about who I am, I feel …*

---

2 How much do I let what *God* says about me, rather than other people, shape how I see myself? Circle a number.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

0 = not at all *10 = completely*

3 Three words other people would use to describe me:

---

4 What do I hope to get out of this study?

A PRAYER TO START

God, I want to see myself the way You see me. Help me be honest as I read. Show me who You say I am, and help me believe it. Amen.

IF THINGS FEEL HEAVY

Some chapters touch hard things like shame, guilt, or past hurts. If you're going through something painful, talk to a trusted friend, pastor, counselor or parent. If you're thinking about hurting yourself, call or text **988** (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the U.S.), or call **911** if you're in danger.

Ready? Turn the page to Chapter 1: God's Essence

IDENTITY: BECOMING WHO GOD SAYS I AM

CHAPTER 1

God's Essence

What's good about Him?

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Before you can know who you are, you need to know who God is. You were made in His image. So what you believe about Him shapes how you see yourself.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **See** why your picture of God matters for your identity.
- **Spot** where your picture of God came from.
- **Explore** nine true things about God.
- **Say** Psalm 34:8 from memory.

KEY VERSE

Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. **Psalm 34:8 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

Is God really good?

A true-to-life story, with details changed.



Illustrative photo

Jesse's mom only mentioned God before dinner: "God is great, God is good, and we thank Him for our food." It sounded more like a chant than a prayer.

Then Jesse's best friend died in a senseless accident. Jesse couldn't match a "great and good God" with that kind of pain. So he stopped thinking about God at all. Numb was easier than angry.

Years later, when he was starting to think about a family of his own, a question crept back in: What if God really is good?

Jesse's story isn't unusual. Pain, silence, and bad examples can twist how we see God. And the way we see God quietly shapes **how we see ourselves.**

Q1 Has anything ever made you doubt that God is good? What happened?

Q2 If you had to describe God in one word right now, what would it be?

HERE'S WHERE WE'RE HEADED

We'll look at what the Bible says is true about God, where your own picture of Him came from, and how to see Him more clearly.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

Made in His image



GENESIS 1:26–27, 31 (NIV)

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness…" So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them… God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

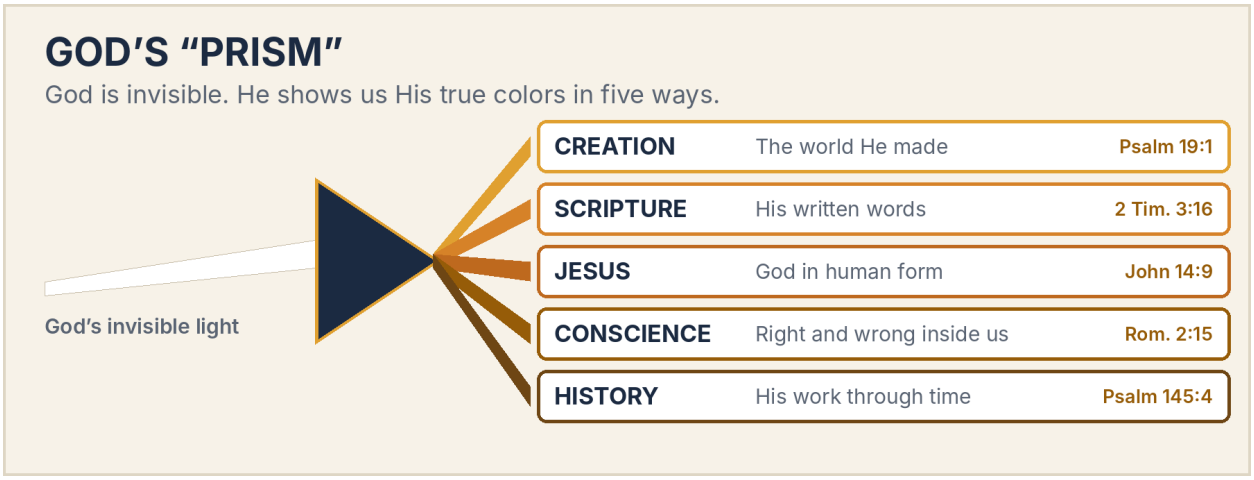
Q3 God made humans in His image. What do you think it means that you reflect Him?

Q4 God called what He made "very good." What do you think was good about the way He designed us?

Here's the key: **to find out what's true and good about you, start with what's true and good about God.** He designed us to be like Him in important ways.

God's "prism"

A prism is a crystal that splits invisible light into a rainbow. God is invisible too. If He hadn't chosen to show Himself, we'd have no clue what He is like. But He did.



A prism doesn't show every ray of light. In the same way, there is much more to God than we can see. (Deuteronomy 29:29)

> **PSALM 145:1–3 (NIV)**
> *I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.*

Q5 Underline the words in Psalm 145 that describe God. List a few here:

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

Where did your picture of God come from?



Nobody starts with a blank slate. We all pick up a picture of God from somewhere. Check any that shaped yours:

- ☐ Parents or the adults who raised me
- ☐ Church, youth group, or a faith community
- ☐ Friends, school, or social media
- ☐ Movies, music, or the news
- ☐ A hard experience or loss
- ☐ Something else: _____

> **EXAMPLE**
> "My dad worked all the time and hardly ever played. So I pictured God as no-nonsense and practical. I never thought He'd care about my wild dreams, or ever splurge on me."

Q6 How might your relationship with your dad (or the main adult in your life) color the way you picture God?

Q7 Is there anything about God that confuses you, bothers you, or that you just don't like? God isn't surprised by this. Be honest.

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God

8 min

Behind the question "Who am I?" is a bigger one: **"Who is God?"** Here are nine things the Bible says are true about Him.

NINE THINGS THAT ARE TRUE ABOUT GOD

Pick three. Look up the verses and mark the words that describe Him.

1 ALL-POWERFUL Nothing is too hard Jeremiah 32:17	**2 EVERYWHERE** No beginning, no end Psalm 139:7–10	**3 THREE IN ONE** Father, Son, and Spirit John 14:16
4 THE CREATOR He made everything Nehemiah 9:6	**5 GOOD** He does what is right Psalm 25:8	**6 TRUE AND JUST** Always fair, always real Deut. 32:4
7 LOVE His love never runs out 1 John 4:8, 19	**8 JEALOUS FOR YOU** He wants all of you Exodus 34:14	**9 GLORIOUS** Beautiful beyond words Psalm 29:2

TRY THIS (ABOUT 5 MINUTES)

1. **Pick three** that stand out to you. Look up their verses in your Bible.
2. **Underline** the key words that describe God.
3. **Write one sentence** about what each one tells you about Him.

HANG ON TO THIS

God doesn't change. He will always be all of these things. And this is only a small part of who He is.

A. W. TOZER,

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

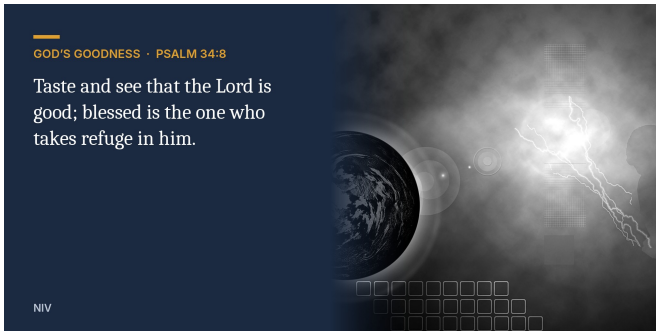
Q8 Tozer says we tend to become like what we believe about God. Where is your current picture of God likely to take you?

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "God's goodness, Psalm 34:8. Taste and see that the Lord is good…"
2. Say the second half three times: "…blessed is the one who takes refuge in him."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

TALK TO GOD

Tell God who you think He is. Be real. If there are things you don't like about Him, say so. Then ask Him to show you who He really is.

JOURNAL (CHOOSE ONE)

A Which of the nine things about God do I need most right now? Why?

B What is one way my picture of God needs to change?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, I want to see You as You really are. Clear away the lies and the hurt that blur my view. Show me that You are good, and that I am made in Your image. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper

IS GOD SAFE?

Many of us want a God who is comfortable and predictable. But the real God is also wild: huge, holy, and beyond our control. In C. S. Lewis's story The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, a character says the lion Aslan isn't "safe," but he is good. Does your God have to be safe? What if He is wild, and also good?

MAKE YOUR OWN PICTURE

Looking at God is like gazing at a diamond: every turn shows another sparkle. Finish this sentence in your own words.

Looking at God is like…

EVEN MORE ABOUT GOD

God is also all-knowing (Psalm 139:1–4), unchanging (Malachi 3:6), and beyond our understanding (Isaiah 55:8–9). Which of these is most comforting to you? Which is most confusing?

FOR GROUP CONVERSATION

1. Where did your first picture of God come from? How has it changed?
2. Which of the nine attributes is easiest for you to believe? Which is hardest?
3. What would change in your life if you really believed God is good?

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IDENTITY: BECOMING WHO GOD SAYS I AM

CHAPTER 2

Made in His Image

What's good about me?

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

You are not an accident. God made you in His image. That gives you value, and nobody else gets to take it away.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Notice** the voices that try to tell you who you are.
- **Discover** how you reflect God, in ways big and small.
- **Let** God, not labels, have the final say.
- **Say** Genesis 1:27 from memory.

KEY VERSE

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. **Genesis 1:27 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

Whose voice is loudest?

A true-to-life story, with details changed.



Illustrative photo

Anastasia can't figure out who she is. Everybody has an answer, and they don't match.

Her mom says, "You're a failure. Nothing you do is ever good enough." Her friends say, "You're okay, just a little weird." Her boyfriend is too confused about himself to say much.

And God? She never asked what He thinks.

How you answer **"Who am I?"** shapes your relationships and your choices. If you think you're a cosmic accident, you might shrug off your gifts. But if you believe a Creator designed you on purpose, **everything changes.**

Q1 Which voices tell you who you are? (Family, friends, social media, your own head?)

Q2 Have you ever asked God what He thinks of you? What do you expect Him to say?

HERE'S WHERE WE'RE HEADED

We'll see how God made you, sort out the other voices, and let Him have the final say.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

Made to reflect Him

> **GENESIS 1:26–27, 31 (NIV)**
> *Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness…" So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them… God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.*

In Hebrew, "image" suggests a reflection of the Creator, like a mirror that shows what He is like. (Jonathan S. Campbell, The Way of Jesus.) You're not a copy of God. But you do reflect Him.

Q3 What do you think it means to be made in God's own image?

How you reflect Him

In Chapter 1 you saw what God is like. Here's how you mirror Him:

GOD IS…	SO YOU…	LOOK IT UP
God is Creator	You can imagine, build, and make things.	Ephesians 2:10
God is three in one	You were made for relationships, not isolation.	Genesis 2:18; John 17:21
God is good	You have a conscience, a sense of right and wrong.	Romans 2:14–15
God is true and just	You care about truth and fairness.	Zechariah 8:16
God is eternal	You long for something that lasts forever.	Ecclesiastes 3:11
God is glorious	You were crowned with glory and honor.	Psalm 8:5

> **LIKE HIM, NOT EQUAL TO HIM**
> God is limitless. We're not. Sin has also damaged the image (more in Chapters 3 and 4). But **every person you meet carries God's image,** and that gives them dignity.

Q4 Which of these do you see in yourself? Which one is hardest to believe about you?

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

Other voices



Check the voices that have shaped you most:

- ☐ What my family says about me
- ☐ What my friends or social media say
- ☐ What I dislike about myself
- ☐ My struggles, mistakes, or labels ("I'm a loser")
- ☐ My talents, grades, or roles ("I'm the athlete")

Q5 Which voice runs your life most? How does it affect how you treat yourself and others?

IF THE VOICES AT HOME HURT

If someone close to you has said cruel things, that was never God's voice, and it doesn't get to define you. Talk to a trusted friend, pastor, or counselor.



A potter and his clay.

ISAIAH 64:8 (NIV)

"Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand."

Q6 When do you "argue with your Maker" about the way He made you?

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God

8 min

Where you fit

Some say humans are just smarter animals. Others say we're gods in the making. What matters is what God says.

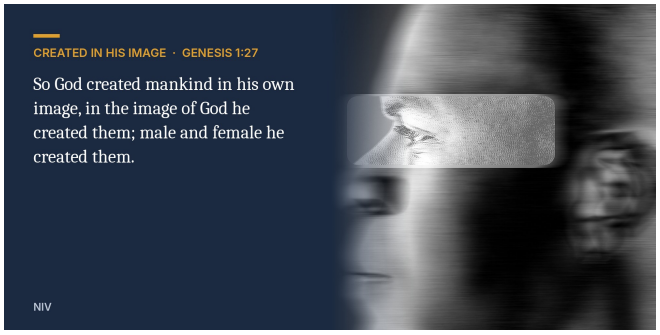
> **PSALM 8:3–5 (NIV)**
> *When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.*

Q7 According to this psalm, where has God placed humans in all He made? How does that make you feel?

Finish this sentence three ways:

> **Because God made me in His image, I…** (for example: have value; matter; can create; am not trash)

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Created in His image, Genesis 1:27. So God created mankind in his own image…"
2. Say the second half three times: "…in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Swap a label

Philippians 1:6 (NIV): "…he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

A label is a word you use to define yourself: klutz, nerd, failure, addict, loser. God never used those words about you. Try this:

1. **Write one label** you've believed about yourself.
2. **Cross it out.**
3. **Write what God says instead:** "Made in His image. Loved. Mine."

The label I'm crossing out: _____

Q8 What would change in your week if you lived as someone made in God's image?

JOURNAL (CHOOSE ONE)

A Which voice do I need to turn down? Which of God's words do I need to turn up?

B Who in my life needs to be reminded they're made in God's image?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, thank You for making me in Your image. Quiet the voices that say I'm not enough. Help me to see myself, and everyone else, the way You do. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper

PRAYERS ABOUT WHO YOU ARE

In three prayers, Paul asked God for three things for his friends: to **see God as He really is,** to **know they were made in His image,** and to **live out who God says they are.**

- Colossians 1:9–14
- Ephesians 1:15–23
- Ephesians 3:14–19

Try it: Pray one of these for yourself. Pray it again for someone you know. Then write what happened in your heart. Over the week, pray the other two.

FOR GROUP CONVERSATION

1. What's one label you've carried? Where did it come from?
2. How does knowing everyone is made in God's image change how you treat someone difficult?
3. Which part of the Psalm 8 passage is hardest for you to accept about yourself?

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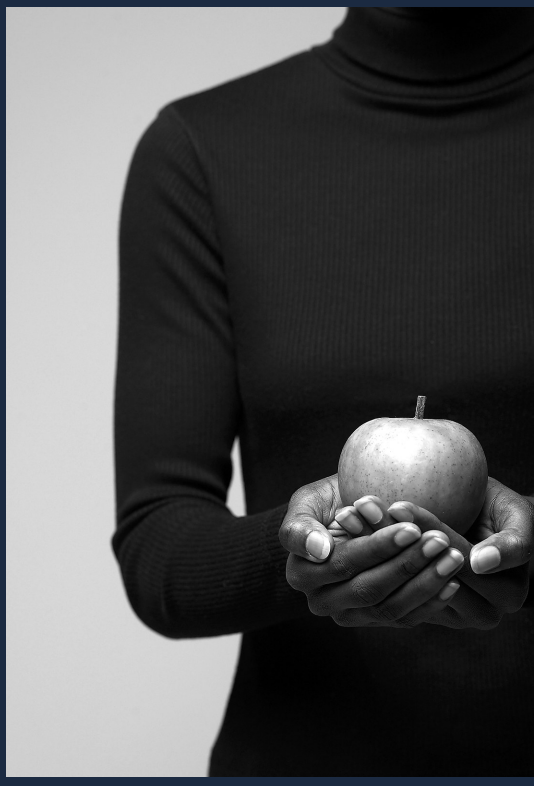
IDENTITY: BECOMING WHO GOD SAYS I AM

CHAPTER 3

The Fall

What went wrong with them?

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Sin isn't just breaking rules. It's breaking God's heart. The first sin changed everything: trust, guilt, shame, and judgment came with it. Naming that honestly is the first step toward healing.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Explain** what sin is and where it started.
- **Spot** four prices sin charges: lost trust, guilt, shame, and condemnation.
- **Tell** the difference between guilt and shame.
- **Say** Romans 3:23 from memory.

KEY VERSE

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. **Romans 3:23 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

Adam's diary

Picture this. It's an imagined diary, a week after the first sin.



Illustrative photo

"Oh, God, what have we done? One minute Father was looking straight into our hearts. I think He saw His own reflection in us.

Now we're ashamed. We're hiding. We're blaming each other. If only we hadn't wanted to be God.

There's no way we can fix this. The only hope is that the Father has a plan."

Adam and Eve passed on a mark to everyone after them, including us. The Bible calls it **sin.** And sin always has consequences: broken trust, guilt, shame, and condemnation.

Q1 When you hear the word "sin," what comes to mind? Be honest.

Q2 Have you ever done something wrong and wanted to hide? What was that like?

HERE'S WHERE WE'RE HEADED

We'll look at how sin started, what it costs, and the good news that Jesus meets us in our guilt and shame.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

How it started



Sin cracks the image of God in us. We still reflect Him, but with distortion, like a funhouse mirror.

Read **Genesis 3:1–24** if you can. Here's the heart of it:

> **GENESIS 3:4–6 (NIV)**
>
> *"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

WHAT LED TO THE FIRST SIN	WHAT IT DID TO HUMANS
Doubt: "Did God really say…?" (3:1)	**Shame and hiding** (3:7–8)
Distrust: the lie that God is holding out on them (3:4–5)	**Fear** (3:10)
Wanting to be God (3:5)	**Blame:** "She gave me the fruit." (3:12)
Looking and wanting (3:6)	**Death and broken relationships** (3:19; 4:8)

Q3 In your own words, what is sin? How is it more than just "breaking rules"?

Look at what the Bible says a few chapters later:

> **GENESIS 6:5–6 (NIV)**
> *The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.*

Q4 How does it feel to know sin hurts God's heart, not just breaks His rules?

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

What sin really costs

SIN ALWAYS HAS TWO PRICE TAGS

The first one is the advertisement. The second is the bill.

THE ADVERTISED PRICE

What you pay up front

- A quick thrill
- Relief or escape
- Fitting in
- Getting your way

THE REAL PRICE

What you pay later

- Broken trust
- Guilt
- Shame
- Condemnation

> **DR. JAMES BORROR**
> *"You never find in sin that which you enter the sin to find."*

Q5 Does that match anything you've seen? Think of a time you chose something that promised a lot but cost more than you expected.

COST #1: LOST TRUST

Adam and Eve stopped trusting God and each other. When someone breaks your trust (or you break theirs), it's hard to trust again, even God.

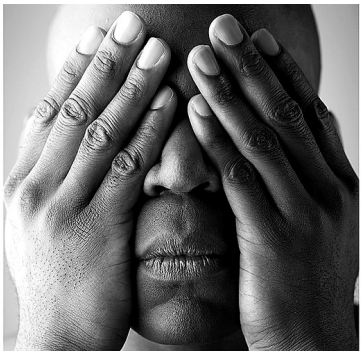
Q6 How has a broken promise or betrayal affected your ability to trust people? To trust God?

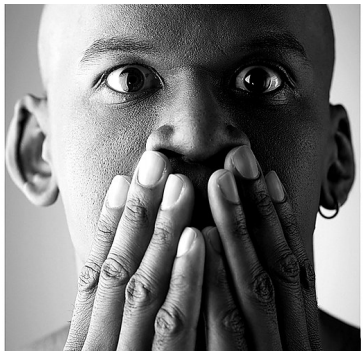
PAUSE 3

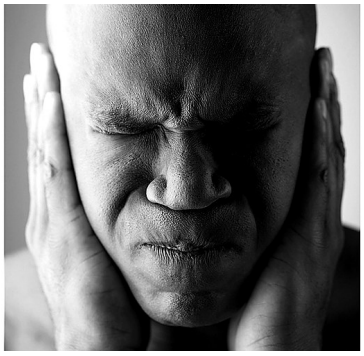
Coming alive to God

8 min

Guilt, shame, and being judged







GUILT says…	SHAME says…
"I did something wrong."	**"I am something wrong."**
Points to an *action.*	Points to *who I am.*
Feels like a heavy conscience.	Feels like wanting to hide.
Cure: confess, and be forgiven.	Cure: being fully seen and loved anyway.

> **PSALM 38:1–4 (NIV)**
> *Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down on me. Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; there is no soundness in my bones because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.*

Q7 David felt his guilt like a heavy weight. When have you felt that? Do you feel worse about what you've done, or what you haven't done?

Q8 Shame whispers, "If people really knew me, they'd leave." Where does shame show up in your life?

