

Identity

Small Group Guide

Warm-up Question: (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. Did you have any nicknames growing up (or now)? Explain.
2. Do you have any relatives that you think you are pretty similar to? Explain.

Read the following passage: Read Romans 6:1-11.

In Romans 6, Paul transitions subjects slightly as he moves from describing how Christ has saved us to what the grace of God means for daily living. In particular, he asks, “Will an emphasis on grace undercut our motivation for righteous living?” And it is here that Paul begins to address the important subject of identity.

Many different factors affect our identity, from our family of origin to our ethnicity to our physical appearance to our past experiences. It is impossible to consistently live in a way that is at odds with our own self-understanding. A changed life requires a change in our self-understanding. Paul describes some important components of our new identity in Romans 6:1-11.

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. What have been some of the most influential factors affecting the formation of your identity? Explain. How do you think of yourself now?
2. Read 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. Explain the relevance of these verses to the subject of identity.
3. A healthy identity needs to be rooted in reality. But we may feel that reality is precisely what is leading us to a negative self-understanding. How do we deal with this?
4. Read Romans 5:6-8; 8:38-39; 1:7; and Galatians 2:20. Paul understood the love of God to be the foundation of his and all believers’ identities. Our experience of love is often merely emotional or superficial. Describe the biblical concept of love. Based on the passages just referenced, how do you think Paul understood the love of God? Describe some ways the love of God should shape our identity.
5. Read Romans 3:22-24. Give a working definition of “shame.” Explain the biblical reason why all of us will deal with shame to some extent. What does it mean to be justified by God? How does our justification lay a foundation for dealing with our shame?
6. Read Romans 6:1-11 again and take note of all the times Paul uses phrases like “in Christ” or “with Christ.” What does it mean to be united with Christ? How should this impact our identity?

7. Considering his argument in Romans 6:1-11, what is Paul's answer to the concern that an emphasis on grace will lead to unrighteous living?
8. Consider the following quotation.

In the end, we can't say to ourselves, "I don't care that literally everyone else in the world thinks I'm a monster. I love myself and that is all that matters." That would not convince us of our worth, unless we are mentally unsound. We need someone from outside to say we are of great worth, and the greater the worth of that someone or someones, the more power they have to instill a sense of self and of worth. Only if we are approved and loved by someone whom we esteem can we achieve any self-esteem. To use biblical terms, we need someone to bless us because we can't bless ourselves. We are irreducibly social and relational beings. We need someone we respect to respect us. We need someone we admire to admire us. Even when modern people claim to be validating themselves, the reality is always that they are socializing themselves into a new community of peers, of "cheerleaders," of people whose approval they crave.

Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God*

Explain the importance of community in our identity formation. How might Paul's instructions in Romans 12:10,15-16 be significant to the subject of identity?

9. What is one way you think God wants to transform your current self-understanding?
10. What can you do this week to build an identity based on God's truth?

Pray