

IDENTITY A STUDY IN RESTORATION



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2 Corinthians 5:16-19

STUDY THEME

As Christians, the Father restores our identity from our habitually inclined unrighteousness and self-righteousness. What Jesus has accomplished replaces what we have said and done to ourselves and what other's have said and done to us. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live inline with our original design and natural desires. This booklet will explore the process our identity takes: Our Past, Our Fall, Our Redemption, and Our Participation.

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SERIES PREFACE

You know those negative attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, or habits that are seemingly impossible to overcome? Or, how about those relationships and circumstances where you feel completely trapped, powerless, or out-of-control?

For me, this was a deep-rooted bitterness toward my dad, an inability to share my feelings, and a 20-year addiction to pornography. My wife, Lacey, struggled with fear that fed an explosive anger producing a need to control people and circumstances.

If our heart and mind are poisoned with feelings of being unloved or unsafe, we hurt.

We are all created in the image of God. This identity is intrinsic. However, it can be distorted and devalued. When we feel loved and safe in our relationships, our heart and mind feel at peace. If our heart and mind are poisoned with feelings of being unloved or unsafe, we hurt. This pain affects how we see ourselves and others. As a result, we hurt others while continuing to hurt ourselves. This devalued and distorted identity is what led Lacey and I into our negative attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and habits. It wasn't until we were set free from our distorted and devalued identities that we were able to truly live a joy-filled life.

We are all created in the image of God. This identity is intrinsic.

We truly believe that every person has the potential to live a life of freedom and overflowing joy as Jesus promised. That is why our vision is to see Christians live free, joy-filled lives. The power of one person's story of freedom and victory is lifechanging. It is the best evangelistic tool a Christian has. Our mission is to encourage and equip Christians to live free of those negative attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and habits and empower them to live joy-filled in every relationship and circumstance. Our hope is that Christians — through their life and story — would be the best testimony the world has of God's transforming love, grace, mercy, and truth. This is the prayer behind the *Christian Living Study Series*.

On behalf of my wife Lacey and me, it is an honor to be able to share these studies with you. They are the result of our combined heartache, healing, education, and transformation. To get the most out of this series, we recommend that you participate in each study in two ways:

First, choose a partner. Due to the nature of the questions, we recommend, if married, your partner be your spouse. If you're not married, choose a partner of the same gender. You and your partner will independently begin each study with prayer. Then, work through the study — reading the main Scriptures (*indicated by* \clubsuit) and text. Finally, together prayerfully discuss the Response Questions (*indicated by* \clubsuit) and implement the Next Steps.

Second, journal. Personal journaling through the lessons will help solidify what the Holy Spirit is doing in your heart and mind. Write out your answers and discussions to the *Response Questions*; your experience with the *Next Steps*; and your own thoughts, objections, and struggles with the studies. This journal will be a record of God's grace and transformation in your life, mind, and heart.

While each study booklet may stand-alone, the *Christian Living Study Series* is a process — a linear progression of theology and application. With this in mind, we recommend going through the booklets in order. A full list of studies is available in the back of this booklet.

Our prayer is that you would be vulnerable — challenging yourself to openly discuss and answer the questions with your partner. Also, that you would allow the Holy Spirit to convict, comfort, and encourage you — empowering you to accomplish Jesus' mission for God's glory, other's good, and for your joy.



NATHANAEL P. STEEL

Study One OUR PAST



God created us in His image and likeness. This is our identity. This identity is designed with natural and healthy responses to difficult, uncontrollable, and uncomfortable circumstances. These natural and healthy responses promote healthy relationships. However, through controllable and uncontrollable influences — especially in our early developmental and growing up years — our identity becomes distorted or devalued. We develop unnatural and unhealthy habitual reactions to protect or fight against this distortion and devaluing of our identity.



What have you said, done, or thought that has distorted or devalued your identity? What have others said or done to you that has distorted or devalued your identity? What have you said, done, or thought that has distorted or devalued another person's identity?

OUR IDENTITY & NATURE



A Biblical perspective on identity defines humans as made in the image and likeness of God. Our identity is intrinsic and given to us by God. Regardless of what we choose to think, say, or do — or what others thinks, say, or do to us — our identity remains intact and true. However, our identity can be distorted or devalued. This devaluing and distorting of our identity negatively affects our nature. Our **nature** consists of our desires, cravings, and habits that are formed in our physiology (body — specifically our brain) and psychology (mind and soul). Our nature can be changed, becoming corrupted, through our own words and actions. What we do or our response to what is

done to us affects our nature. We are all born free to remain in relationship with God or reject Him.¹ While our physical bodies are dying,² our ability to choose is very much alive. However, through unrighteous or self-righteous choices we stop trusting the Father. This change in our nature — from trusting God to trusting ourselves — is one of broken relationship. We become guilty of rejecting God, enslaved to sin, and spiritually dead. While our identity remains intact, we develop a sinful nature one habitually inclined to unnatural desires and motives.