CONDEMNATION: THREE VOICES

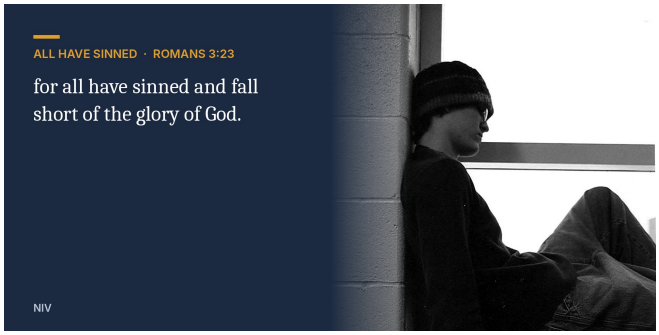
From God: He is perfectly holy, so sin deserves judgment (Romans 5:12). **From others:** people can be harsh, and we can be harsh too (Romans 2:1). **From yourself and Satan:** the "accuser" loves to pile on (Revelation 12:10). But look at what is true for those who belong to Jesus:

> **ROMANS 8:1 (NIV)**
> *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

> **1 JOHN 3:19–20 (NIV)**
> *This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.*

Q9 Which voice of condemnation do you hear most: others, yourself, or Satan? What do you think God says back?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "All have sinned, Romans 3:23. …for all have sinned…"
2. Say the second half three times: "…and fall short of the glory of God."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Bring it into the light

Adam and Eve hid. You don't have to. Try this quiet exercise:

1. **Name it.** Think of something that makes you feel guilty or ashamed. You don't have to write it down.
2. **Tell God.** "God, I feel ____ about ____." Say it plainly. He already knows.
3. **Receive His answer.** Read Romans 8:1 out loud, and let it sink in.

Q10 What would it feel like to stop hiding and let God see all of you?

IF SHAME FEELS HEAVY

You don't have to carry it alone. Talk to a trusted friend, pastor, or counselor. If you ever think about hurting yourself, call or text **988** (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the U.S.).

JOURNAL (CHOOSE ONE)

A What is one lie that shame tells me? What is the truth from God's Word?

B Is there someone I've been judging? What would grace look like?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, I'm tired of hiding. You know everything about me, and You haven't walked away. Thank You that there is no condemnation for me in Jesus. Help me to bring my guilt and shame to You. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper

WHEN JESUS MEETS SHAME

Read the story of the woman at the well in **John 4:5–38.** She came at noon to avoid people, carrying a painful past. Notice what she might have felt: lost trust, guilt, shame, and others' judgment. Then notice how Jesus treated her.

Ask yourself: How did Jesus deal with her guilt and shame? What would it mean for you if He treated you the same way?

JUDGING OTHERS

Because we're made in God's image, we can tell right from wrong. But sin twists it, and we judge others unfairly (Romans 2:1). Where are you most tempted to judge? What would it look like to leave the judging to God and offer grace instead?

FOR GROUP CONVERSATION

1. Why do you think people hide, as Adam and Eve did? What do we hide behind today?
2. What's the difference between guilt that leads to change and shame that makes us hide?
3. How can our group be a safe place to be honest about our struggles?

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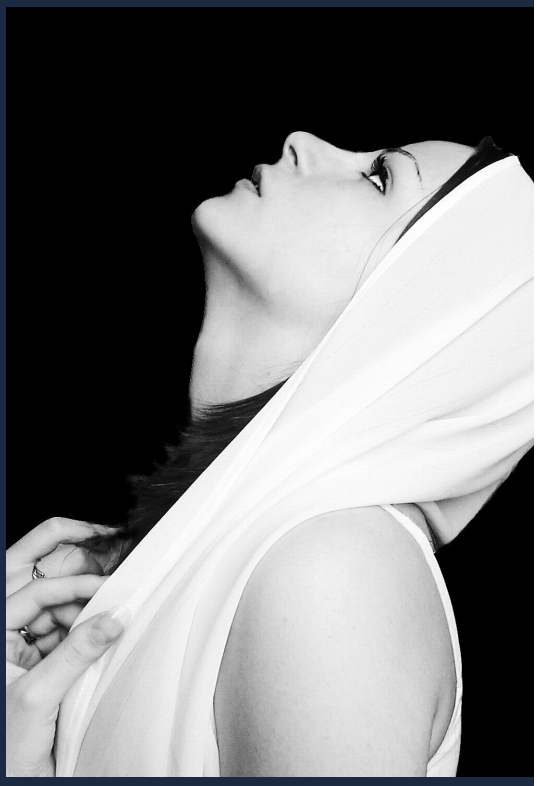
IDENTITY: BECOMING WHO GOD SAYS I AM

CHAPTER 4

The Mark

What's wrong with me?

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Something is off in all of us. Sin has cracked God's image in us, and left us feeling lost, restless, and disconnected. Naming that honestly leads you to the good news: God's mercy.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Trace** how thinking wrongly about God leads to living wrongly.
- **See** how sin has bent your original design.
- **Meet** two people who received God's mercy, and two who missed it.
- **Say** Lamentations 3:22–23 from memory.

KEY VERSE

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. **Lamentations 3:22–23 (NIV)**

START HERE
A short story
4 min

“What’s wrong with me?”

A true-to-life story, with details changed.



Illustrative photo

Keiko has asked herself “What’s wrong with me?” maybe a thousand times. She also looks around and wonders, “What’s wrong with everybody?”

She’s kind one minute and cutting the next. Lately she catches herself sounding exactly like her mom. Where does all this inner junk come from?

It’s obvious something is wrong with human nature. But what, exactly?

The Bible has an answer. It isn’t meant to crush you. It’s meant to help you see clearly so you can get help. Honesty about what’s broken is where healing starts.

Q1 What do you think it means to be “broken”?

Q2 How broken do you feel most days? Explain.

HERE’S WHERE WE’RE HEADED

We’ll see how sin bent our design, and then meet the mercy that meets us right there.

PAUSE 1
Exploring what God says
9 min

The downward spiral

In Romans 1, Paul describes how a person (or a whole culture) slides downhill. The pattern: **what we think about God shapes what we allow ourselves to do.**

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL (ROMANS 1)

What we think about God shapes what we allow ourselves to do.



ROMANS 1:21–22, 25 (NIV)

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools… They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised.

Paul continues in verses 26–27 with examples involving sexuality. We'll cover that topic in depth in the Soul study. Read the whole passage in your Bible (Romans 1:18–2:1) when you have time.

Q3 Three times Paul says God "gave them over" (verses 24, 26, 28). What do you think that means? (Hint: He let them have what they chose.)

Q4 Can you see this principle in your own life? How has what you believed about God shaped what you did?

DON'T MISS ROMANS 2:1

"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things." We're all in this together.

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

How sin bent the design

In Chapter 2, you saw how you reflect God. Sin hasn't erased that design, but it has warped it, like a cracked mirror. Finish the last three rows.

GOD IS…	YOU WERE MADE TO…	BUT SIN…
All-powerful	Do meaningful work	makes us use our power for ourselves first. "If I can get away with it, why not?"
Eternal	Live in a body	makes us fear limits and death, and chase what won't last.
Three in one	Connect deeply with others	makes us use, ignore, or hurt the people we need.
Creator	Create and imagine	_____
Good	Sense right from wrong	_____
Love	Love others	_____

Q5 How has sin messed with your sense of who you are?

GOOD NEWS IS COMING

Seeing what's broken isn't the end of the story. Pause 3 is about the mercy that meets us here.

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God

8 min

Two people who found mercy

Mercy means God treats us with kindness we haven't earned. Jesus told stories that show who receives it, and who misses it.

> **LUKE 18:13–14 (NIV)**
> *"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

In **Luke 7:36–48,** a woman with a shameful past weeps at Jesus' feet. The proud host, Simon, looks down on her. Jesus says, "Whoever has been forgiven little loves little" (v. 47).

Q6 Pick the tax collector or the woman. How do you think they felt after meeting Jesus? What else did they gain?

Q7 What kept Simon and the other man from mercy? What might keep *you* from it?



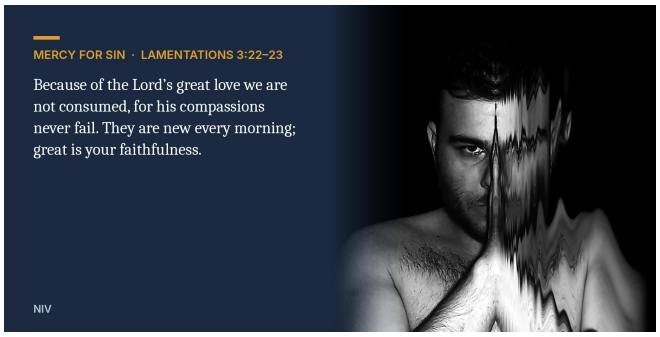
PHILIP YANCEY, WHAT'S SO AMAZING ABOUT GRACE?

"Calvary broke up the logjam between justice and forgiveness."

On the cross, Jesus took the price of our sin so we could receive mercy.

Q8 What would life be like without mercy? What difference has mercy made in yours?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Mercy for sin, Lamentations 3:22–23. Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail."
2. Say the second half three times: "They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

> **1 JOHN 1:9 (NIV)**
> *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

Receive mercy

1. **Be still.** Take a minute of quiet. Picture the cross.
2. **Be honest.** Tell God one way sin has marked you or hurt you, and one way you've hurt someone else.
3. **Receive.** Say, "God, thank You that Your mercy is new today." Then breathe.

Q9 How do you feel about being exposed, and still loved?

JOURNAL (CHOOSE ONE)

A Where do I need God's mercy most right now?

B Who needs mercy from me? What would it look like to give it?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, thank You that You see all that's broken in me and still love me. Forgive me. Show me mercy, and teach me to give it. Your mercies are new this morning. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper

GOOD SHAME AND BAD SHAME

Writer Andrew Comiskey puts it like this: bad shame makes us turn on ourselves; good shame shows us we're separated from God and others, and moves us to cry out for mercy. When we do, God replaces our fig leaves with robes of righteousness.

Ask yourself: Which kind of shame do I tend to feel? What happens when I take it to God?

MORE VERSES ON MERCY

- Psalm 145:9: "The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made."
- James 2:13: "Mercy triumphs over judgment."
- 1 Peter 2:9–10: "Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

FOR GROUP CONVERSATION

1. Which feels more like you: the tax collector or Simon? Why?
2. How have you seen "what we think about God" shape what we do?
3. How could our group show each other mercy this week?

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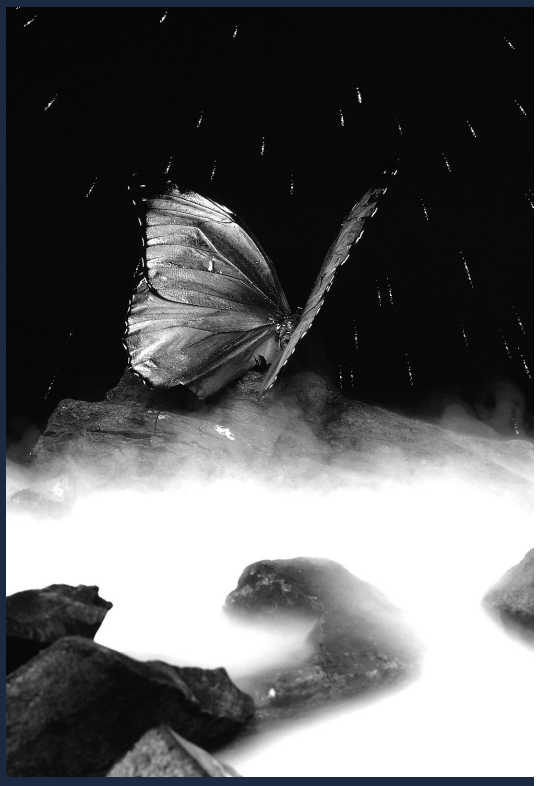
IDENTITY: BECOMING WHO GOD SAYS I AM

CHAPTER 5

Made New

What's new about me?

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Jesus doesn't just forgive you. He makes you new. The last two chapters showed what went wrong. This one shows what Jesus did about it: He is rebuilding God's image in you from the inside out.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Compare** the impact of Adam's sin with the impact of Jesus.
- **See** your "before and after" in Ephesians 2.
- **Match** one hard feeling you carry with a truth God says about you.
- **Say** 2 Corinthians 5:17 from memory.

KEY VERSE

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

START HERE

A short story

4 min

“Can the old stuff really pass away?”

A true-to-life story, with details changed.



Illustrative photo

Elena carries something she never chose. When she was a child, someone who should have protected her hurt her. For years she believed that’s who she was: damaged, ruined, “used.”

Then a friend showed her 2 Corinthians 5:17. “The old has gone.” Elena didn’t believe it at first. Her scars were still there.

But slowly she started to see it. The scars were real. They just weren’t her name.

Maybe your story is different. We all have something we wish we could undo. Today is about what Jesus does with it.

Q1 What is one thing about your past you wish you could “pass away”? (Only write what you’re comfortable with.)

Q2 When you hear “you’re a new creation,” what part of you wants to believe it? What part doubts it?

IF THIS CHAPTER TOUCHES SOMETHING PAINFUL

You don’t have to face it alone. Talk with a trusted adult, pastor, or counselor. If you or someone you know has been abused, the Childhelp hotline (1-800-422-4453) and RAINN (1-800-656-4673) are free and confidential in the U.S. If you ever think about hurting yourself, call or text **988**.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

Two men, two results

Paul says the whole human story comes down to two men. Adam's one choice brought a mess to everyone. Jesus' one act of obedience brings **redemption** (He buys us back), **reconciliation** (He brings us home), and **restoration** (He renews God's image in us).

ADAM'S IMPACT	JESUS' IMPACT
Sin entered the human race	Forgiveness is a free gift
Condemnation for everyone	Right standing with God
Death rules over us	Life and victory through Jesus
Many became sinners	Many are made right with God

Based on Romans 5:12–21. "One righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people" (v. 18, NIV).

Your before and after

Paul writes to people who felt like outsiders. Notice how many pictures he uses to describe the change.



> **EPHESIANS 2:4–5 (NIV)**
> *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.*

Q3 Which picture speaks to you most? How do you feel about who God says you are now?

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

What the cross did for shame

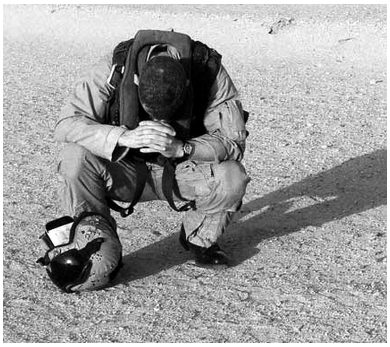
Jesus didn't only pay for our sin. He took on our shame. He was publicly humiliated so you wouldn't have to carry yours.

> **HEBREWS 12:2 (NIV)**
> *…fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Q4 Finish both sentences honestly. (Nobody is "there" yet. We're all in process.)

My old life without Christ was…

My new life with Christ is…



Illustrative photo

> **MARK BUCHANAN, YOUR GOD IS TOO SAFE**
> *"Confession is presenting our real self to God. It's bringing before God not the person we hope to be, but the person we actually are."*
>
> Take a minute. Tell God who you actually are today. Confess anything you need to turn from, then listen.

When Jesus was baptized, His Father said:

> **LUKE 3:22 (NIV)**
> *"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

Q5 What would it feel like to hear God say that about *you*? How much do you sense Him saying it today?

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God

8 min

When feelings lag behind truth



"This is all good, but how I **feel** doesn't match what I **know**." That's okay. Feelings often lag behind understanding. Be patient with yourself. God is working on all of you.

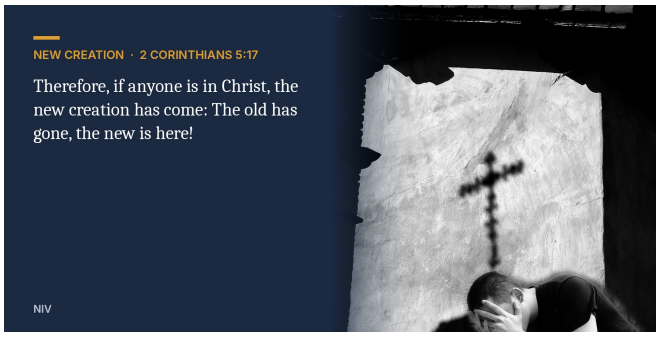
Do this: circle **three feelings** you struggle with most, and **three truths** that encourage you most.

I MAY FEEL…	BUT THE TRUTH IS…	LOOK IT UP
○ flawed	○ **I am becoming like Christ.**	2 Cor. 3:18
○ unlovable	○ **I am beloved by God.**	Deut. 33:12
○ alone	○ **God is always with me.**	Heb. 13:5
○ guilty	○ **I am forgiven.**	1 John 1:9
○ condemned	○ **I am not condemned.**	Rom. 8:1
○ ashamed	○ **Jesus took my shame.**	Heb. 12:2
○ rejected	○ **I am accepted as I am.**	Rom. 15:7
○ abandoned	○ **I am God's adopted child.**	Eph. 1:5
○ like a failure	○ **I am gifted by God's design.**	1 Cor. 12:1–31

PROCESS ONE (2 MIN)

Q6 Pick one feeling you circled. Tell God about it. Then look up its verse. What key truth do you see?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "New creation, 2 Corinthians 5:17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:"
2. Say the second half three times: "The old has gone, the new is here!"
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Live as who you are (Ephesians 4:1)

1. **Choose one truth** from the list in Pause 3.
2. **Say it out loud** each morning this week: "I am _____."
3. **Thank God** for one way He's already changed you.

JOURNAL (CHOOSE ONE)

A Which feeling and which truth will I carry with me this week?

B Who needs to hear "you are not what happened to you"? How will I tell them?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Father, thank You for making me new in Jesus. Where I feel flawed, remind me that I'm becoming like Him. Where I feel ashamed, remind me He took my shame. Help me live as Your beloved child today. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper

REDEMPTION RESTORES



"Redemption is restoring the work of God's original creation… By his redemption, God sets us free from our bondage to sin and spiritual death, to be who we were originally designed to be."

Jonathan and Jennifer Campbell, The Way of Jesus

FALLEN AND REDEEMED: A QUICK CHART

Truth in three steps: God made you beautiful, sin marred that beauty, and Jesus is renewing it.

Fallen humanity (words that describe it):

Redeemed humanity (words that describe it):

Which part of your new identity would you most like to grow in? What would that take?

ONE MORE VERSE

- 1 Peter 1:3: "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

FOR GROUP CONVERSATION

1. Which "I may feel / the truth is" pair spoke to you most? (Share only what's comfortable.)
2. Affirm each other out loud: "[Name], you are not flawed. You are becoming like Christ…" Use your own words.
3. How could we remind each other of our new identity this week?

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IDENTITY: BECOMING WHO GOD SAYS I AM

CHAPTER 6

My New Identity

Who does God say I am?

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Who you are is not your job, your grades, your looks, or your followers. In Jesus, God gives you a new identity: His child, His friend, His servant, and His handiwork. Today you'll let His words about you be the loudest.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Collect** what God says is true about you "in Christ."
- **Practice** seeing other people through that same lens.
- **Explore** four ways God relates to you.
- **Say** 1 John 3:2 from memory.

KEY VERSE

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made clear. 1 John 3:2 (NIV)

START HERE

A short story

4 min

“Who am I, really?”

A true-to-life story, with details changed.



Illustrative photo

Sam knows who he is. He’s an engineer. He’s athletic. He’s Sarah’s fiancé. He follows Jesus.

Then a friend says something that sticks: people tend to act out of who they think they are. Sam wonders, “What if I can’t get an engineering job? What if an injury ends my sports? What if Sarah changes her mind?”

If those things disappear, who is he? And who gets to decide?

Sam also still struggles with sin. How can he call himself Jesus’ friend when his life doesn’t always match? If you don’t answer “Who does God say I am?” you’ll let friends and culture answer for you.

Q1 List three things people use to describe you.

Q2 If you lost all three, who would you be? Be honest.

HERE’S WHERE WE’RE HEADED

The phrase “in Christ” shows up again and again in the New Testament. Each time, it tells us something true about you.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

"In Christ" I am…

When you trust Jesus, you're joined to Him. Paul calls this being "in Christ." Read the key words below, then fill in what each verse says is true about you. (Two are done for you.)

VERSE	KEY WORDS (NIV)	SO I AM…
Romans 6:11	*"count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus"*	alive to God
Romans 8:1	*"no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"*	not condemned
Romans 8:39	*"nothing… will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus"*	
Ephesians 1:3	*"blessed us… with every spiritual blessing in Christ"*	
Ephesians 2:10	*"we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works"*	
Ephesians 4:32	*"forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you"*	
Colossians 2:10	*"you have been brought to fullness in Christ"*	

Q3 Which of these is hardest for you to believe? Why?

Q4 In your own words: what does it mean to be re-created in Jesus' image?

