

# TAKEAWAY

Free  
Part 6 – Free to Be

August 1, 2010

## Mistaken Identity

*Do you know anyone who is tone deaf, but thinks they're a wonderful singer? (If not, just watch American Idol early in the season.) Do you know people who are talented or beautiful but view themselves as the opposite? It's often difficult for us to accurately see ourselves. If you ask your friends what they honestly think of you, their answer might not be what you expected.*

*We sometimes think more or less of ourselves than we should. Do you tend to have a more positive or negative self-image? Either way can affect your relationship with God. If you think too poorly of yourself, it can be more difficult to perceive how much God loves you. If you tend to be over-confident, you may not realize or acknowledge how much you need to depend on God. As Christ-followers, we must guard against our old self-identity hindering us from living out our new identity in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and experiencing the freedom He offers (John 8:31-32).*

*Another potential obstacle is our (mis)perception of Jesus. In Matthew 16:15, Jesus asked Peter, "Who do you say I am?" Jesus knew that Peter's understanding of Him and the relationship they had would affect Peter's future actions and recognition of his true identity.*

*As you reflect on your liberty in Christ, ask yourself the following questions. Does knowing Christ give me more freedom to fully be who He made me to be? Why or why not? Read Matthew 16:13-17:8. Why was Peter's perspective of Jesus so different than the other ideas he had heard? Why did Jesus react so differently to Peter in verses 17 and 23? In verses 17-18, how did Jesus link Peter's identity to His own? Why do you think it was important for Peter, James, and John to see Jesus' transfiguration in chapter 17? How does having God's perspective of our identity in Christ (and of Jesus' identity) help us to not be afraid (17:7)? Review the passage again and write down some key principles that help you have an accurate view of who Jesus is and who you are in Him.*

## American Idols

In our society, people are encouraged to "find themselves" even if it costs those around them. Our culture supports high self-esteem, self-help, and self-confidence. Often, who we think we are can become what we expect ourselves to be. *I'm the good child. I'm the black sheep. I'm street smart. I'm good at math. I'm a giving person. I never forget. I'm kind at heart. I'm just being honest.* One problem with that is what can happen when we don't live up (or down) to our expectations. I know people who view themselves as problem-solvers—fix-it types who are good at finding solutions. But, sometimes when the predicaments they address remain unresolved, they can become angry or depressed since they feel that they have failed. This type of self-focus could be an indicator that an identity has become an idol. That happens when we turn toward ourselves rather than God. We might think we are free to be ourselves, but having idols of any kind never brings freedom.

It may sound strange to hear this, but Jesus said in Matthew 16:24-28 that in order to find our life we must lose it. It is sometimes harder to accept the gift of an identity given to us by God than it is to worship at the golden shrine of our self-identity. In *The Art of the Soul: Meditations for the Creative Spirit*, Joy Sawyer said,

*Idols are like cheap baubles with deceptively expensive exteriors, like those fake designer watches...that fall apart the moment you wind them. As Paul says, those who buy into idols trade "the glory of God who holds the whole world in his hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand" (Romans 1:23 The Message). But, unlike those watches, idols aren't just an inconvenience. They are ruthless and they exact a price from our souls. Whether we love, hate, or fear the god we have made of ourselves, it destroys our holy enjoyment of God and one another.*

When someone asks you about yourself, what are the first characteristics that come to mind? Is there a part of your identity that has become your idol because you love, hate, or fear it? Remember what Jesus said about how to find yourself? What would that look like in your life? Take some time to examine your identity, and ask God how it lines up with the identity He has given you. Do others know your God-given identity or do they only see the graven image you may have put in its place?

## **I Wanna Be like Christ**

When I went to sleep, I was 6'3". I woke up at almost 6'6". Being a tall man is one thing. Here in the United States, that is a prize. Being a tall woman, however, is bizarre, strange, and difficult at best. Those who are not tall often wish they were. But, most of the tall women I know spend a great deal of time wishing for one reason or another that they were shorter.

