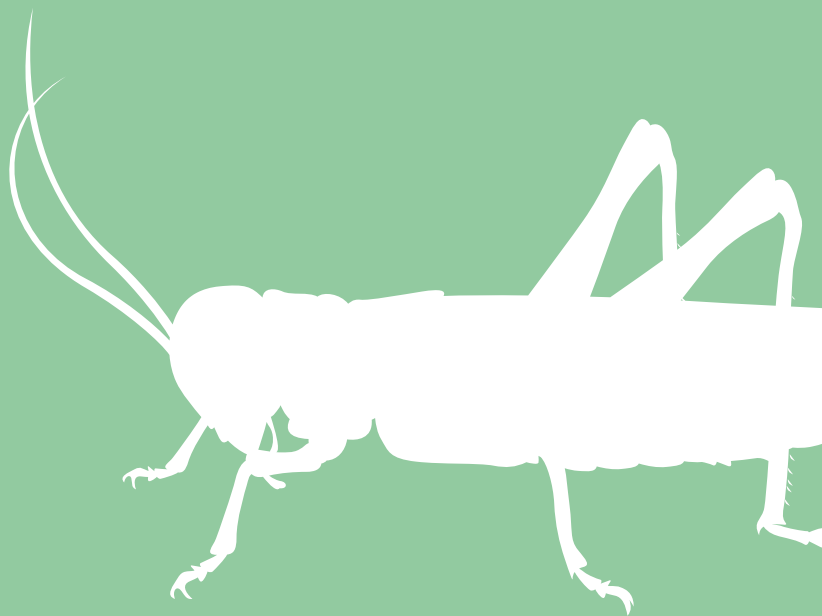


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MORE THAN  
GRASSHOPPERS

RECLAIMING YOUR  
GOD-GIVEN IDENTITY

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## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

Consider the scene: God had given His people an incredible promise of victory and abundance. A select group of men, whom we should assume represented respected leaders among the people since they were entrusted with such a task, embarked on a scouting expedition. They encountered the enemy, the potential conquest, and their own fears. They did the math, and their true self-image affected the sum total: “We are but grasshoppers.” And with that, ten men sealed the fate of their generation as wanderers who could not receive God’s promise of triumph and abundance.

Those flunky undercover agents from the Old Testament don’t have a corner on the market when it comes to messed-up self-worth, identity, and destiny. While our culture bogs further and further in revolting narcissism, Joshuas, Gideons, and Samsons falter in our churches—each is a symbol for identity struggles. We have too many Gideons in hiding who cannot see themselves as the mighty man of valor God can see underneath the fear and insecurities. We need some Joshuas who fight off the inferiority complex that our doubt-riddled flesh and the enemy himself would try to impose. And we need some redeemed Samsons of

ability who throw off the temptation of arrogance and dedicate their talents to God in humility.

As we began writing this book, after Joel presented a portion in a student workers' training seminar, we frequently confronted the reality that we are not professional therapists. Yet in serving in a combination of roles as student pastor, student advisor in a college setting, and in a number of informal counseling sessions as ministers, we have seen countless people of all ages struggling to understand their identity and worth. In fact, as we consulted with various ministers and editors on the creation of this book and explained the thesis, a couple of consultants asked, "Oh, so this is a book for youth?" I wish it were only adolescents who battled with their worth. I wish men in their mid-forties and women in their fifties and preteens being bullied and senior adults in nursing homes never faced identity assaults. I wish cultivating a God-centered self-image was something we worked through as sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds and then graduated to live secure, stable Apostolic lives never to be rattled by identity questions. Yet the statistics and the struggles of people we encounter weekly reflect an epidemic of identity issues that rock Christians of all ages.

Iconic Pentecostal leader T. F. Tenney claims, "We are living in a world in an identity crisis. People simply do not know who they are, or who they are supposed to be. The society in which we operate is in trouble. . . . As Apostolics, we must find our true identity, knowing it is when we find God's destiny for our lives, then and only then will we know—and become—who we are meant to be."<sup>1</sup>

Let's get personal. Who are you? Before you read any further, describe yourself in three words—the first words that pop in your head.

What did you come up with? Did you go with the words that came to mind first or did you dismiss them and find others? Why?

If you were the rebel who read straight through the activity without playing along (what does that say about you?), we are going to give you a second chance to be a team player. Take the next ten seconds to close your eyes and think of three things you like about yourself. Close your eyes and go.

Okay, before you analyze those qualities, we are going to do yet another activity. You'll have another ten seconds. This time, you'll think of three things you don't like about yourself. Go.

Okay, take a deep breath. Besides reflecting on the self-image diagnosis involved in the words you chose, ask yourself this question: which was easier—identifying qualities you liked about yourself or those you don't?

I've conducted this exercise several times in classes and the overwhelming majority of people can find an infinite list of things they don't like about themselves—faults, flaws, and shortcomings of all stripes from their uneven earlobes to destructive addictions—while most people struggle to come up with even a few positive qualities about themselves.

In this book we're going to argue that Apostolic Christians are plagued with self-image problems resulting from an identity crisis. Because we don't understand how God thinks about us, we don't know how to think about ourselves. I'm not peddling a "power of positive thinking" knock-off; I'm talking about looking to Scripture to realign the most foundational aspects of our thinking: who God is, what He thinks of us, and then how we should think of ourselves.

Who do you think you are? I intentionally want to push you on that point. You must understand yourself, and to do that, you first must understand who God thinks you are.

We so often see ourselves as inferior: just grasshoppers. Do we have any sense of how God sees us? Do we really get that He loves us? Do we honor the privilege of being made in His image? Do we

let the hunger for acceptance by and affirmation of others shape our sense of worth and manipulate our behaviors? Do we struggle with feelings of low self-confidence or ricochet to the extreme of arrogance over our perceived strengths and talents?

Failure to see who we are in Christ is failure to understand the grace and power of God. It's a blindness to all of the many verses in the Bible that declare the limitless power of Jesus Christ. He can do anything, even—in fact, especially—through you.

Seeing ourselves as less than what we are is a trick of the enemy. And the sad part is, it's contagious. The grasshopper effect represents the tendency to see ourselves as less than we really are in God, exaggerate who the enemy is, and spread that poison to others.

The Bible is filled with grasshoppers—men and women who thought themselves inadequate, unqualified, or somehow falling short when stacked alongside perceived competition. And yet it is as if God seems to particularly delight in using just such people to experience the miraculous and in turn change the world around them. The issue is entirely in our self-perception—our willingness to accept our identity as Jesus-name, Holy-Ghost-empowered Apostolics. This book is a challenge to change the way you see yourself—to understand your rightful place as a child of God made in His image, bearing His name, and filled with His Spirit.