WHAT SCHOLARS SAY

J. I. Packer wrote that the image of God was defaced by the Fall, but now God is at work in believers to repair it. That's what "being renewed in the image of Christ" means (2 Corinthians 3:18).

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

We find out who we are with other people



Illustrative photo

Think of someone you're at odds with right now. Read each verse out loud and put **their name** where you see a blank.

"There is no condemnation for _____ who is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)

"For _____ is God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works." (Ephesians 2:10)

Q5 How did it feel to read those verses about them? How might seeing people this way change your relationships?

A NEW NAME



REVELATION 2:17 (NIV)

"I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it."

Q6 Who gave you your name or nicknames? What do they mean to you? What new name would you want God to call you?

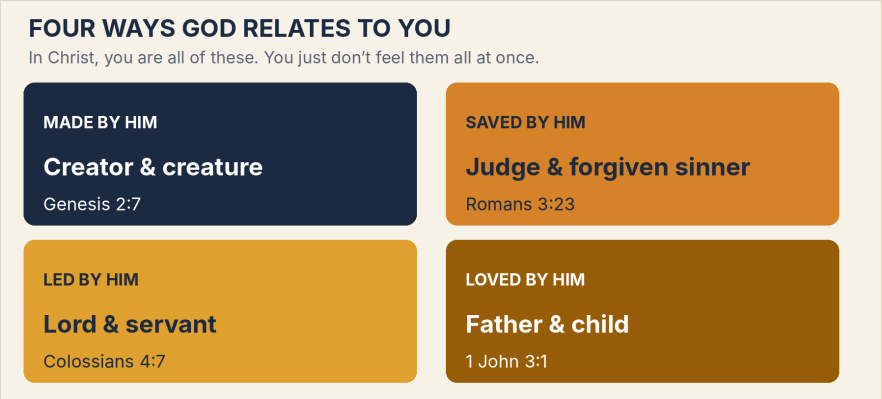
PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God

8 min

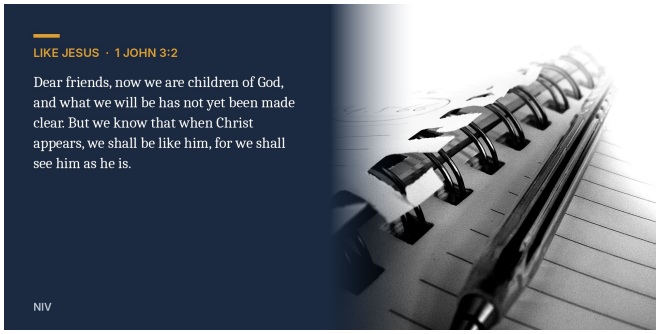
Who does God say you are?

Others call you son, daughter, or athlete. Those are real, but they aren't your **core identity.** Ask "Who does God say I am?" If you're in Christ, you are all of these.



Q7 Circle the pair that means most to you right now. How do those two relate? (Example: potter and clay, Isaiah 64:8.)

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Like Jesus, 1 John 3:2. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made clear."
2. Say the second half three times: "But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Ask God to deepen it (Ephesians 3:20)

1. **Pray from your identity.** Pick the pair you circled and talk to God as that person (creature, forgiven sinner, servant, or child). Write what comes up.
2. **Ask.** "How do You want to relate to me right now: as Father, Lord, Redeemer, or Friend?" Listen.
3. **Thank Him** for what He did to rescue you and share His identity with you.

JOURNAL (CHOOSE ONE)

A How would God define me if my name were in His dictionary today?

B Who is one person I can affirm this week as someone who is "in Christ"?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Father, thank You that I am Yours. Thank You that I'm not what I do, what I've done, or what others say. I'm Your child, held by Your love. Teach me to see myself, and others, the way You do. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper

CLAY IN THE POTTER'S HANDS

> **ISAIAH 64:8 (NIV)**
> *Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.*

Look up **Jeremiah 18:1–6** and **Romans 9:20–21.** What does it mean to be clay? What does the potter do with it?

RE-STORY YOUR FUTURE

You can't rewrite your past, but God shapes your future. What is one deep desire you have for how He will "re-story" your identity?

REMEMBER: WHO DOES GOD SAY I AM?

Go back to the "in Christ" table. Tape or save one verse where you'll see it every day this week.

FOR GROUP CONVERSATION

1. Which "in Christ" truth did you circle? Why?
2. Use the verses from Pause 2 to affirm each other out loud: "[Name], there is no condemnation for you…"
3. Where do we let friends or culture define us instead of God?



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IDENTITY: BECOMING WHO GOD SAYS I AM

CHAPTER 7

Gifts With a Purpose

What are they for?

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

God made you one of a kind, like a snowflake. He also gives spiritual gifts to every believer. They're not trophies. They're tools to build up other people and show them God's love.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Tell** the difference between a natural ability and a spiritual gift.
- **Explain** why God gives gifts.
- **Spot** gifts in action in the Bible.
- **Say** Romans 12:5–6 from memory.

KEY VERSE

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 Peter 4:10 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

Four people, four kinds of joy

True-to-life snapshots, with details changed.



Katherine lights up when she talks about the elderly people she cares for at a nursing home. Bathing them so they feel clean and fresh is her favorite part of the week.

Chen loves to teach the Bible. He can't sleep on Saturday night because he's so excited about Sunday morning.

Daniel organized the guys in his youth group to fix up 25 worn-out bikes and give them to kids in a nearby housing project for Christmas.

Andrea loves researching cultures and trends, then turns what she learns into resources other people can use in ministry.

Q1 Which of these four do you relate to most? Why?

Q2 What do you love doing so much that you lose track of time?

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

One of a kind, on purpose

God doesn't use a cosmic cookie cutter. The One who made every snowflake different takes special care with people made in His image. When you belong to Him, you become more yourself, not less.

NATURAL ABILITY OR SPIRITUAL GIFT?

They overlap. God made both, and He can use both.

NATURAL ABILITY

What you do well naturally, or with training and practice.

Examples:

- Playing guitar
- Solving math problems
- Making people laugh

SPIRITUAL GIFT

What God does through you beyond yourself, to bless His people.

Examples:

- Words that hit home
- Care that heals
- Wisdom you didn't study

Q3 What are your strengths and natural abilities? What would friends add? (Listing them isn't bragging. It honors the God who gave them.)

WHY DOES GOD GIVE SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

Romans 12:4–5	*"in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."*
1 Corinthians 12:7	*"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."*
Ephesians 4:12	*"to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."*
1 Peter 4:10	*"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others…"*

Q4 Based on these verses, who are gifts mainly for? What do they do?

GIFTS ARE GOD AT WORK

The Bible calls them gifts of grace. Sam Storms writes that spiritual gifts are "nothing less than God Himself in us," working through us for His purposes. That's why we can't brag about them.

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

"I feel His pleasure"



Eric Liddell was a Scottish sprinter who qualified for the 1924 Olympics. He felt torn: should he train, or focus on becoming a missionary? In the film Chariots of Fire, he says:

"God made me for a purpose… but He also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure."

He won gold, then became a missionary in China. He died in a Japanese internment camp in 1945.

Q5 What were Eric's passions and abilities? How did they bring glory to God?

Q6 What are you doing when you genuinely feel God's pleasure? (Careful: not everything that pleases *you* pleases Him.) How could that bring Him honor?

REALITY CHECK



You don't have to figure out your gifts by 21. Do three things:

1. **Notice** what motivates you and when you feel God's pleasure.
2. **Try things.** Take risks outside your comfort zone.
3. **Ask others** where they've seen God use you.

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God

8 min

Gifts in action

Match each person in Acts with the gift they were probably using. Some fit more than one.

_____ Peter, Acts 2:14–41

_____ Stephen and six others, Acts 6:1–6

_____ Philip, Acts 8:26–35

_____ Tabitha, Acts 9:36

_____ Barnabas, Acts 11:22–24

_____ Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos, Acts 18:24–28

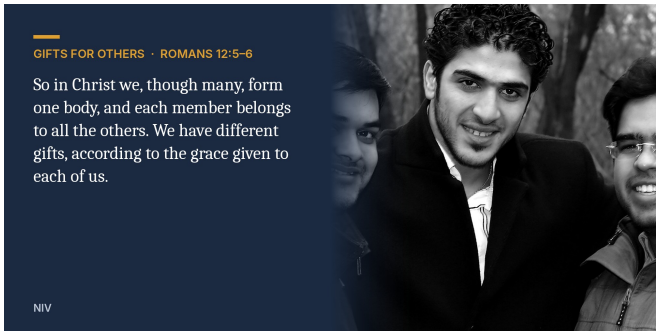
WORD BANK

Teaching: Explaining God's truth clearly
Encouragement: Comforting and motivating people
Mercy: Caring for those who hurt
Serving: Meeting practical needs
Evangelism: Sharing the good news boldly
Leadership: Giving vision and organizing people

The Bible lists more gifts (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4). Christians differ on how a few of them work today, so talk with your pastor or mentor about those.

Q7 Name one mature believer you know. What did they do that built up others? Which gift might they have been using? How did they bless you?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: “Gifts for others, Romans 12:5–6. So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”
2. Say the second half three times: “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.”
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Take one step

1. **Notice.** Write one thing you do that makes you feel God’s pleasure.
2. **Ask.** This week, ask a friend or mentor: “When have you seen God use me to bless someone?”
3. **Try.** Pick one small way to serve this week that stretches you.

Q8 What’s one thing I’m willing to try?

JOURNAL (CHOOSE ONE)

A Where do I feel God’s pleasure most? How could I use it to bless someone?

B Who has helped me grow with their gifts? How will I thank them?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, thank You for making me one of a kind. Thank You for the gifted people You’ve put in my life. Show me how to use what You’ve given me to serve others, and help me feel Your pleasure as I do. Amen.

✓ You made it. That’s 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper

TWO GREEK WORDS FOR "GIFTS"

The New Testament uses pneumatikos ("spirituals") and charisma ("a gift of grace"). Both point to the Holy Spirit as the source. Romans 12:3, 6 says gifts come "according to the grace given us," so there's no room for pride.

GIFTS AND FRUIT

> **GALATIANS 5:22–23, 25 (NIV)**
>
> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law… Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

Ask yourself: Why is it called "fruit"? How are fruit and gifts connected? (Hint: what good is a gift without love?)

FOR GROUP CONVERSATION

1. Where have you seen God use someone in a way that surprised them?
2. Share one strength you see in each other.
3. How can our group use our gifts together this month?



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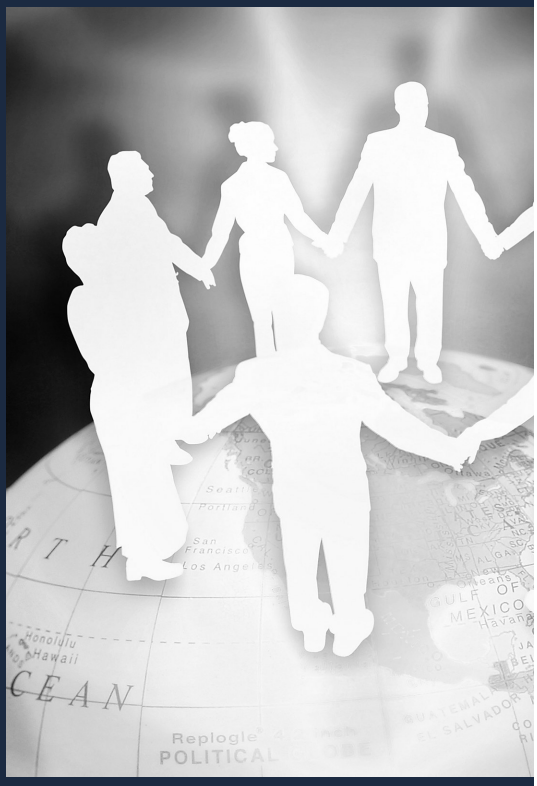
IDENTITY: BECOMING WHO GOD SAYS I AM

CHAPTER 8

Built to Fit

How am I designed?

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

You're a different part of the same body. God gave every believer a unique mix of gifts, personality, skills, and passions, and He needs all of them. No part is useless, and no part can say, "I don't need you."

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **See** how gifts show both our unity and our diversity.
- **Spot** the two lies that sabotage gifts: "I don't belong" and "I don't need you."
- **Look** at your own design: gifts, personality, skills, passions.
- **Say** 1 Peter 4:10 from memory.

KEY VERSE

But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. **1 Corinthians 12:18 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

“Why didn’t I get the cool gifts?”

A true-to-life story, with details changed.



Illustrative photo

To Sarah, “spiritual gifts” sounded more like spiritual chores. Teaching, serving, giving: those were responsibilities, not gifts.

Over the years she’s learned something surprising: serving blesses the giver as much as the receiver.

Still, she struggles. Her gifts, mercy and serving, seem like the “lesser” ones. Nobody applauds them. She likes giving. She also likes being noticed. Can’t she have both?

Maybe you’ve felt this way: wishing you had the gift that gets the spotlight. Today we’ll see how God sees it.

Q1 Is there someone whose gifts or talents you envy? What is it about them?

Q2 Have you ever downplayed something you’re good at? Why?

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

Unity in diversity

We're **different** because we have different gifts. We're **united** because we're all part of Christ's body. Read **Romans 12:4–8** and **1 Corinthians 12:4–13** in your Bible. Look for words that point to difference ("different," "various," "each") and words that point to oneness ("one," "same," "all").

Q3 What did you notice about our unity? About our diversity?

HOW GIFTS WORK TOGETHER



TWO LIES PAUL CALLS OUT

> **1 CORINTHIANS 12:15, 21 (NIV)**
> *Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body… The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"*

Q4 The foot says, "I don't belong." The eye says, "I don't need you." Which lie are you more tempted to believe? What happens when we believe it?

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

When gifts go wrong



Illustrative photo

The Corinthian church was very gifted and very messy. Instead of building each other up, they competed and split into cliques. Any gift can be misused: to show off, to control others, or to avoid obeying God.

Gifts only work well when they're led by the Holy Spirit and driven by **love.**

Q5 If one part of your body stopped working, what would the rest feel? What happens in a church or group when someone stops using their gifts?

THE SEE-SAW OF PRIDE AND DOUBT

Romans 12:3 says to think of yourself "with sober judgment."

TOO LOW	SOBER JUDGMENT	TOO HIGH
"My gift is nothing."	"It's a gift of grace to share."	"Look how great my gift is!"
Discouraged	Balanced and thankful	Proud

Q6 Which way do you lean: too low or too high? What would "sober judgment" look like for you?

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God

8 min

Your design is bigger than one gift

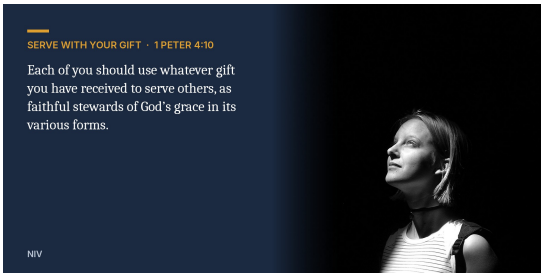


Your gift tells you what God may do through you. Your personality, skills, and passions often shape where, when, how, and with whom you serve. Circle the side that sounds more like you:

- crowds **or** small groups
- building relationships **or** finishing tasks
- clear responsibilities **or** starting new things
- leading **or** supporting a leader

Q7 List your top skills or hobbies, and one thing you're passionate about or burdened by. How might these work with a gift God has given you?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: “Serve with your gift, 1 Peter 4:10. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others,”
2. Say the second half three times: “as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Take one step

1. **Thank God** for the gift He’s giving you, even if you can’t see it clearly yet. (“Faith is confidence in what we hope for,” Hebrews 11:1.)
2. **Ask two people:** “Where have you seen God use me to bless others?”
3. **Try** one new way to serve this month.

Q8 Who will I ask, and what will I try?

IF YOU’RE UNDER 25

Under 25? You’re more likely to see several possible gifts than one clear one. That’s normal. Try lots of things.

JOURNAL (CHOOSE ONE)

A Which lie, “I don’t belong” or “I don’t need you,” do I need to let go of?

B Whose gifts do I need to appreciate more? How will I tell them?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, thank You for making me part of Your body, just as You wanted. Free me from comparing and bragging. Show me how to use what You’ve given me, and help me love the people I serve with. Amen.

✓ You made it. That’s 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper

LOVE IS THE POINT

> **1 CORINTHIANS 13:1–2 (NIV)**
> *If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.*

Fill in: "If I have the gift of _____ and can _____, but do not have love for _____, I am _____."

GIFT DETECTIVE (FOR AGES 25+, OR ANYONE CURIOUS)

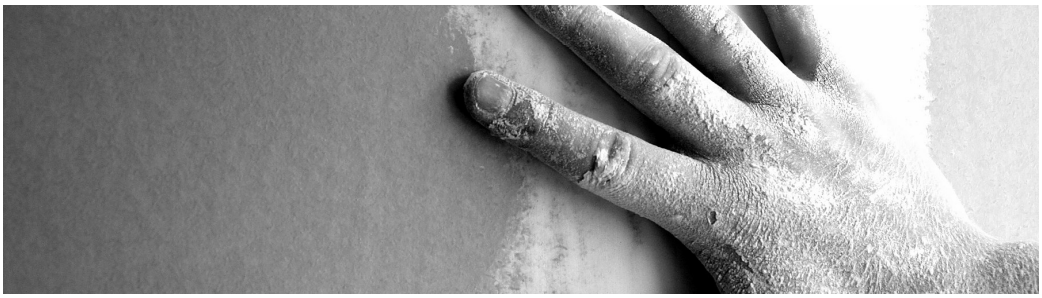
Recall a time you blessed someone in a group of believers. What did you do? How might God have used you? Example: "Stayed up to care for a sick roommate and pray for him" might point to serving, faith, or encouragement.

GO FURTHER

The authors of this study offer a tool called Breakthru: Discovering My Spiritual Gifts (LEAD Consulting) to explore your gifts in more depth.

FOR GROUP CONVERSATION

1. Tell each other: "Here's how you've blessed me…" Be specific.
2. What potential gift do you see emerging in each person here?
3. Which gifts does our group need more of? How can we support each other?



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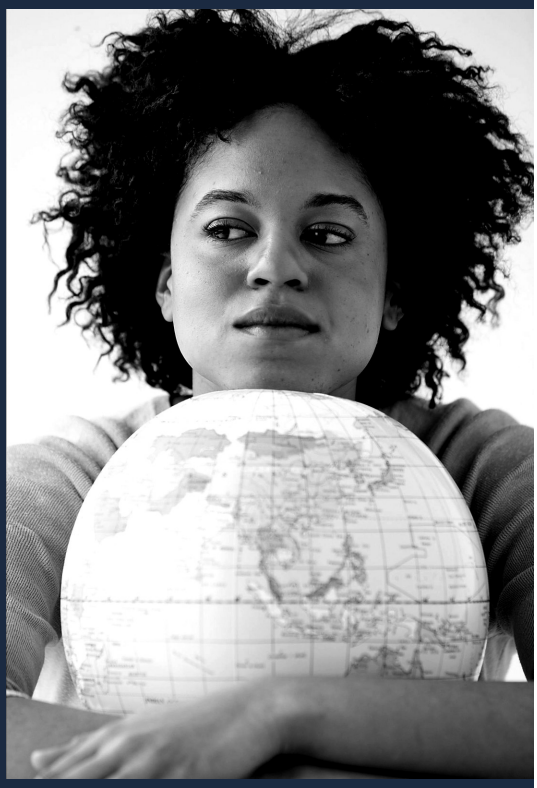
IDENTITY: BECOMING WHO GOD SAYS I AM

CHAPTER 9

Finding Meaning

Can I find some?

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Life can be going well and still feel empty. Solomon had everything and called it "meaningless." God shows us where meaning comes from: worshiping Him and living faithfully, even in ordinary work.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Name** what you're counting on to give your life meaning.
- **Learn** what Solomon discovered after trying everything.
- **See** your ordinary work from God's point of view.
- **Say** Ecclesiastes 12:13 from memory.

KEY VERSE

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. **Ecclesiastes 12:13 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

“What’s the point?”

A true-to-life story, with details changed.



Illustrative photo

The alarm goes off. Juan talks himself out of bed. Again.

On paper, life is good. He has a tech degree, a solid job, a girlfriend he loves, and a boss who says he’ll shape the company’s future. So why does something feel missing?

“Why am I working so hard? What’s the big picture? What’s the meaning of it all?” He’s afraid he’s wasting his chances because he can’t answer.

In Macbeth, Shakespeare calls life “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Maybe you’ve felt that, even if you never said it out loud.

Q1 Have you ever felt like your life didn’t matter? When?

Q2 Finish the sentence: “My life will have meaning if…”

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

The man who tried everything

So far you've learned that your **identity** gives you worth, no matter what you do. Now we ask what gives your life meaning. King Solomon searched harder than anyone. He tried wisdom, work, parties, and projects.



> **ECCLESIASTES 1:14 (NIV)**
> *I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*

None of these things is bad. The problem is making any of them your ultimate reason for living. They promise everything and can't deliver.