This changed and corrupted nature, in turn, affects our hearts the totality of who we are. In the *Salvation Booklet*, we learned that our heart is the origin of thoughts, motives, and actions. It is both the summation and totality of who we are and our decisions. When we feel loved, honest, and open in relationships, our heart feels at peace. It experiences the freedom of being close to another person. If our heart is poisoned with feelings that we are unloved and unappreciated, our heart will hurt and we feel terrible about others and ourselves. If our relationships are unsafe, threatening, and manipulative, then our heart will shut down as we make efforts to protect ourselves. In light of this, two primary factors affect our heart:

1. UNCONTROLLABLE INFLUENCES

Uncontrollable influences are the relationships, circumstances, and events that we do not have control over nor do we have the ability to immediately change. The following lists are not to be considered exhaustive.

Gestational Influences – These influences are developmental factors that influence our physiology. This may also include teratogens — any negative agents, factors, or experiences that cause congenital abnormalities or developmental issues. While our parents are the primary source, external factors also contribute to these influences.

- Genetics
- Gender & Race
- Diet
- Physical Stress
- Emotional Stress
- Environment
- Chemicals

- Exercise
- Substance Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Trauma/Tragedy
- First-Emotions
- Medications
- Drugs

¹ Luke 15:11-32; Romans 7:9-12; Ezekiel 18:1-32

² Genesis 3:19; Romans 5:12-21



What has been the negatively most impacting influence from your early developmental years for you? Why?

Emotional Influences – When we experience trauma or stressful circumstances during our development, these feelings are chemically wired into our brains through neurological connections. They become our automatic emotional reactions to conflict or negative circumstances.

- Unloved
- Unworthy/Worthless
- Insignificant
- Alone/Lonely
- Devalued
- Defective
- Unknown
- Controlled/Powerless

Discouraged

Inadequate/Inferior

Vulnerable

- Hopeless
- Invalidated
- Failure
- Unwanted/Rejected
- Unaccepted/Abandoned •
- ٠ Disrespected
- Unprotected
- ٠ Trapped
- Unsafe
- Insecure ٠
- Disconnected



•

What three or four automatic emotions do you naturally have when in conflict, argument, or disagreement with someone?

Familial Influences - These familial relationships deal with the family that we grow up in - especially in our growing up years. This may include our biological, adoptive, foster, or other family arrangement.

- ٠ Parents (biological or Grandparents otherwise)
 - Aunts/Uncles
- Siblings (amount, etc.)
- Cousins

Cultural/Societal Influences - The geographic location and environment we grow up in influences our world-view, political views, and self-view. We are influenced culturally and behaviorally though interactions with other members of our society. This influences how we think and behave.

- Country
- Region

- Religion
- Culture •
- City, State, Providence ٠
- **Financial Status**

What was the family environment in which you grew up? How many siblings did you have? What traditions or customs did your family have? What other traditions or customs have you observed in your growing up years?

Experiential Influences – These experiences are things done to us or circumstances that we witness. While some are seemingly insignificant, they all influence how we process information, our thoughts, and our behaviors.

- Rejection, Neglect, Loud/ Abandonment Comm
- Absence (physically, emotionally, mentally)
- Abuse (physically, emotionally, mentally)
- Loud/Silent Communication
- Inferior/Superior Behavior
- Sickness, Disease, Disability, Death
- Anger/Bitterness Separation, Divorce

Q

What experiential influence have you personally experienced or observed? Through who or what did this experience come? How did your family communicate their thoughts or feelings? How might these experiences affect your current interactions with others?

2. CONTROLLABLE INFLUENCES

Controllable influences are the circumstances and events that we have control over and ability to change. While, for the most part, we cannot control what is done to us or what happens around us, we can control our responses. Our collective responses influence our habits and lifestyles. The following lists are not to be considered exhaustive.

Actions – Our actions can be either intended or unintended. However, both can still have negative affects on others physically, emotionally, or mentally. Our ability to recognize the negative consequences of our actions on others and ourselves will directly affect our ability to be free. Actions are thoughts, words (said or written), physical gestures, or even motives toward others and ourselves.

- Raging/Anger
- Arrogance
- Discourage
- Retaliation/Revenge
- Catastrophize
- Get Dramatic
- Manipulate/Control
- Withdrawing to Pout
- View Pornography
- Avoid Issue
- Hide Information
- Act Selfish/Impulsive
- Intellectualize/Justify
- Neglect

- Isolating/Escape
- Perfectionism
- Perform
- Fault-Find/Blame
- Defensive/ Minimize
- Nagging/Lecture
- Withdraw to Punish
- Use Drugs/Alcohol
- Numb Out
- Withdraw to Avoid
- Shame Self
- Withdraw to Defend
- Bitterness
- Hitting/Punching

Inactions – Inactions are things that you willfully choose not to do or simply neglect. This includes thoughts, words, physical gestures, or even motives.

- Forgive
- Restore
- Confess/Repent
- Encourage/Affirm
- Respect
- Celebrate
- Empower
- Connect/Be Vulnerable
- Physical Affection
- Serve

- Confront
- Capture Thoughts
- Fulfill Responsibilities
- Intervene
- Validate
- Provide
- Demonstrate Self-Control
- Pray
- Quality Time
- Generously Give

Curse – Curses are negative or destructive words said or written to or about someone.

- Hurtful Sarcasm
- Gossip
- Lie/
- Slander
- Hold Grudges
- Shame
- Discourage

- Fault Find
- Retaliate/Blame
- Manipulate
- Judge
- Criticize
- Lecture
- Nag

From the controllable influence lists, what are your three or four "natural" reactions when in a conflict with a friend, family member, or spouse?

out someone.

CONCLUSION

God created us very good - in His image and likeness. As a result of the curse, however, our brains may not physically develop perfectly as He designed. Additionally, negative and destructive examples, experiences, and influences affect our development. When our heart and mind are poisoned in our growing up years with feelings of being unloved or unsafe, we hurt. This pain will affect how we see ourselves and others. All of us have been wounded or hurt by someone or something especially in our growing up years. This wounding has negatively affected our heart, our mind, and our reactions to life. These effects are compounded by our unwillingness to acknowledge these negative events and circumstances. While our identity remains intact - albeit distorted and devalued we develop unnatural and unhealthy desires and habits. These habits become "natural" to us as a way to fight against or flee from feeling unloved or unsafe in our relationships and circumstances. Because of this habitual fight or flight reaction, we contribute to our own pain. As a result, we hurt others while continuing to hurt ourselves.

STUDY RESPONSE

DISCUSSION

Pray through and discuss the above **Q** questions with your partner. Journal your response and answers to this study. Include any questions or differing opinions and thoughts that were shared in your discussions.

NEXT STEP

Can you identify natural reactions in a friend, family member, or spouse when in conflict with them? How might you have contributed to them feeling their "first-emotions"? How did you react to these "first-emotions"? How might you respond to them in the future in light of this teaching?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

5 Days to a New Marriage

Shawn Stoever Ph.D. & Terry Hargrave Ph.D. The Hideaway Foundation, ©2011

Study Two OUR CORRUPTION



As a result of our experiences, we incline our heart away from the Father's design and plan for our life. Our heart makes at least one transition through our lifetime. We habitually incline our heart away from God as the source of purpose, pleasure, power, provision, and peace. We fall out of relationship with our good and loving Heavenly Father. This transition moves us from spiritual life to death.¹



Who's attention would make you feel valuable? What achievement would make you feel successful? What circumstance would make you feel content?

OUR EXPERIENCE



Our hearts begin inclined toward trusting God. This is the first step in our development. We are created to trust someone outside of ourselves. When we are born, we are, by nature, dependant upon our parents. This also influences our spiritual and cognitive development. Our brains are chemically wired toward trust. If there is a conflict in this natural developmental process then we become inclined toward mistrust. This develops both a chemical and spiritual insecurity. Therefore, to gain some sense of security we become self-reliant.

¹ Romans 7:9-12

² Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 9:42; 10:13-15; Luke 17:2; 18:15-17. The word in these passages for "child" (ESV) is *paidion*. This word is used in reference to a small child — like an infant or toddler.

(LYou, like all humans, were built to be programmed with important information from your history with those who provided your care... no matter whether you feel loved, unloved, or something in between, your heart reacts to how it was loved within the family where you grew up.³]

Terry Hargrave Ph.D & Shawn Stoever Ph.D.

While this may be a natural and often necessary response toward unsafe/unloving circumstances, it also has negative spiritual implications. We begin to reject God as our source of security. We become physically, mentally, and spiritually independent. Ultimately, we deny the Holy Spirit who has been given to us for our benefit, conviction, and empowerment.



In what relationships or circumstances is it easier for you to trust yourself rather than God? Why? How do you demonstrate this difficulty to trust God (actions, words, thoughts, etc.)?

THE PHASES OF OUR HEART



Romans 1:18-324

The phases that our heart goes through as we grow and mature are as follows:

1. INNOCENT⁵

When we are born, our hearts are free to love and be loved by God. Both physically and spiritually, we are positioned to trust and rely upon someone outside of ourselves. This innocence is marked by immaturity, inability, and ignorance. We must be shown maturity, encouraged to grow in our ability, and intentionally taught right and wrong.

³ Terry Hargrave Ph.D, Shawn Stoever, Ph.D., *5 Days to a New Marriage*. (The Hideaway Foundation, 2011), pg.11

⁴ Ecclesiastes 3:11; 1 John 2:15; Romans 2:14-16; Ephesians 2:1-3; James 5:1-5 (see Genesis 2:7)

⁵ See Genesis 1:25-27; Isaiah 7:14-16; Romans 7:9

2. FALLEN⁶

This phase of our heart happens early in our development. It can be defined as a fall from our God-given design and desires. Our natural desires become corrupted, bent toward unnatural lusts. It is marked by enslavement toward negative emotions, actions, thoughts, and beliefs. We begin to break relationship with the Father. We become guilty of willful sin and rebellion and are condemned to spiritual death. We begin the process of dying spiritually (being separated from God for eternity). Those who do not trust their sin to Jesus end their lives in this phase.

3. REDEEMED⁷

We can enter this phase of our heart only through repenting to the Father, trusting Jesus for our forgiveness, and living empowered by the Holy Spirit. This phase is marked by joy, love (of God, others, and ourselves), peace, and hope. God, through His Holy Spirit renews our natural desires and empowers us to build life-giving habits. While we are immediately set free from the punishment of our sin, being set free from the power of sin may take time and process. Freedom from the power of sin — redemption — is a process of grace and truth lived out over time.



Thinking back to your growing up years, when do you first remember having negative emotions, thoughts, or beliefs about God? Other people? Yourself?

