

**Do you know your
TRUE identity?**



**Know your story
Embrace the truth**

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Why We Do This

Choose to Go North Instead of South

Life is all about relationships. We're always relating to God whether we know it or not. This is his world and we're always in his presence. We can harden our hearts toward God and try to ignore him or we can love him. Either way, we're relating to him and he's always relating to us.

Moreover, we're always relating to people. From the moment we're born we're relating to our parents and siblings, then our teachers, employers and friends. It's almost impossible to get through a day without relating to someone, a cashier, the lady at the drive thru, a phone call from a friend.

We have no choice about whether we'll relate to God and others but we do have a choice about how we'll relate to them. We approach relationships in one of two primary ways. We're either givers or takers. We're either giving life to people or we're grasping for life from them. Call it going north or south. Here's how it works.

When we go south, we tend to live with ourselves at the center of our lives. We relate to people as objects of self-gratification. When we approach people this way we'll fear those who could disappoint our expectations, we'll resent them when they fail to meet our expectations and we'll selfishly love them when they meet our expectations. But in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said it's no big deal if we love those who love us. The worst of sinners do that.

When we put ourselves at the center of our lives, it becomes a dark and chaotic world of greed, anger, worry, envy and all the other destructive fruits of the flesh.

Those kinds of emotions are sure signals that tell us we're forsaking God and going south by putting ourselves at the center of our universe. We're trying to be our own little god. But it can be so different when we choose to go north by turning toward God and making him the blazing center of our lives. What do we mean by making God the blazing center? Here's how John Piper explains it -

I have a picture in my mind of the majesty of Christ like the sun at the center of the solar system of your life. The massive sun, 333,000 times the mass of the earth, holds all the planets in orbit, even little Pluto, 3.6 billion miles away. So it is with the supremacy of Christ in your life. All the planets of your life - your sexuality and desires, your commitments and beliefs, your aspirations and dreams, your attitudes and convictions, your habits and disciplines, your solitude and relationships, your labor and leisure, your thinking and feeling - all the planets of your life are held in orbit by the greatness and gravity and blazing brightness of the supremacy of Jesus Christ at the center of your life. If he ceases to be the bright, blazing, satisfying beauty at the center of your life, the planets will fly into confusion, a hundred things will be out of control and sooner or later they will crash into destruction.

We are made to know Christ as he really is (which is why biblical doctrine is so important). And the knowing we were made to experience is not the knowing of disinterested awareness - like knowing that Caesar crossed the Rubicon, or that ancient Gaul was divided into three parts - but the knowing of admiration and wonder and awe and intimacy and ecstasy and embrace. Not the knowing of a hurricane by watching TV but by flying into the eye of the storm.

Yes, when all the passions of our life revolve around the blazing center of the massive Sun, everything finds its proper place and orbit. Only in Christ, do we find "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom 14:17) As Saint Augustine said, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our souls are restless until they rest in Thee." Then, and only then, we become established people. We become grateful, giving children of God. We live purposefully by intentionally living to reveal the greatness and goodness of our God by how we relate to others, yes, even when we fail to meet our expectations. But, as Piper suggests, when we take the sun from the center of our lives, we put anything else in its place - sex, work, family, sports - our passions spin out of control. Our lives are engulfed by chaos and darkness: fit of rage, lust, conflict and destruction consume us and everyone who stands in our way.

Therefore, we are here together for one main purpose: to stir and stoke the fire of our heart's affections for Jesus Christ. And in so doing, it's our desire that we'll leave with a deepened resolve in our hearts to cherish our

husbands/wives, to be patient with our children, to be loyal to our friends, to serve our church and everyone we meet, so they too will want to make the glory and beauty of our awesome God the blazing center of their lives.

“The fight of faith is the fight to stay satisfied with God.”

John Piper

Friday Night Session

I. It's all about treasure

-Imagine tilling a garden. (Read Matt 13:44)

-Whether we're aware of it or not, we treasure and pursue whatever we believe has the power to bring us joy and fulfillment.

-Follow Jesus is an invitation to LIFE!

II. The problem: We're born fools

-We worship and serve created things: “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator - who is forever praised. Amen.” Rom 1:25

-There are only two ways we can go to seek life (God/North or Created Things/South). There is no in-between:

“Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy, where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourself treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matt 6:19-21

-Seeking our treasure in heaven or on earth is the tension we live with every day. Who or what do we believe holds the promise of fulfilling the hunger and thirst of our hearts? If it is anything created, thieves can break in and steal.

III. How to discern if you're seeking your treasure in heaven (God/North) or on earth (Created Things/South)

-Consider the Ten Commandments.

1st commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me.”

10th commandment: "You shall not covet..."

Paraphrased: "You have Me so be content."