I have always been physically odd. I was 6'3" at the end of sixth grade. As you can imagine, I got called every name in the book! I was left out quite a bit—a square peg in a round hole—because there was no way to “blend” in as I towered over everyone and could barely get myself into a student desk. I wanted to be just like everyone else. Instead, I felt like an outcast, with only one or two friends who were able to see past my height to who I really was.

Thankfully, I learned who I was through Christ at a very young age. I remember a little prayer book a friend gave me that included all the names Christ had for me: loved, daughter of Christ, joint heir with Christ (and so on). I clung to that, turning away from what everyone else said about me, and embracing the love that Christ alone could offer. I made a conscious decision to root my identity in who God said I was—not the bully down the road whose goal in life was to make little girls cry.

Despite this understanding, when I woke up from corrective surgery for scoliosis on July 2, realizing that I was even taller than before, something inside me wanted to ask the doctors to make me crooked again. Not only was I that much taller, but now I could not bend—at all. My spine had been fused from top to bottom.

It wasn't just that I had grown nearly three inches in one day...I also totally lost my independence. I could no longer bend over to dress myself, or pick up anything that fell to the floor, or reach around to my bedside table to get medicine or food. To make matters worse, I was in so much pain I wasn't even capable of getting up to go to the bathroom by myself. This did not settle well with the “always-in-control, on-top-of-everything, fiercely-independent” side of me. My entire identity had been excavated, replaced by what I perceived as a large, black void. All sense of freedom was lost—replaced by the shackles of needing others to go and do for me and my inability to do things for myself.

It was not until I had to be readmitted to the hospital—with what could have been a lethal pulmonary embolism—that God began to rattle my cage. He reminded me of that little girl who had found her identity and freedom in Christ. He showed me how far I had strayed in embedding my identity in what I could do for myself and others, how well I could perform at my job, how strong and capable I was. The cage I felt trapped in was of my own making. The darkness I felt enveloping me was because I had turned my back on the light of His glory while I was so busy embracing my own inadequacies. My prison was myself.

God reminded me of Jeremiah 29:11, which promises that God has a plan, and that plan is one of hope—not bondage, and 2 Corinthians 3:16-18 (NIV) ran through my head daily: “But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

I found that my true identity is not in myself. Any identity that I call “my own” creates the walls of a dark and depressing prison cell. It is in laying hold of God's promises for me and my life—despite present hardships—that I have found inescapable freedom and life.

## **Going Deeper: Gaining God's Perspective**

Taking personality surveys can help us better understand ourselves and our interactions with others. However, we can get so wrapped up in introspection that we find it hard to recognize how God sees us. He has made each of us uniquely who we are, but self-evaluation without considering His point of view can be detrimental. If we are Christ-followers, God sees us “in Christ,” and He has covered us (and everything about us) with Jesus' atoning death and resurrection.

We may relate to God in different ways. We may even call Him by different names, such as Provider, Healer, and Father. But, to Moses, God said of Himself, “I AM who I AM.” That means He doesn't change, and He doesn't depend on anyone else for His identity or character. Asking questions about who we are should always be accompanied by knowing how God sees us. If our view of ourselves disagrees with His, then we need a change of mind and heart. Spend time this week allowing God to transform you through His Word. Ask Him to give you a revelation of how He sees you. Read through one (or more) of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Jot down the character or personality traits of Jesus that you notice. See if you can identify His values. Then, spend some time considering how you exhibit those traits and values to others. If you think you fall short, remember that putting on the new man is a process (Ephesians 4:22-24) and, as we have been learning these past few weeks, it requires practice. So, put what you've learned into practice.

*The justice-seeking 20th century priest Henri Nouwen once wrote that our identity in Christ shares the nature of the Lord's Supper. As the Spirit moves in our lives to form us into deeply loved sons and daughters of God, we are “taken, blessed, broken, and given,” reflecting the actions of the Lord's Supper. So in a mysterious way, through our faithful surrender to Christ, we become bread for the world as we are taken, blessed, broken, and given by God. ~ Kara E. Powell, Deep Justice Journeys Leader's Guide*