Q3 Which of these six are you most tempted to chase? What do you hope it will give you?

Q4 What do people around you do or buy to feel their lives matter?

> **WHY LITTLE THINGS MATTER**
> "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9) What you do today has consequences, even for eternity.

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

Seeing ordinary work differently

An old story: a visitor asks three workers what they're doing. Same job, three answers.

THREE WORKERS, ONE JOB

Same bricks. Different view.

"I'm laying bricks."	"I'm building a wall."	"I'm building a cathedral for God."
Sees the task	Sees the project	Sees the purpose

Q5 Why was the third worker so motivated?

Q6 Pick something ordinary you do (class, work, chores, practice). Finish each:

Anyone can see I'm… _____

Up close, I'm… _____

You can't see it yet, but I'm… _____



REALITY CHECK

You'll never have life's meaning fully figured out. Your twenties are for laying the foundation and framing the walls. Small acts of faithfulness add up. Paul says our foundation is Jesus (1 Corinthians 3:11), and we build with "gold, silver, costly stones" or "wood, hay or straw."

Q7 Think of one joy and one sorrow from your life. What did each teach you? Which of your daily choices is "gold" and which is "straw"?

PAUSE 3

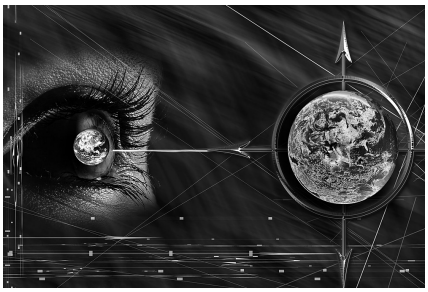
Coming alive to God

8 min

What Solomon found at the end

> **ECCLESIASTES 12:13–14 (NIV)**
> *Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.*

Two purposes: **Worship** ("fear God"): live in awe, reverence, and trust. **Faithfulness** ("keep his commandments"): live out love, mercy, truth, and justice every day. Jesus was a carpenter for 30 years. Ordinary work done for God is never second-rate.

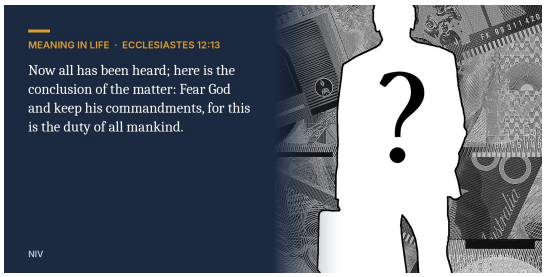


Everything we do matters to God. Paul says each believer's work will be reviewed: "each of us may receive what is due us for things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). This isn't about earning salvation. Your faithfulness is never wasted.

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord." (Colossians 3:23)

Q8 How do you feel about your choices mattering forever? What are you giving your life to right now?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: “Meaning in life, Ecclesiastes 12:13. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter:”
2. Say the second half three times: “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.”
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

PSALM 16:11 (NIV)

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Offer your ordinary

1. **Pick** one ordinary thing you’ll do today (class, work, chores).
2. **Offer it** to God: “I’m doing this for You.”
3. **Notice** what changes in how you feel about it.

Q9 What is one ordinary thing I’ll offer to God today?

JOURNAL (CHOOSE ONE)

A What am I counting on for meaning that can’t deliver? What will I do about it?

B How would I explain the meaning of life to a 12-year-old?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, thank You that my life matters to You. Forgive me for chasing things that can’t satisfy. Teach me to live in awe of You and to be faithful in small things, so that all I do is for You. Amen.

✓ You made it. That’s 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



Try this: A 12-year-old you know asks you, "What's the point of life?" Write your answer in simple words.

PRAYER WITH TWO PSALMS

Read **Psalm 16** or **Psalm 91** slowly, on your own or with others. Both remind us that God is in control of the big picture, for your life and for the world.

WRITE YOUR OWN

Try a song, poem, or voice memo expressing your questions and tentative answers about your life's meaning.

FOR GROUP CONVERSATION

1. Share your answer to "My life will have meaning if…" from the Start page.
2. Where have you seen someone treat ordinary work as worship?
3. What could we do together that would matter ten years from now?

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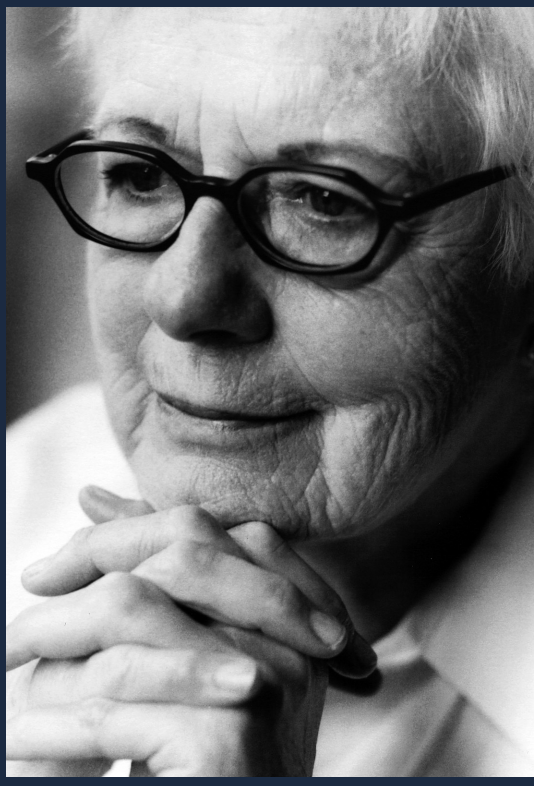
IDENTITY: BECOMING WHO GOD SAYS I AM

CHAPTER 10

Why I'm Here

Why am I alive?

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

You are here on purpose, for a purpose. God designed a destiny for you, and for every person in the Bible. It usually unfolds slowly and it's rarely only about you. This is the last chapter, so we'll bring it all together.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Compare** how Joshua, Esther, and Paul understood their purpose.
- **Link** your purpose to practical goals.
- **See** how Jesus lived and gave His life for His purpose.
- **Say** Philippians 3:10 from memory.

KEY VERSE

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." **Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

"Why am I still here?"

A true-to-life story, with details changed.



Illustrative photo

Bryan grew up in a home that was short on money, so making lots of it made sense. Work swallowed him up.

What didn't make sense was why he was alive. He knows God matters, but it doesn't change his days. Most of his friends don't seem to have a purpose either.

"If God wanted us in heaven, why leave us here? Where should my life go? How do I decide?" Some days those questions nag. Most days he just wants money and fun.

YOUR STORY, STEP BY STEP

Each chapter built on the last. Now we put them together.

DIGNITY & HOPE	MEANING	PURPOSE & GOALS	DESTINY
Made in God's image; being renewed	Your life matters to God	What you're here to do	God's story, with you in it

Q1 Where are you most like Bryan? What question nags at you?

Q2 If God told you today why you're here, what would you hope He said?

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

Three people who knew why they were here

Each of these people served God in a different way, in a different generation. Read each verse and write what they saw as their big purpose. (Pick one to read more about if you like.)



JOSHUA

JOSHUA 24:15 (NIV)

"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve… But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Purpose:

_____

_____



ESTHER

ESTHER 4:14 (NIV)

"Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Purpose:

_____

_____



PAUL

ACTS 20:24 (NIV)

"My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me."

Purpose:

_____

_____

Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land. Esther, a queen, risked her life to save her people. Paul went from persecuting Christians to taking the good news to the world.

> **JEREMIAH 29:11 (NIV)**
>
> *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

Acts 13:36 says that David "served God's purpose in his own generation."

Q3 How would it feel to reach the end of your life and know you had served God's purpose in *your* generation?

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

Purpose needs goals

Purpose is the big "why." Goals are the small "whats" that make it real. Without goals, good intentions slip away.

PURPOSE AND GOALS WORK TOGETHER

Example: fitness

PURPOSE	"God wants me to care for the body He gave me."
GOAL	"I'll work out three times a week."
SCHEDULE	"Monday, Wednesday, Friday at 6:30 a.m."

Q4 Pick one: your relationship with God, with family and friends, your attitude at work or school, or how you use money and entertainment. How would having a clear purpose and goal change that area?



FREDERICK BUECHNER

"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

Q5 Where might that meeting place be for you? (It's okay if you don't know yet.)

DON'T PANIC IF YOU'RE UNSURE

Destiny usually unfolds slowly and rarely becomes clear in your twenties. Other people can help you see it, and others can distract you from it. And God's purpose for you is probably more about others than about you.

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God

8 min

How Jesus lived His purpose

In John 17, Jesus prays just before the cross. Read it and notice: He gave the Father glory, finished His work, and gave His followers the Word. His path was hard, and He chose it for love.

> **PHILIPPIANS 2:5–8 (NIV)**
>
> *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

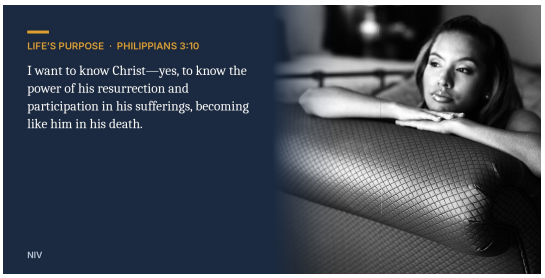
Q6 What tough choices did Jesus make for His purpose? What came from them?



> **JOHN 12:24 (NIV)**
>
> *"Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."*
>
> Giving yourself away leads to life.

Q7 What might it look like for you to "lose your life" for something bigger? What temptation might make you trade God's best for something smaller?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Life's purpose, Philippians 3:10. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection"
2. Say the second half three times: "and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Say yes (Romans 12:1)

1. **Offer yourself** as a "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). Write a first draft: "I want my life to…"
2. **Pick** one goal for the next three months that fits it.
3. **Pray:** "God, here's my life. Use it for what matters to You." Linger in His presence for a minute.

JOURNAL (CHOOSE ONE)

A What is one dream I think God may have for me? What is the next small step?

B Who could help me see my purpose more clearly? When will I ask?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, thank You that I'm here on purpose. I don't have it all figured out, but I want to live for You. Show me my next step, and give me courage to take it. Use my life to love others and to bring You glory. Amen.

✓ You made it. That’s 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper

A PEOPLE PROJECT

Pick one or two mature people whose lives you admire. Call, visit, or message them and ask:

- What do you think is God's big-picture purpose for your life?
- Where do you find personal meaning?
- How did you become convinced of your purpose?