CHARACTERISTICS OF A CORRUPTED HEART



With our hardened heart, we become pride-filled, self-focused, and self-reliant. We sacrifice our relationship with others and God for our own benefit. We trust our own emotions, abilities, authority, desires, and experience. We begin to die emotionally, relationally, and ultimately spiritually. Once we have rejected the Father as our source of purpose, pleasure, power, provision, and

⁶ See Romans 3:23; Ephesians 2:1-4; Galatians 5:16-21

⁷ See Romans 6:5-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 1:22-33

⁸ Proverbs 16:25; Romans 1:18-32; Jeremiah 9:23-24

peace we've corrupted our hearts. We develop rebellious and sinful lifestyles. We become unrighteous and ungodly in our relationships. Based on **Galatians 5:16-21**, the following are some of our negative lifestyles that emanate out of our hardened and fallen heart.

Wise leaders should have known that the human heart cannot exist in a vacuum. If Christians are forbidden to enjoy the wine of the Spirit, they will turn to the wine of the flesh.977

A. W. Tozer

1. SEXUALLY DRIVEN

"Sexual Immorality, Impurity, Sensuality"

Sexual Unfaithfulness - God created sex to be fulfilled and enjoyed within the life-giving, sacrificial marriage between one husband (man) and one wife (women). *Examples*: viewing pornography, fornication (sex before marriage), adultery (sex with someone other than your spouse), promiscuity, flirtation, and purposeful immodesty (in attitude or attire), crude joking, etc.



How might being sexually driven be discouraging or harmful to yourself or others?

2. SELF-TRUSTING "Idolatry, Sorcery"

Self-Gratifying or Self-Medicating - Anything or anybody we use to diminish discomfort or discontentment without either first seeking the Lord or thanking His provision may become an idol. That is, anything we trust and acknowledge above Jesus to make us feel safe, secure, or successful. *Examples:* spouse, children, family, friends, medication, circumstances, substances, possessions, status, etc.



How might being self-trusting be discouraging or harmful to yourself or others?

⁹ Terry Hargrave Ph.D, Shawn Stoever, Ph.D., *5 Days to a New Marriage*. (The Hideaway Foundation, 2011), pg.11

3. CAUSTIC

"Enmity, Strife, Jealous, Fits of Anger, Rivalries, Dissensions, Divisions, Envious"

Angry and Argumentative - This is the gaining of satisfaction or superiority through physical or verbal intimidations, fear, manipulation, or control. *Examples:* quarrel (fight physically or verbally), argumentative, be right, dramatically emotional, emotionally driven, outbursts, self-focused, self-absorbed, theologically divisive, relationally divisive, etc.



How might being caustic be discouraging or harmful to yourself or others?

4. EXCESSIVE

"Drunkenness, Orgies"

Immoderately partaking in good things - God has given us good things for our health and enjoyment. However, taken in excess or used outside of God's design, these good things can become harmful and unhealthy for us and our relationships. They can develop into habit-forming addictions or unrestrained ambitions. *Examples:* food, alcohol, sex, therapeutic medication, hobbies, sports, relationship, exercise, etc.



How might being excessive be discouraging or harmful to yourself or others?

5. ANYTHING NOT LED BY THE SPIRIT "...and things like these."

Anything that is not life-giving, relationally healthy, personally healthy, or encouraging to our walk with Jesus - This is purposefully vague as not everything that is unrighteous or ungodly in all cultures and times could be listed. The idea is that our lives should be ones of trust and reliance upon the Holy Spirit. When we reject or ignore the Holy Spirit's leading in our lives, we are living out of the same motivations that these attributes come from.



What other characteristics not listed can you think of that would not be led by the Holy Spirit? How might these characteristics be discouraging or harmful to yourself or others?



From the list above, what is your most common "go to" or "natural" reaction when in conflict, discomfort, or discontentment? How has this unnatural reaction hurt yourself or your relationships with your family? With friends? And, if applicable, with your spouse?

CONCLUSION

We have all transitioned from an innocent heart to a fallen one. This transition generally happens early in our growing up years. Because of the examples, relationships, and circumstances around us, we begin to willfully incline our heart toward unnatural desires and unhealthy responses; we approach every event or relationship through the lens of this corruption. Our "natural" reactions become self-protecting, self-focused, and self-reliant. Our heart, mind, and life are in need of redemption.

STUDY RESPONSE

DISCUSSION

Pray through and discuss the above \P questions with your partner. Journal your response and answers to this study. Include any questions or differing opinions and thoughts that were shared in your discussions.

NEXT STEP

Can you identify corrupted heart attributes in those with whom you are in relationship? What have some of the affects been for these individuals and their relationships as a result of these attributes? How might you specifically pray for and seek the Lord on behalf of these individuals in light of these attributes? When and how often will you pray for these individuals?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds We Carry

Mike Wilkerson Crossway, ©2011

Study Three OUR REDEMPTION



When we repent to the Father and trust Jesus with our unrighteousness and self-righteousness, our hearts are redeemed. This redemption leads to a desire to live empowered by the Holy Spirit to live free of those destructive habits. For those of us who are reconciled with God, our heart is redeemed. This redemption empowers us to live in the way God originally created to live. The characteristics of our redeemed heart are transformed in light of the Holy Spirit's work in us.



What has been the biggest change in your life since being reconciled with the Father ("being saved" or "born again")?

