

DEFINING IDENTITY THROUGH
THE MIRROR OF GOD'S WORD

redeemed

Well-Watered
WOMEN CO.

redefined

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Dear Friend,

The vision for this study has been stirring in my heart for years. In moments of weakness and longing for direction, God would light a match of truth in my heart that would ignite a desire to know Him more. I longed to understand the gospel fully, and to grasp what it means to be “in Christ” and a daughter of God. **Everyone wrestles with identity, but few are brave enough to discuss this struggle.** Yet this conversation is necessary because identity is the core of who we are. We must seek to fully grasp the implications of how the gospel redefines our past, present, and future. If not, we will walk around with a useless rubber sword of “self helps” trying to fend off the lies and insecurities of this world, and forfeit the “sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17). **In searching to find out who we truly are, we have to begin by looking to who Jesus Christ is and why He changes everything.** It may seem backwards, but such is the kingdom of God.

I’ve sat down with countless girls and listened as they shared their identity crises. They were grasping for some hope that their lives mattered and their brokenness was useful. I’m tired of seeing the enemy win small victories. I’ve seen women walk through life with insecurity as their cloak rather than the covering of the blood of Jesus as their confidence. I’ve cried my own tears of desperation, confusion, and self-pity, wondering if I would ever truly comprehend and live out the freedom and fullness of life Jesus promised in John 10:10.

*Would you believe me if I told you that what
Jesus did on the cross two thousand years ago
changes everything about who you are today?*

Belief is where the change begins. If you find yourself already lacking belief, join a fellow doubtful believer who stood in Jesus' presence in this prayer, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24) **Even when we don't believe, Jesus still speaks the gospel over our broken hearts, bringing new life to our dry bones.**

The realities of who we are in Christ—all because of His life, death, resurrection, and current reign—are profoundly inconceivable to our finite minds. His greatness and the power of the gospel are hard to understand this side of Heaven, but God has given us His Word so that we might discover these treasures every single day as we come to Him. *Even in our profound brokenness, He does His work to make us beautiful in His image.*

The name for this study came during a season when I was walking through a dark valley in 2015. I was in a time of transition after having my son, and I was struggling to remember who I was. All of this caused me to lack a hunger for the Word. God had already given me the vision for this study, but little did I know it would be a year later before it would actually be written. He never allows me to write what I have not first lived and learned in the secret places with Him. As I struggled to believe He had a plan for my life, the labels of my past began to play through my head like a film reel. I began to wonder if God could redeem me from the pit into which I had fallen.

BROKEN. WORTHLESS. INADEQUATE. UNWANTED. UNQUALIFIED.



All of these words stung my soul like the venom of a serpent, as the enemy continually rehearsed my failures and shortcomings. Then came the change. I opened the Word to the book of Colossians and read these words that soothed my aching heart: “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14).

DELIVERED. CHOSEN. LOVED. REDEEMED. FORGIVEN.



Right then I saw myself kneeling before the cross where I had been redefined. I saw my Savior, no longer hanging on the cross, by my side—risen and reigning. No longer was I defined by my unworthiness and insufficiency, I was redefined by Jesus’ worthiness and abundance.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, to “redefine” means “to define again, to reexamine or reevaluate especially with a view to change.”¹ This is exactly what Jesus Christ did for us when His hands, feet, and side were pierced as He hung on two perpendicular planks of wood. He rewrote our identity with His nail-pierced hands and the blood that poured forth from His wounds.

JESUS REDEFINED OUR IDENTITIES.

This is the journey we are going to take through this six-week study. **We are going to look to the cross and to Christ our Savior—the Redeemer and the Rewriter of our stories.** We will trade our cloak of insecurity for robes of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10).

We will hand Jesus the script to our lives—past, present, and future—and allow Him to illuminate it according to the gospel of grace.

No more shackles. No more shame. No more wearing a scarlet letter. We are going to walk in Jesus’ footsteps that have gone before us in victory. We will trade our past for His present beauty and live the redefined life that Jesus came to offer us—*for His glory and for our good* (Romans 8:28).

living free in Him, *Gretchen Saffer*



Everyone has a story to tell.

However, we want to hide a lot of our stories. The past has a way of controlling the present, and the struggles of our daily lives become a burden we carry alone in an attempt to cover up our brokenness. We weren't meant to live this way. Our hearts have compartments that, if left untouched and unnoticed, can become places of hoarded insecurities that keep us from walking in the fullness of grace. Jesus wants to empty out the junk drawers of our hearts and clear them away with truth, with hope, and with the cleansing power of His shed blood.