"Thou shall not covent" is the internal commandment which shows the man who things himself to be moral that he really needs a Savior. This is a very central concept if we are to have any understanding or any real practice of the true Christian life or true spirituality... When we talk of the Christian life or true spirituality, when we talk about freedom from the bonds of sin, we must be wrestling with the inward problems of not coveting against God and men, of loving God and men and not merely some set of externals. Does this mean that any desire is coveting and therefore sinful? The Bible makes plain that this is not so - all desire is not sin. Desire becomes sin when it fails to include love of God or men. Further, think there are two practical tests as to when we are coveting against God or men; first I am to love God enough to be contented, second, I am to love men enough not to envy... When I lack proper contentment, either I have forgotten that God is God or I have ceased to be submissive to Him. We are now speaking about a practical test to judge if we are coveting against God. A quiet disposition and a heart giving thanks at any given moment is the real test of the extent to which we love God at any moment."

-Francis Schaeffer.

IV. Questions for discussion

-Name the symptoms or consequences of coveting and treasuring created things in place of Jesus.

-What has the power to break your contentment in God? What created things do you covet life from?

-Tune into emotions like anger, self-contempt, worry, envy and jealousy.

-Listen to the self-talk that fuels those emotions.

-What helps you stay focused and content in Jesus?

**Do You Know Your True Identity?
Know your story. Embrace the truth.**

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ."
2 Cor 5:17

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

Everyone in Christ shares a glorious identity. We are God's "dearly loved children." (Eph 5:1) God smiles whenever he looks at us. God is always with us and for us.

Believing the truth about our identity is not easy. It's much easier to think we are unlovable or even worthless. It's common to think that God is frustrated angry or disappointed with us. Christians often believe they have to work hard to earn God's love or to get his attention. This is a lie. And a battle is underway to get us to believe lies about our heavenly Father and about our identity.

A battle is under way to "name" you and me

We must understand the categories of going north to God or south to the false gods of this world if we will intentionally live with Christ at the center of our lives. Otherwise, we habitually believe lies about where life is found. We foolishly believe love and respect, significance and security are found in human relationships and in things like, money, sex and power instead of knowing and treasuring Jesus. As Rom 1:25 says we have, "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator." We are born idolaters. Without God's intervention, we naturally turn south to the created things of this world to find our significance and security instead of turning north to God.

Moreover, we have an enemy. There is an unbelievably common attack against every man and woman. Many people need to be awoken to the reality of this battle being waged against them. While most people acknowledge struggles within, most do not define the battle correctly.

Whether a man faces problems with pornography, problems with his girlfriends, wife or his job, he tends to define the problem as inadequacy or low self-esteem. He feels deficient and therefore succumbs to the pressure of just trying harder to do it right. Whether a woman faces problems in her marriage, problems in her friendships or problems with loneliness and insecurity, she tends to feel deficient and defines the problem as being unlovable.

Whether male or female, it's easy to mis-name the real battle or to never define it at all. But Christ makes a clear declaration about this war: "The enemy has come to kill, steal, and destroy but I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." (John 10:10) Everyday we are engaged in a battle for our hearts. Satan is the father of lies. He lies to us about our identity, telling us we're unlovable and hopeless failures. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy..."

Furthermore, everyone has been disappointed, hurt or wounded in life. Prov 19:18 says, "Life and death are in the power of the tongue." Everyone can remember a time when they were hurt by the words and actions of someone. While our greatest enemy is our flesh and the lies it believes about where life is found, our disappointments, hurts and wounds "heat up" those lies and give them direction and power. For example, whenever I played softball at recess, I usually struck out. I was always picked last. My peers often mocked me. The shame fostered a lie in me. Without realizing it, I defined life as getting people to want me by being good at something. I defined death as having others see my inadequacy and reject me. People's approval, based on my performance, was my false god instead of embracing the security and freedom that comes from knowing Jesus' love and acceptance. In many ways, lies and wounds shape who we are and how we relate to God and others.

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10) We are here to embrace that life Jesus offers us. In order to do that, it is important that we face our lies and wounds so we can turn from them and embrace the truth about how God sees us. Writing our story can help us define the wounds and lies we believe.

Writing your story

Take some quality time to reflect on your story. Here's where to begin: As we said earlier, everyone has been hurt or wounded by life. Think back on a time when you were wounded by the words or actions of someone. Maybe it was a friend on the playground. Maybe it was when your father or mother walked out on your family. When I was younger, one of my best friends saw that I was in deep emotional pain. He asked me what was wrong. I told him that my girlfriend has just broken up with me. My friend started dating her the next day. Take a moment and reflect on a painful event in your life:

One of the first wounding events I can remember in my life story is:

Now, try to remember two or three other painful events in your life. Reflect on the impact those wounding words or actions had on you. For example, during those painful moments, what do you think you believed you had to do or be in order to avoid that kind of pain and rejection in the future? On the flip side, what did you believe you had to do or be in order to get people to accept you? And last of all, how did those painful events influence the way you saw yourself? This is not about blaming others or avoiding responsibility. Without thinking about all this, our wounds will influence the way we see God, ourselves and others. And again, these wounds will shape and enflame the lies we believe. For example, I was held back in the fourth grade. I felt ashamed of myself. This painful event was one of many events in my life story that told me I was a stupid failure. And because I believed stupid failure was my real name or identity, I believed another lie. The lie went like this: "Significance and acceptance come from never looking or feeling stupid again!" Without knowing it, I made a commitment. I was determined to avoid anything that could make me feel like a stupid failure again. Instead of dealing with problems, I avoided them through passivity in order to protect myself from the fear of failure and shame.