THE FINAL PHASE OF OUR HEART



We enter the last phase of our heart only through repenting to the Father and receiving His forgiveness through Jesus. Trusting His death for our rebellion and living empowered by the Holy Spirit enables us to live free of condemnation and guilt. Living out of our redeemed heart kills our unnatural desires.²



When you repent, what specific lifestyle changes do you make? How do you demonstrate that your corrupted heart, with its unnatural desires, is dead?

¹ See also, 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 1:22-23

² See 2 Corinthians 7:10-11; Galatians 2:20



Galatians 5:22-24

Once we have accepted the Father's forgiveness for our unrighteousness and self-righteousness, He redeems our hearts. Our emotions, relationships, and — to a limited extent — our bodies are redeemed. With our redeemed heart, we become humble, Christ-focused, interdependent, and self-sacrificing. We trust Jesus over our emotions, over our abilities, over our own authority, over our desires, and over our experience.³ Our soul is once again united with God. We are able to develop trusting and life-giving habits. These habits replace our old unnatural self-protecting, self-focused, self-reliant habits. Based on **Galatians 5:22-24**, the following are some life-giving and joyfilled lifestyles that emanate from our redeemed heart.

Cod develops the fruit of the Spirit in your life by allowing you to experience circumstances in which you're tempted to express the exact opposite quality! Character development always involves a choice, and temptation provides that opportunity.⁴ JJ

~Rick Warren

1. PREFERRING OTHERS "Love"

A denial of ourselves (our rights, desires, beliefs, and expectations) for the benefit of others - This includes extending mercy or withholding discipline. That is, not punishing or desiring negative consequences for deserved behavior or offenses. It prefers others without coercion, expectation, requirement, compulsion, or manipulation. *Examples:* Forgiving, Gracious, Not Holding Grudges, Negating our own rights for the sake of relationship



How might preferring others be encouraging or helpful to yourself or others?

³ Proverbs 3:5-8; Deuteronomy 30:11-20; Luke 15:17-24; James 5:5-10

⁴ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on earth am I here for?* (Zondervan, 2013), pg.59

2. DELIGHTFUL

"Joy"

Contentment beyond circumstance - This is a Jesusfocused, hope-filled response to negative circumstances. It acknowledges our limited perspective, trusting and submitting to the Father's good will above our own. *Examples:* Amidst disease, death, financial struggle, unfair/unmerited criticism, etc.



How might being delightful be encouraging or helpful to yourself or others?

3. CALM "Peace"

A soothing composure - Amidst tumultuous, confusing, or offensive people, this is the ability staying calm and composed, resolving conflict in a harmonious manner. *Examples:* Not emotionally driven or dramatic amidst conflict, not controlled by emotion or feelings, etc.



How might being calm be encouraging or helpful to yourself or others?

4. ENDURES SUFFERING

"Patience"

Attitude acknowledging God's will - This focuses on and rejoices in the outcome of suffering rather than the source or cause of suffering. It endures uncertainty with a hope based in God's good character. *Examples:* Amidst unpleasant or drawn-out negative circumstance or relationship, etc.



How might enduring suffering be encouraging or helpful to yourself or others?

5. COMPASSIONATE

"Kindness"

Generous and sympathetic toward other's plight - This is the ability to feel genuine pity and sorrow for someone else's deserved or undeserved misfortune or suffering. *Examples:* Amidst those suffering with consequences of their own sin or the sin of others, etc.



How might being compassionate be encouraging or helpful to yourself or others?

6. BENEFICIAL

"Goodness"

Helpful and supportive toward other's needs - It's the ability to identify genuine and specific needs in someone's life and meet those needs. *Examples:* Gently speaking loving truth to those believing lies, empowering the marginalized, provisionally meeting other's needs, etc.



How might being beneficial be encouraging or helpful to yourself or others?

7. TRUSTWORTHY *"Faithful"*

Consistent and Reliable - This deals with the consistency between one's character and actions — the harmony of both one's reputation (outward) and integrity (inward). *Examples:* Time/Financial Management, Morality, Work, etc.



How might being trustworthy be encouraging or helpful to yourself or others?

8. NOT FORCEFUL "Gentleness"

Restful, able to encourage and strengthen - This is the ability to think, communicate, and act with understanding and concern for the well-being of others in a life-giving manner. *Examples:* Amidst theological disunity, recognition of sin in others, etc.



How might not being forceful be encouraging or helpful to yourself or others?

9. UNWAVERING "Self-Control"

Able to resist coercion, temptation, and unnatural desires - Despite being habitually inclined toward self-gratification and self-medication, self-control confidently rests in God's natural design of how He created us to fulfill our desires. *Examples:* amidst negative peer pressure, unnatural urges, in preaching truth in-spite of criticism, etc.



How might being unwavering be encouraging or helpful to yourself or others?



From the list above, what characteristics are the easiest for you to embrace and live out? What ones are difficult for you to embrace and live out? With whom or in what circumstance is it the most difficult? Why?