One of the greatest mistakes we make in approaching issues of our own identity struggles is to first look inward with affirmations in an attempt to boost self-esteem.² In "The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness", Timothy Keller describes it this way:

"Boosting our self-esteem by living up to our own standards or someone else's sounds like a great solution. But it does not deliver. It cannot deliver."³

Boosting self-esteem is not the answer in healing identity wounds. We need a deeper, more lasting, and fulfilling answer. What we need is not a Band-aid® to place over our wounds; we need healing ointment. Keller goes on to say,

"The more we get to understand the gospel, the more we want to change."⁴

The answer to the self-esteem issues that plague women and add to our broken identities is found in something bigger than ourselves.

Peeling Back the Bandaid

We often begin in the wrong place when trying to mend the damage that sin has done to our identities. We bandage our wounded souls with temporary fixes, words, and phrases in an attempt to soothe the aching of our souls. We want to know that we are more than the reflections we see in the mirror. I've heard the statement, "You are loved. You are chosen. You are beautiful." countless times, but when said apart from Christ, these phrases simply numb the soul. They cannot bring lasting relief from our struggle with identity. *The focus of these statements is you, and it is "me."* This is the problem with our Band-aid fixes:

I AM NOT THE ANSWER, JESUS IS.

However, if we are completely honest, this is not what we initially want to hear. Because we are hard-wired by sin to think of ourselves first, looking outside of ourselves is not our first response. We would rather hear that we are enough, we are beautiful, and we are brave before we want to hear anything about Christ or our brokenness. But there is a difference between what we want to hear and what we need to hear. *We need the gospel. The gospel is good news, but it is also hard news.*

In my own struggles with identity and self-image, everything changed when I shifted my gaze from the mirror on the wall to the mirror of the Word. The mirror on the wall only reveals part of the big picture—the outer self versus the inner being. The mirror of the Word reflects both the heart and the body through the image of Christ. What we believe about Jesus is expressed through how we view ourselves. *Right living begins with right thinking, and right thinking begins with having our minds saturated in the Word of God.*

The Healing Ointment of the Gospel

Peeling back the band-aid of temporary identity fixes can be painful and nerve-wracking. No one desires to be exposed. However, we learn in Ephesians 5:8, “for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.” *The light of the gospel exposes what has been tucked away in the junk drawers of our hearts and exchanges our trash for the treasure of the gospel.* This is the healing ointment that is applied to our wounds by the Lord Jesus Himself, bringing comfort, conviction, and confidence to our souls.

Jesus is the healing ointment our identities need. The gospel is not a temporary fix, it is an eternal promise and hope. Being exposed is not something that you should run from; it is something that you should embrace, for in exposure comes healing. As Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4:5-7:


“FOR WHAT WE PROCLAIM IS NOT OURSELVES, BUT JESUS CHRIST AS LORD, WITH OURSELVES AS YOUR SERVANTS FOR JESUS’ SAKE. FOR GOD, WHO SAID, ‘LET LIGHT SHINE OUT OF DARKNESS,’ HAS SHONE IN OUR HEARTS TO GIVE THE LIGHT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST. BUT WE HAVE THIS TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY, TO SHOW THAT THE SURPASSING POWER BELONGS TO GOD AND NOT TO US.”

As we open the Word together, humbled and hungry for more of Jesus, my prayer is that the Holy Spirit would not only free us but make us into women of deep conviction! We carry the healing ointment for this broken world. *Don't let the enemy hide your jar.*

Join me in praying:

Jesus, help me see myself the way You see me. Amen.