Two or three other significant, wounding events in my life story are:

Now, if you took all these disappointments, hurts or wounds and boiled them down to a word or phrase about how you see yourself, what would that word or phrase be? For example, people have used words like: Unlovable, Unwanted, Failure, Loser, Idiot, I'm on my own, I'll never be good enough, I always screw things up, Strike Out and Never Chosen.

As you boil all the wounding events of your life down to words or phrases, what would you say your false identity is?

Whispers of the enemy

As we experience the pain of life, our enemy comes to us and twists the knife. He pounces on our insecurities, wounds and failures. He seeks to accuse and name us: you're such a loser, you're all alone, you'll never succeed at anything, you'll never be chosen, you're so unlikable, you'll screw it up again, you're just an idiot, you looked at pornography again, you screamed at your children again or God could never delight in someone like you! Sadly, we choose to believe these lies instead of embracing the truth of God's love for us.

When you believe the lies, what do they tell you to do?

The lie tells me I must always _____
if I am to be wanted, loved or seen as competent and respectable.

The lie tells me I must never _____
if I am to avoid rejection or the shame of failure and incompetence.

Whispers of Jesus

What do you believe Jesus would say to you if you could hear him whisper to you from his heart? Most people assume they would hear some kind of correction, disappointment or rebuke instead of delight. Henri Nouwen has well said that, "Being the Beloved expresses the core truth of our existence." That's true. Grace means unmerited favor. If you are in Christ, God favors you. He delights in you. He is always for you. He is always with you (Rom 8:28 & 31-39). You are his dearly loved child (Eph 5:1).

Reflect on the following passages from God's word:

The Lie:	The Truth:
I'm unloved & rejected	A beloved child of God: 1 John 3:1, 4:10
Unacceptable due to my performance	Accepted & loved because of Jesus performance: Rom 3:21-24 & 15:7; Titus 3:4
Ugly, undesirable, too sinful	In Christ, you have a new heart, new creation: 2 Cor 5:17
Unwanted	Chosen: Eph 1:4-5 & 11
Unusable blown it too badly	Called by God for his eternal purposes: Matt 9:9-12; Luke 15:7; 2 Tim 1:9-10

You might want to reflect on Luke 15:3-24 to understand how God feels about about you. Consider what the shepherd, woman and father feels in these three parables -

1. The parable of the lost sheep
2. The parable of the lost coin
3. The parable of the lost son

You have a new heart!

The following passages talk about the new covenant heart which is the basis of our true identity and God's delight in us: Ez 36:25-27; 2 Cor 3; Jer 31:31-33; Zeph 3:17; John 4:13; Heb 8:10; 1 Cor 3:16 & 6:19 & 11:25.

Through the New Covenant heart we have a new identity and a deep desire to go north to God

Costume jewelry is essentially worthless metal covered with an attractive coating. It looks good on the outside but it's worthless on the inside. In the same way, many Christians believe their goodness is shallow and their badness runs deep. They see themselves as covered by the blood yet sinners through and through. But tarnished silver is a much truer image of who we are after conversion. The new believer isn't a sinner by definition but a saint who struggles with sin.

We find this hard to believe but Scripture is clear. You are I are not merely forgiven sinners; we are new creations in Christ. At core, we have good hearts because Jesus lives there. While sin still exists through our flesh, our sinful flesh no longer defines us. Sin has ceased to be our ruling master. We don't have to obey it. We can and, deep down, want to obey and love God because that's what Jesus, who lives in our new heart, always wants to do. Christ in you is our truest and deepest identity.

The term "in Christ" is used 82 times in Paul's letters. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2 Cor 5:16-17) This truth is the bedrock of his theology. Here's one more example. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Cor 6:19) Paul doesn't address the Corinthian believers as sinners needing to shape up but as saints needing to remember who they really are.

Ask God to help you embrace who you really are in Christ. Ask him to help you believe these truths about your true name or identity as you seek to listen to the whispers of Jesus heart for you.

Final thoughts as you write your story

As you continue to reflect on your story, talk about the ways God has spoken truth into your life. Think about the significant people who have related to you in ways that have helped you believe the truth about God's love for you. Explain what happened or how they spoke the truth to you. How did they help you know that Jesus is for you? If memories like that

don't come to mind, what other ways have you seen the faithfulness and goodness of God in your spiritual journey?

In light of what God says and feels about you, what would you say is the real identity, the identity bestowed upon you by God's kind and loving heart?

How would you treat other differently if you believed the truth?

What will help you live from your new covenant heart? What will help you hear and believe the truth about who you really are in Christ?

Prayerfully consider sharing your story with a few trusted friends in addition to your group so you can help each other embrace your real name and turn from the lies of your false name.

WHAT'S YOUR NEXT STEP?

Adult Small Groups

Adult small groups provide a safe place to connect with others, build meaningful friendships and accountability as we experience the transformation power of Christ by pursuing him together. There are all kinds of groups available. If you are looking for a group, we'd love to help!

For more details or to join a group, contact Gary 866.9597 x118, gheim@bhbconline.org.