IDENTITY TRAITS OF OUR REDEEMED HEART

The following is a brief list of identity traits that come out of us living in agreement with how God designed us — in His image and likeness. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list.⁵

^aI am a child of my Heavenly Father. • ^bI am Jesus' friend. • ^cI am loved. • dI am free from condemnation. • eI am adopted into my Heavenly Father's family. • fI am an heir of my Heavenly Father - co-heirs with Jesus. • gI am more than a conqueror through Jesus. • hI am sanctified. • iI can be wise because I have the mind of Jesus. • JI am God's temple; His Spirit lives in me. • kI am united with Jesus; one with Him in spirit. • If am valuable and bought with a price; I belong to my Heavenly Father. • mI am victorious through Jesus. • nI am a new creation in Jesus. • •I am reconciled to my Heavenly Father. • PI can help reconcile others to my Heavenly Father. • qI am an ambassador of Jesus. • rI am God's righteousness through Jesus. • sI'm empowered to work with God. • I am justified in Jesus. • "I am crucified with Jesus. • "I am a saint. • wI am holy and without fault in God's eyes because of Jesus. • *I am adopted by my Heavenly Father through Jesus. • yI am accepted by my Heavenly Father. • ^zI am sealed with the Holy Spirit. • 22I am seated with Jesus in Heaven. • bbI am God's art work; created for good things. • ccI am a citizen of Jesus' Kingdom. • ddI am free and forgiven of all my sin. • eeI have been made complete in Jesus. • ffI am saved. • ggI am a member of a royal priesthood, a holy nation. • hhI belong to God; I am one of His chosen people. • ⁱⁱI share God's nature.

⁵ a. John 1:12-13; b. John 15:15; c. John 17:23; d. Romans 8:1-2; e. Romans 8:15; f. Romans 8:17; g. Romans 8:17; h. 1 Corinthians 1:2; i. 1 Corinthians 2:16; j. 1 Corinthians 3:16; k. 1 Corinthians 6:17; l. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; m. 1 Corinthians 15:57; n. 2 Corinthians 5:17; o. 2 Corinthians 5:18; p. 2 Corinthians 5:18; q. 2 Corinthians 5:20; r. 2 Corinthians 5:21; s. 2 Corinthians 6:1; t. Galatians 2:16; u. Galatians 2:20; v. Ephesians 1:1; w. Ephesians 1:4; x. Ephesians 1:5; y. Ephesians 1:6; z. Ephesians 1:13; aa. Ephesians 2:6; bb. Ephesians 2:10; cc. Philippians 3:20; dd. Colossians 1:14; ee. Colossians 2:10; ff. Hebrews 7:25; gg. 1 Peter 2:9; hh. 1 Peter 2:9-10; ii. 2 Peter 1:4



From the above identity traits, what one(s) are the easiest for you to embrace? Why? What one(s) are the most difficult to embrace? Why?

CONCLUSION

Our hearts transitions from being fallen to redeemed when we trust Jesus with our past, current, and future unrighteousness and self-righteousness. This repentance reconciles us with our Heavenly Father. This reconciliation empowers us to live as God originally designed and created us to live. Our unnatural desires are redeemed to their natural state. We can approach every event and relationship through the lens of our redeemed heart. We are empowered to trust Him for our purpose, pleasure, power, provision, and peace. We can live free of sin when we trust God's Spirit who empowers us from within ourselves. Our heart, mind, and life are redeemed.

STUDY RESPONSE

DISCUSSION

Pray through and discuss the above \P questions with your partner. Journal your response and answers to this study. Include any questions or differing opinions and thoughts that were shared in your discussions.

NEXT STEP

Say the identity traits **<u>out loud</u>** for 30 days; especially focusing on the trait(s) you have difficulty believing.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Your New Identity: A Transforming Union with God

Neil T. Anderson Bethany House Publishers, ©2014

The Bondage Breaker: Overcoming Negative Thoughts, Irrational Feelings, and Habitual Sins

Neil T. Anderson Harvest House Publishers, ©2006

Study four OUR PARTICIPATION



Isaiah 61:1-4

Living in our redeemed identity will always lead to relationship, restoration, victory, freedom, and grace. We are reconciled to our Heavenly Father through faith in Jesus. However, once we have been reconciled, the Holy Spirit desires to build within us life-giving habits and lifestyles. He desires us to be the means of restoration and reconciliation with those with whom we have broken relationship.



In light of your restored identity, how have you pursued restoring the negative things others have negatively said or done to you? How have you pursued restoring the negative things you've said or done to yourself?

A LIFE-GIVING TRAJECTORY



Deuteronomy 30:1-201

Our choice to trust Jesus is not simply a momentary emotionally-driven decision; it's the direction our entire life takes. This new direction will be difficult. It will require rebuilding life-giving Christ-focused — and perhaps even uncomfortable — attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and habits. However, our habitually inclined flesh will fight against this rebuild. Walking in this new direction, there are two plans of which we must be aware. Both plans are well thought out. However, each plan leads to a dramatically different conclusion.

¹ See also, Romans 8:28; Galatians 5:1; Ephesians 4:17-24; John 10:10; 15:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; James 4:7-10; 1 Peter 5:6-11

THE ENEMY'S PLAN

The enemy of our hearts will always attack our identity and make us doubt who we truly are. He will bring circumstances and people into our lives to distort and devalue our identity. However, we must be aware that his plan will always be to steal, kill, and destroy our hearts, minds, lives, and souls. While he may work supernaturally, he most often uses our own habitually inclined unnatural desires, along with the subtle lies of circumstance and other people. His most cunning plan is to seduce us into relieving, achieving, and satisfying our God-given desires through ungodly or illegitimate means. However, we must keep in mind that our Enemy is powerless until we agree with him.²

(It strikes some as odd to say that Satan has a strategy. They mistakenly conclude that because our Enemy is sinful he must be equally stupid. Such reasoning has been the downfall of many in the body of Christ. He does not act haphazardly or without a goal in view.³]]

~Sam Storms

THE FATHER'S PLAN

The Father has designed us to live a joy-filled, life-giving, fulfilled life. His plan for us has always been for our good. Jesus has promised that if we trust Him, live within His plan for our life — empowered the Holy Spirit — we will live a truly full and satisfying life. Trusting God for our identity will always lead us toward action — not just simply away from sin. It will take us from rebellion to reconciliation; from brokenness to restoration; from defeat to victory; from captivity to freedom; from deserving God's wrath to experiencing God's grace. God's plan for our lives is one of hope, joy, fulfillment, and peace. Trusting this plan, even amidst opposing circumstances and relationships, will empower us to live as He has designed and created us free and joy-filled.