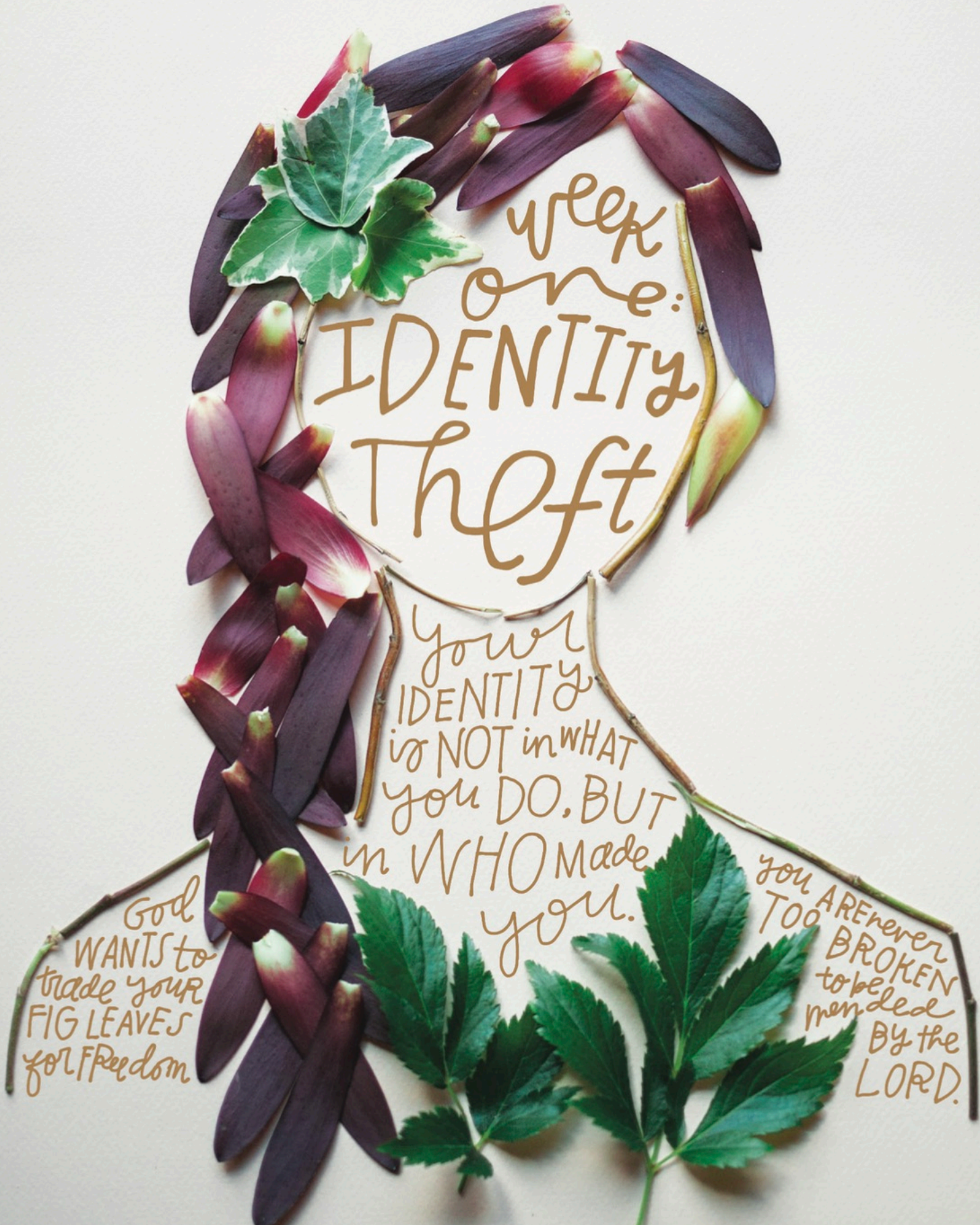




My joy comes from the Lord,
and not from the ease of my day.
My identity is found in Him,
not in what I do or say.
My hope is in His promises,
not my dreams or plans.
My strength is in His Word,
not praise from words of man.
My beauty is from Jesus,
not makeup, clothing, or size.
My to-do list will not discourage me,
because Jesus is the Prize.
My past will not define me,
I've been forgiven, washed, set free.
My future is secure,
by grace this is the
new me.

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welcome:
IDENTITY
Theft

Your
IDENTITY
is NOT in WHAT
you DO, BUT
in WHO made
you.

God
WANTS to
trade your
FIG LEAVES
for Freedom

you ARE never
TOO BROKEN
to be
mended
By the
LORD.



Week One Introduction

Identity in Christ is a BIG subject. This study will only skim the surface, but my desire in it is that it sparks a yearning in your heart to know Jesus deeply and intimately. As you study, go deeper. Pray bigger. Lay out your past and your insecurities before the Lord. Ask questions. Share truth. Be vulnerable. And most importantly be willing to listen as God leads you to walk in the new life He purchased for you on the cross.

We are starting at the very beginning, so don't let that intimidate you. Walk into this with fresh eyes, a blank canvas, and a longing heart.

Jesus, be glorified as we study who You are and who we are in You. Speak to us boldly and tenderly through the words of Scripture and mold our hearts to be more like Yours. Tattoo truth on our minds and erase the lies of sin from our hearts with Your spotless blood. We are Yours, Lord.

Amen.

The Original Design


i·den·ti·ty | /,ɪ'den(t)ədē/

the condition of being oneself or itself, and not another; condition or character as to who a person or what a thing is; the qualities, beliefs, etc., that distinguish or identify a person or thing.¹

We've all struggled with identity theft. We have handed over who we are and who we were originally made to be to a ruthless world that etches lies, doubts, and insecurity upon our hearts. Most of us walk around in life confused, attempting to understand who we really are, but actually, we're really chasing after the wind in our vain attempts to discover the truth. **We all suffer from a bad case of identity theft, yet we don't know where to go or to whom we should report our robbery!**

The right place to begin is not where you currently are. Rather it is back at the very beginning of all time when the world was created by God. Turn to Genesis 1 and read verses 1-2. Write a description of the very first verses of the Bible in the space below.

Right from the get-go, the entire story of creation and life centers around God. God created. The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. The Hebrew word for "create" is *bara*, meaning to fashion out of nothing. In essence, God caused something that had not been created to come into existence.² God is the source of all life, the designer of all existence, the ingenious inventor of the world in which we live. Continue to read Genesis 1:3-25 and write down the order of creation:

A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a woman with long dark hair holding a large bouquet of flowers. The bouquet includes several orange carnations, purple carnations, and some greenery. The woman's face is partially obscured by the flowers.

It is God who designed the mountains, valleys, hills and seas. He not only made the enormous whale swimming through the depths of ocean, but He also created the tiny ant crawling beneath our feet. The atom was His idea and by His great power He holds all created things together (See Colossians 1:16-17). Take a moment to glance around you. *What do you see? What are you sitting on? What are you wearing? What light is illuminating your surroundings?* Write these things down, and think about this: God created the fibers that create every single thing.

There is not one thing that has been “invented” on this earth that was not first thought up by God Himself. Let this humbling perspective be the lens through which you see the rest of this study on reclaiming your identity in Christ. **The world does not revolve around you. It revolves around God.** You do not hold all things together, *God* does. You did not create the clothes you wear or the food you eat or the home you live in, *God* did. In order to reclaim who we are and who we are meant to be, we need a full understanding of one of the most foundational truths of existence: **GOD IS THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE, NOT US.**

In the midst of all of God’s creation, one act stands out from all the rest. In verses Genesis 1:3-25, God created everything on the planet and described each thing He created as “good”. He was referring to the absolute best or highest quality and moral excellence.³ *God does not do things halfway.* He is the Creator of creativity, and the Author of life.

In the next part of the creation account, God zooms in to the pinnacle of His creation. Read verses Genesis 1:26-31. Write verse 26 in the space below. Circle the word “Us” and draw an arrow to “Our image.” Underline the role of man.



In this specific verse, God references Himself in the plural form. Theologians believe this plural description of the character of God to refer to the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In verses 1-2, we already saw a reference to God and the Holy Spirit. John 1:1 tells us Jesus was in the very beginning of creation and He was the maker of all things. The significance of the word “Us” impacts how mankind was created and originally defined.

What was man created to reflect? (Verses 26-27)

Born to be Image-Reflectors

The original design of God was for mankind to be His image-reflectors. Note that we have been created “in” His image. The word “image” in the Hebrew refers to “likeness.” We were created to be God’s image-bearers and image-reflectors. In studying the “image of God”, there are a few things to note about the identity of mankind:

- 1** Man is distinct from the rest of creation. Only humans have been created according to God’s likeness. Man is superior to all other created things and is to “have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (verse 26b).
- 2** God ordered man to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over every fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (verse 28).
- 3** Humans are created “in” the image of God, not “as” the image of God; meaning that we are not God, we simply reflect Him. Michael S. Heiser described this concept of creation in this way: “Humans are created as God’s imagers—they function as God’s representatives.”⁴



God's original design for humans has always been for us to be His imagers and His reflectors. We are to reflect who He is as our Maker and Creator, just as a pot would bear the unique design of the potter. Set apart from all the rest of creation, man was mandated to bear fruit, to multiply, and to rule over all that has been made. We learn from the very beginning that we are created with a purpose and with a mission, for God's glory.

YOUR IDENTITY IS NOT IN WHAT YOU DO, BUT IN WHO MADE YOU.



John Piper described the purpose of man being created in God's image like this: "God didn't create you as an end in yourself. He's the end, you're the means. And the reason that's such good news is because the best way to show that God is infinitely valuable is to be supremely happy in him. If God's people are bored with God, they are really bad images. God is not unhappy about himself. He is infinitely excited about his own glory."⁵

Being created in God's image as His reflectors and image-bearers is not some trivial fact to quickly pass by. It is a foundational, life-altering, purpose-giving truth to which we are to hold on tight in a world that threatens to reclaim our identity. In the very end of the creation account, God sealed His creation of man when He described what He had made with two words (verse 31):

VERY GOOD

It was by no accident that God created man and woman uniquely and distinctly to bear His image and to reflect His wondrous glory. It is also by no accident that God has created you and given you life, breath, passions, and has placed you exactly where you are today. **You are not an accident.** You have been created by God, on purpose, and with one mission: to reflect His image and declare His glory. This was God's original design.



PURPOSE: *redefined*

What God-given roles are you responsible for in your own life? (Think very practically here. Are you a wife? A mom? What do you do at your job? Are you a care-giver? A student?) The roles God has given you in your life are opportunities to reflect Him to others and to be faithful to His mandate to be fruitful and multiply for His glory.

How does being made in the “image of God” affect the way you think about yourself and other people?

Genesis chapter 2 focuses on the creation of man and woman. Take time to read and reflect on this passage and the detail that has been given to God’s original design for humans. How does God’s original design contrast with the way humans live today?