CELEBRATE FINISHING THE STUDY

If you did this in a group, take time to **reflect back** (how has your walk with God changed?), **look forward** (what are your next spiritual needs? who could you invite to study this?), **affirm** (thank someone who's impacted you), and **pray** together.



FOR GROUP CONVERSATION

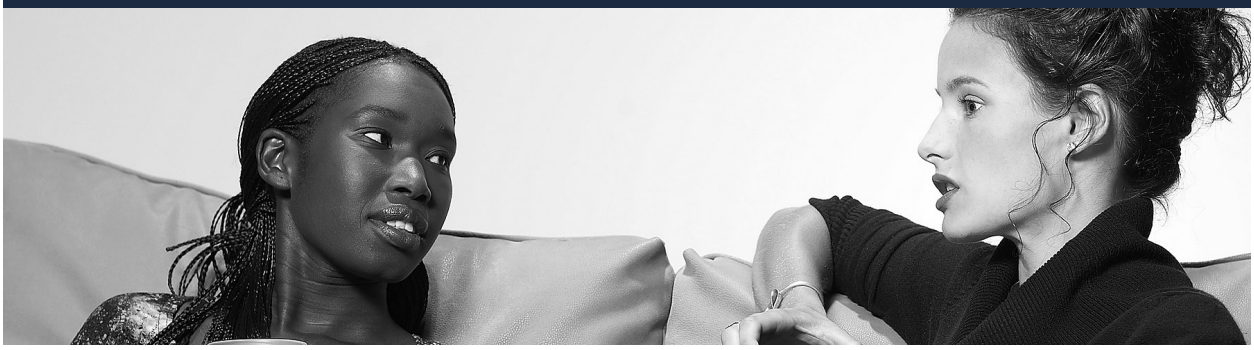
1. Which person, Joshua, Esther, or Paul, do you relate to most? Why?
2. What's worth living for? What's worth dying for?
3. How can we help each other keep following our purposes after this study ends?

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AFTER CHAPTER 10

Celebrate your group

You finished. Take a moment to notice what God has done.



You've spent ten chapters asking big questions about who you are, and who God says you are. Before you move on, **pause and celebrate.** Your friendships have deepened. You've learned from each other: truths, joys, even some pain. Set aside one meeting (45–60 minutes is plenty), bring snacks, and walk through the four moments below. Studying on your own? Do this with a friend or mentor, or write your answers in a journal.

1 · REFLECT BACK

1. What's one thing you learned about God, or about who you are in Him, that you didn't expect?
2. How has the way you see yourself changed? Think about shame, comparison, or how you handle a rough day.
3. Which chapter hit you hardest? Which truth do you most want to keep believing?
4. What feelings come up as you look back? Gratitude, relief, leftover questions. All of it is welcome.

2 · LOOK AHEAD

1. What do you need most in your next season with God?
2. Where could you find it? A friend, a mentor, a church, a campus group, another Connect study?
3. How will you stay connected? A group chat, a monthly dinner, a weekly walk?
4. Who else could use this study? Could two of you start a new group?

3 · SAY THANKS

Go around the circle. Tell each person one thing you appreciate about them: how they showed up, or something they said that stuck with you.

Be specific. Two real sentences beat "you're awesome."

4 · PRAY TOGETHER

Thank God for this part of the journey. Tell Him what you love about Him. Use words from the chapters if they help.

Then **linger.** No rush, and nobody has to pray out loud.

WHO YOU ARE

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" 1 John 3:1 (NIV)

KEEP IT WITH YOU

My new identity in Christ

When you feel it, remember what's true.

Quiet-time idea. Each day, pick one row. Tell your Father honestly how you feel (the left column). Then read the verses and ask Him to help you understand and embrace the truth (the right column).

I MAY FEEL…	THE TRUTH IS…	LOOK IT UP
flawed	**I am becoming like Christ.**	2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:2–3
unlovable	**I am beloved by God.**	Deuteronomy 33:12; John 15:12
futile	**I am a productive citizen of God's kingdom.**	Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 3:23–24
ugly inside	**I am beautifully adorned in Him.**	Luke 15:11–24
discontent	**I am grateful for God's work in me.**	2 Corinthians 2:14–16
powerless	**I am empowered by the Holy Spirit.**	Ephesians 3:16–21
meaningless	**I am meaningful in light of eternity.**	2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:8
fragmented	**I am integrated by the God of all.**	Colossians 1:15–20
undesirable	**I am desired by the One who calls me.**	Song of Songs 7:10
abandoned	**I am an adopted child of God.**	Ephesians 1:5
dishonored	**I am honored in His eyes.**	Isaiah 43:4
unworthy	**I am made worthy.**	2 Thessalonians 1:5
unappreciated	**I am appreciated and delighted in by God.**	Psalm 18:19; Hebrews 13:16
alone	**I am never alone. God is with me.**	Hebrews 13:5; Psalm 37:28
numb or dead	**I am alive now and forever.**	Ephesians 2:4–5; Romans 6:11
rejected	**I am accepted as I am.**	Romans 15:7; 1 Corinthians 15:10
disconnected	**I am connected to the body of Christ.**	Ephesians 2:18–22
guilty	**I am forgiven.**	1 John 1:9; Psalm 103:8–14
spiritually oppressed	**I am delivered from the enemy's hold.**	1 John 2:14; Revelation 12:11
condemned	**I am not condemned.**	Romans 8:1; 1 John 3:19–22
afraid	**I am at peace in God's presence.**	John 14:27; John 16:33
stuck	**I am free in Christ.**	Galatians 5:1, 13–14
like a failure	**I am gifted by God's design.**	1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12:6–8
disillusioned	**I am real in Christ.**	1 John 2:27–28
inadequate	**I am adequate in Jesus.**	2 Corinthians 3:4–5
ashamed	**I am unashamed. Jesus took my shame.**	Hebrews 12:2; Hebrews 11:16
depressed	**I am given joy in Jesus.**	1 Peter 1:8; John 16:24

Chart adapted from the original study. Check the verses in your own Bible.

KEEP IT WITH YOU

Why memorize Scripture?

Words hidden in your heart are there when you need them.

You won't find the word "memorize" in the Bible, but the idea is everywhere. God's people are told to **treasure** His words, **store them up,** and **write them on their hearts.** Here's what that looks like, and what it does for you.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS TO DO

- **Treasure** God's words and guard them like your most precious possession (Proverbs 7:1–3).
- **Write them deep within your heart,** like a necklace you always wear (Proverbs 3:3).
- **Let them sink in,** and pay close attention (Proverbs 4:20–22).
- **Think about them** day and night (Joshua 1:8).

WHAT IT DOES FOR YOU

- **Helps you resist sin:** "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11).
- **Brings life and health** (Proverbs 4:22).
- **Builds your trust in the Lord** (Proverbs 22:18–19).
- **Brings joy:** "Your words were my joy and my heart's delight" (Jeremiah 15:16).

TWO PEOPLE WHO KNEW IT BY HEART

Jesus. In the wilderness, Satan tempted Him. Jesus answered each time with a verse of Scripture (Matthew 4:1–11). He knew God's words well enough to use them in the moment.

Peter. On the day of Pentecost, a huge crowd gathered. He had no time to look anything up, yet he spoke from the Old Testament, including the Psalms and the prophet Joel (Acts 2). About 3,000 people believed that day.

HOW TO START (PICK TWO)

- ☐ **Put it on your phone.** Lock screen, notes app, or a daily reminder.
- ☐ **Say it out loud.** Walking or driving works great.
- ☐ **Write it out** until you can get every word right.
- ☐ **Pray it back to God,** line by line.
- ☐ **Text it to a friend** with one sentence on why it matters.
- ☐ **Review before you sleep.** Fall asleep thinking about it.

CARRY THESE WITH YOU

Ten verses to know by heart

One from each chapter. Check the box when you can say it.

1 GOD'S GOODNESS

Psalm 34:8

Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

☐ I can say it

2 IN HIS IMAGE

Genesis 1:27

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

☐ I can say it

3 ALL HAVE SINNED

Romans 3:23

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

☐ I can say it

4 MERCY FOR SIN

Lamentations 3:22–23

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

☐ I can say it

5 NEW CREATION

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

☐ I can say it

6 LIKE JESUS

1 John 3:2

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made clear. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

☐ I can say it

7 GIFTS FOR OTHERS

Romans 12:5–6

So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

☐ I can say it

8 SERVE WITH YOUR GIFT

1 Peter 4:10

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

☐ I can say it

9 MEANING IN LIFE

Ecclesiastes 12:13

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.

☐ I can say it

10 LIFE'S PURPOSE

Philippians 3:10

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

☐ I can say it

Scripture quotations are from the NIV (2011). Check any verse against your own Bible.

WHAT'S NEXT

The Connect series

Keep going. There's more to discover.

Connect is a series of personal and group studies built to help you know God's truth, rest in His love, and live in His hope. They're made for small groups, where friends can encourage, trust, and support each other on the journey. Jesus said what life is all about:

> **MATTHEW 22:37–39 (NIV)**
> *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Growing in love for God, for others, and for yourself, and living in ways that honor Him: that's a real spiritual journey. Here's the whole road.

1 GOD	**Connecting with His Outrageous Love** Receive God's love, and love Him back.
2 IDENTITY	**Becoming Who God Says I Am** YOU ARE HERE Discover who God says you are, and learn to live out of that true identity. This is the study you just finished.
3 SOUL	**Embracing My Sexuality and Emotions** See how loving God, others, and yourself helps you handle your inner life in ways that honor Him.
4 RELATIONSHIPS	**Bringing Jesus to My Community** Learn to love people, all kinds of people. If you're loving God and yourself, loving others follows.
5 LIFE	**Thriving in a Complex World** Explore time, money, decisions, and commitment, and how they fit into living well with Jesus.
6 FREEDOM	**Breaking the Power of Shame** Face shame, whatever its source, and experience God's mercy, healing, and freedom.

OUR PRAYER FOR YOU

That you will grow in deeper closeness with God, from a heart of worship, as you humbly follow Jesus' way, His truth, and His life.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THIS STUDY

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Ralph and his wife, Jennifer, have served with The Navigators since 1975, from military bases in Norfolk to Princeton University, Richmond, the Glen Eyrie Leadership Development Institute, and The CoMission in Moscow. Ralph has a master's degree in Intercultural Relations. They live in Raleigh, North Carolina, with four married children and nine grandchildren.

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Author information is from the original 2006 edition.

Notes and sources

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About the stories. Stories are adapted from the original study. Some are true to life, and others are composites or imagined. Names and details are changed.

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