Specifically, when is it most difficult for you to experience hope, joy, fulfillment, and peace?

² 2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:11;

³ Sam Storms, *Tactics of Temptation* (http://www.samstorms.com/allarticles/post/tactics-of-temptation, 2006)



Colossians 3:9-17

Jesus has made it possible, through His death and resurrection, for our identity to be redeemed. However, there are several lifestyle choices, empowered by the Holy Spirit, that we can develop into new habits to help us "stay free".⁴

1. LIFESTYLE OF SURRENDER



Using the analogy of war, we can encourage and promote our redeemed identity in several ways.

- a. **First**, we have to surrender our "weapons". These weapons are the excuses we use to justify why we think and act the way we do.
- b. **Second**, we need to abandon our "strongholds". Strongholds are both the physical or mental "safe places" we use to escape the reality of life. They can be relationships, possessions, entertainment, habits, beliefs, attitudes, or emotions.
- c. **Finally**, we need to stop committing treason. That is, rebelling against the Holy Spirit. We need to live empowered by the Holy Spirit.



To remain free, specifically what weapons, strongholds, and treasonous activities do you need to abandon?

2. LIFESTYLE OF GIVING THANKS



Giving thanks is an act of submission. Especially in uncomfortable circumstances or hard relationships, this may mean sacrificing our desires, will, and current emotions. It is easier to become bitter, angry, or resentful in negative

⁴ Galatians 5:1

⁵ Ephesians 4:22-24; 6:10-20; James 4:4-10

⁶ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Philippians 4:4-7; Romans 1:21-25; 5:3-5; James 1:2-4; Psalm 55:22

circumstances and relationships. However, these actions flow out of an unthankful heart. God allows suffering in our lives as an opportunity for trusting Him and growing in our walk with the Holy Spirit. Submission to God invite's His grace and empowerment into our lives.

Giving thanks also acknowledges God's sovereignty. It reveals the extent to which we trust Him in negative or uncomfortable circumstances and relationships. Thankfulness does not negate the real feelings in our heart. It acknowledges the real element of unknown and risk in these circumstances and relationships but directs our fears, worries, and doubts toward God. Fear is a by-product of unthankfulness. **Fear** is not a circumstantial or relational issue. It is an issue of misplaced trust.

Giving thanks is a spiritual weapon against our spiritual enemy. Sin can not exist and the enemy will not win when we choose to acknowledge God and give Him thanks amidst negative or uncomfortable circumstances and relationships.



What circumstances, relationships, or events are difficult for you to be thankful? Why? What circumstances, losses, or relationships seem to overshadow the goodness and provision of the Father?

3. LIFESTYLE OF FORGIVENESS & REPENTANCE



Matthew 6:9-157

Cancel Debts: Forgiveness

We must settle the offense at the extreme conclusion. That is, regardless of whether or not the person changes we will forgive them. Forgiveness does not simply release the negative or offensive action or words of someone. Forgiveness releases the person from ANY expectations you may rightfully have of them or from them. Forgiveness also releases any desire for retribution toward the offender for any current or future negative affects you may experience because of their sin. Finally, forgiveness ultimately releases the offender to God. It desires, more

⁷ Matthew 12:34; 18:7-9, 21-35; 2 Corinthians 7:10-11; Luke 17:1-4

than consequence for them. It desires real, specific blessing and goodness for the offender. This may mean, for some of us, we are going to be the avenue God uses to bless them. Forgiveness will always end with a compassion for the offender. Along with this compassion, should be a willing to pursue relationship with the person. While some instances may not be safe or beneficial to pursue relationship, it should at least be a desire of ours. If we don't have compassion or are unwilling to pursue relationship with those who hurt, wound, or offend, us then we haven't completed the process of forgiveness. For us to truly be whole and free, we must be willing to resolve our past. We will always react out of unresolved losses and offenses in our relationships. However, God will always reveal where we are living less-than lives.

One thing that must be stated here is that forgiveness must not be confused for reconciliation. Often times we may pursue forgiveness and become discouraged when the relationship isn't reconciled. Reconciliation takes two people. It is the exchange of both forgiveness and repentance. Reconciliation may not be possible. However, forgiveness and freedom are always possible.



With whom is it difficult for you to love and be willing to pursue relationship?

Accept Responsibility: Repentance

Repentance is not a feeling or emotion. It is an actionbased response to the conviction of the Holy Spirit for real sin. God's kindness leads us to repent because He desires our freedom more than we ever could. Repentance is not simply the stopping of sinful actions. It is a directional response away from rebellion toward relationship. Repentance is not necessarily only a moral issue. Repentance must happen when relationship has been broken. When we've broken relationship but haven't sinned, repentance is still required to the relationship to be reconciled. Repentance cultivates new, life-giving lifestyles and habits. It is based in the idea that what we expose our hearts to will affect how we relate to others. This includes new lifestyles in what we read, watch, listen to, participate in, and the people by which we are influenced.

Even if we pursue Christ-focused repentance, forgiveness must be extended for a relationship to truly be reconciled.

What relationships in your life are broken because of something you did or said? Specifically, how did this relationship become broken? How have you pursued repentance and restoration in those relationships?

CONCLUSION

Freedom will always lead to peace, joy, and hope. While our broken relationships may not be reconciled, we can still live free in those broken relationships. The Holy Spirit will empower us to live lifestyles of forgiveness and repentance. While we are not responsible for how others may respond to our forgiveness and repentance, we are responsible to forgive and repent. Ultimately, God's desire is to see us live free and joy-filled. We must guard and fight against the Enemy's plan for our life. Choosing to acknowledge and thank God in all of our relationships and circumstances reveals our ability to trust God.

STUDY RESPONSE

DISCUSSION

Pray through and discuss the above \P questions with your partner. Journal your response and answers to this study. Include any questions or differing opinions and thoughts that were shared in your discussions.

NEXT STEP

Who will you pursue relationship with this week that has wounded, hurt, or offended you? How will you specifically bless them? Who will you pursue relationship with this week that you've hurt, wounded, or offended? How will you specifically extend restitution toward them?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Victory Over The Darkness: Realize the Power of Your Identity in Christ

Neil T. Anderson Bethany House Publishers, ©2000

FINAL JOURNAL THOUGHTS

- 1. In **Identity** (*Our Past, Our Corruption, Our Redemption, Our Participation*), what passage of Scripture has been the most convicting or challenging for you? Explain. What passage of Scripture has been the most encouraging or empowering for you? Explain.
- 2. What content or discussions regarding **Identity** (*Our Past, Our Corruption, Our Redemption, Our Participation*) have you disagreed with? Or, have difficulty accepting or understanding? Or, find most difficult to apply? Explain.
- 3. What content or discussions regarding **Identity** (*Our Past, Our Corruption, Our Redemption, Our Participation*) have you agreed with? Or, find easy to accept and understand? Or, find easy to apply? Explain.
- 4. Explain what ONE characteristic of your redeemed heart you find to be easiest to accept AND apply. Explain what ONE characteristic of your redeemed heart you find to be most difficult to accept AND apply.
- 5. Since beginning the study on **Identity**, what area in your <u>life</u> (actions & words), <u>mind</u> (thoughts & beliefs), and <u>heart</u> (motivations & passions) have you noticed the most significant change — positive or negative? Explain. Or, in light of this study, what do you desire to change? Explain.
- 6. What was your favorite discussion with your partner? Why? What was your least favorite or most difficult discussion with your partner? Why? Who could you encourage with what you've learned from this unit? How will you do this?

CHRISTIAN LIVING STUDY SERIES

The power of one person's story of freedom and victory is lifechanging. It is the best evangelistic tool a Christian has. Our mission is to encourage and equip Christians to live free of those negative attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and habits and empower them to live joy-filled in every relationship and circumstance. Our hope is that Christians — through their life and story would be the best testimony the world has of God's transforming love, grace, mercy, and truth. This is the goal behind the *Christian Living Study Series*.

- 1. FAITH // A Study in Reliance
- 2. SALVATION // A Study in Reconciliation
- 3. IDENTITY // A Study in Restoration
- 4. FORGIVENESS // A Study in Releasing
- 5. **REPENTANCE //** A Study in Reorientation
- 6. **CONFLICT** // A Study in Resolution
- 7. RELATIONSHIPS // A Study in Reflecting God
- 8. STEWARDSHIP // A Study in Managing Resources
- 9. SPIRITUAL WARFARE // A Study in Being Relentless
- 10. PRAYER // A Study in Divine Relationship
- 11. EXPERIENCE // A Study in Rejoicing
- 12. SCRIPTURE // A Study in God's Revelation

INFORMATION

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Contributions The *Christian Living Study Series* are provided free of charge. If you would like to contribute to the development and distribution of them or to NLS Ministries in general, please visit their website at www.NathanLaceySteel.com.

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NATHAN & LACEY STEEL were married in 2004. They met at Alaska Bible Institute. located in Homer, Alaska. Nathan graduated from ABI's Biblical Study Program in 2004 and Christian Ministry Program in 2006. Nathan was born with a genetic disease called Cystic Fibrosis. This disease led the Steels to adopting their

two girls, Lydia and Arianna. Through God's grace and provision, the Steels have shared Jesus' love, grace, mercy, and truth all over the world. Nathan and Lacey's vision is to See Christians Live Free, Joy-Filled Lives. They designed the Christian Living Study Series as a catalyst for one-on-one discipleship, a curriculum for church small groups, and a course for discipleship schools. They developed and teach the Christian Living Course at Alaska Bible Institute (ABI). ABI exists to Train and Equip Christians for Life & Ministry. You can find out more at www.AlaskaBible.org. For more information about the Steels, visit their website at www.NathanLaceySteel.com. They currently reside with their two girls in Homer, Alaska.

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