

REFLECTIONS FOR HEART & MIND

Identity Beyond Dysfunction

Rooted in Truth, Planted in Grace – Reflection Series

INTRODUCTION

Growing up in a dysfunctional or hurtful family can leave you believing lies about who you are. Words spoken over you, roles you were forced to carry, or painful experiences can quietly shape your identity for years. These messages often show up in daily life through self-doubt, shame, people-pleasing, fear of failure, or believing you are “the problem” in relationships.

In Scripture, we see examples of people whose identity could have been defined by their family dysfunction or past. Joseph was rejected by his brothers and sold into slavery, yet God still called him chosen and used his life for good (Genesis 50:20, ESV). Rahab came from a broken and sinful past, yet she became part of God’s redemptive story and is listed in the lineage of Jesus (Matthew 1:5, ESV). Their identity was not defined by their past or their family — it was defined by God.

In the same way, your identity is never defined by your family’s dysfunction — it is anchored in Christ alone. You are chosen, loved, and made new.

CLINICAL INSIGHT

Many people carry labels from childhood — words, roles, or messages that became part of how they see themselves. These labels may have come from parents, siblings, teachers, or painful experiences, and over time they become internal beliefs.

In psychology, **labeling** refers to assigning a name or identity to oneself that shapes how a person thinks, feels, and behaves. For example, someone may begin to believe, “I’m not good enough,” “I’m the problem,” “I always mess things up,” or “I’ll never change.” These beliefs often become **core beliefs**, which are deeply held beliefs about oneself that influence thoughts, emotions, and behavior (Beck, 2011).

When a person believes negative labels, it often leads to **shame**, which is the feeling that “there is something wrong with me,” and **self-sabotage**, which happens when a person makes choices that hurt themselves because they believe they do not deserve good things. Research shows that early negative messages and family dysfunction can shape self-esteem, identity development, and emotional regulation into adulthood (American Psychological Association, 2023).

The brain tends to repeat familiar thoughts, even if they are not true. Over time, repeated negative thoughts become mental pathways that feel automatic. However, those pathways can be changed when a person identifies the lie, challenges it, and replaces it with truth. This process is similar to cognitive

restructuring, a psychological process used in cognitive behavioral therapy where false beliefs are identified and replaced with accurate and healthier thoughts (Beck, 2011).

The process of change usually includes:

1. Recognizing and naming the labels
2. Understanding where the label came from
3. Replacing the label with truth

This is both a psychological and spiritual process of renewal.

BIBLICAL CONNECTION

God’s Word makes it very clear that your identity is not defined by your past, your family, or your mistakes — it is defined by Christ.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” — 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

“...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession...” — 1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

Many people struggle with feeling unworthy, unseen, or defined by their past. But Scripture repeatedly shows that God gives people a new identity. Abram became Abraham. Jacob became Israel. Simon became Peter. Their past did not define their future — God did.

Let’s explore how this issue shows up in your own life—and what spiritual and practical tools can help you walk in freedom.

REFLECTION EXERCISE 1

Instructions: Use the table to name the old labels you’ve carried and replace them with God’s truth.

Old Label I’ve Believed	Where Did It Come From?	God’s Truth About Me
<i>Example: “I’m not good enough.”</i>	<i>My parents’ constant criticism.</i>	<i>“I am God’s masterpiece — Ephesians 2:10.”</i>

STEP-BY-STEP APPLICATION & ACCOUNTABILITY

Seek the Holy Spirit

Pause for a moment and ask God to show you where old labels or lies about your identity may still be influencing how you think, feel, and make decisions. Ask Him to help you see yourself the way He sees you.

Pray

Take a moment to talk to God honestly about the labels or lies you have believed about yourself. Pray a brief prayer aligning with this week's struggle and ask God to help you walk in truth instead of lies.

Sample Prayer:

"Lord, You know the labels and lies I have believed about myself for many years. You know the places where I feel ashamed, not good enough, or defined by my past. Please help me release every lie about who I am and replace it with Your truth. Teach me to see myself the way You see me. Help me walk in my true identity as Your child, chosen, loved, and made new.
Amen."

Surrender

Write down one old label, lie, or story about yourself that you need to surrender to God this week.

Unlock Your Mind

What truth did you uncover about who you really are in Christ? Write one truth you want to begin believing and speaking daily.

Truth I am choosing to believe:

Connect with an Accountability Partner

Name of Accountability Partner	Method of Contact	Contact Info
Mary	Text or Call	Mary@HerMail.com / (123) 456-7891

JOURNAL PROMPT

What old story about who you are do you need to release?

What truth about your identity in Christ do you want to begin believing and living from?

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." — 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

☒ SUMMARY BOX

- Your family's dysfunction does not define you.
- Your past does not define you.
- In Christ, you are a new creation, chosen and loved.
- When you replace lies with truth, your mind, identity, and life begin to change.

OPTIONAL GROUP DISCUSSION PROMPT

What old label or message has shaped the way you see yourself?
How does 2 Corinthians 5:17 change the way you think about your identity?

WHAT'S NEXT?

Renewed Mind: Journey Through Healing Family Identity Wounds — learn how to replace old lies with truth and renew your thinking.

Soul Restoration: Embracing Who You Are in Christ — go deeper into healing identity wounds and learning to live from your true identity.

Reflections for Heart & Mind: Continue working through other reflections to keep renewing your mind and growing in truth.

CLINICAL NOTE

This worksheet is a tool for reflection and personal growth but is not a substitute for professional counseling or mental health treatment. If you struggle with deep family wounds, shame, trauma, or identity issues that significantly affect your daily functioning, relationships, or emotional health, consider seeking support from a qualified mental health professional or Christian counselor.

REFERENCES

American Psychological Association. (2023). *Resilience and recovery after stress*.
<https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>

Beck, J. S. (2011). *Cognitive behavior therapy: Basics and beyond* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV).