

STEPHEN VIARS

Author of *Overcoming Bitterness*



*DO YOU
BELIEVE
WHAT*

*GOD SAYS
ABOUT
YOU?*

HOW A RIGHT VIEW OF YOUR IDENTITY IN
CHRIST CHANGES EVERYTHING

“There are few counseling issues that do not circle back to the matter of our identity in Christ. Steve Viars has written the book I’ve been looking for that lays out clear, biblical truth about who we are. The format—31 brief, focused chapters—along with the personal reflections and group discussion questions make this usable in a variety of settings. Steve’s passion for God’s Word and God’s Word about us is evident in every chapter and every question. I will be commending this book for years to come.”

Jonathan D. Holmes, pastor of counseling, Parkside Church, Chagrin Falls, OH; executive director, Fieldstone Counseling

“Steve Viars brings his decades of experience as a pastor and a counselor in this wonderful 31-day resource. He weaves biblical exposition, sound theology, and practical application into an engaging narrative. The short, readable chapters make this a perfect tool for basic discipleship.”

Dr. Jim Newheiser, director of the Christian counseling program, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, NC; executive director IBCD (Institute for Biblical Counseling and Discipleship)

“Cultural expectations, worries, fears, and the unexpected traumatic tragedies of life leave their mark and tend to dramatically shape one’s identity. These shaping influences can harden into an inherently ungodly view of self. Steve has produced a helpful 31-day study for a redefined and biblical view of self. If you are a believer in Christ and are battling debilitating thoughts, you need to carefully read this book. It will give you the guidance to view your *self* correctly from God’s perspective!”

Dr. John D. Street, graduate professor, The Master’s University and Seminary; president, Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

“This is a timely and creative discipleship tool for a culture confused about personal identity in ways that lead to personal and cultural devastation. Learn from biblical truths as they are applied by a diverse group of believers who wrestle with identity problems, and discover how believing what God says about you can set you free!”

Dr. A. Charles Ware, executive director of Grace Relations; professor

“God has a vantage point on your identity. His Word speaks clearly about who you are and what you should believe. This wonderful book challenges and rearranges our thinking about ourselves around Scripture. It offers a superb primer for new believers and a marvelous refresher for older saints.”

Deepak Reju, PhD, pastor of biblical counseling and family ministry, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC

“As a follower of God, it is important to know who you are through the eyes of God. Steve has put together helpful insights to guide you into that reality.”

Dr. Nicolas Ellen, president, Expository Counseling Training Center

“In a day when ‘what *I* think about me’ seems supreme, Steve tells me not only what *God* thinks about me, but *how* embracing God’s thoughts about me transforms me. Steve provides 31 practical, theologically anchored descriptions of a believer’s identity in Christ, each marked by careful biblical exposition and meaningful life application. Plus, the conversations among his book characters add enjoyment to each chapter.”

Robert D. Jones, DMin, DTheol, biblical counseling professor, Southern Seminary, Louisville, KY

“As a careful student of the Bible, a seasoned pastor, and a wise counselor, Steve has penned one of the most unique and helpful books I’ve read in a long time. His creative style and conversational tone, presented through a small-group setting, engage the reader and make vital biblical teaching come alive in a winsome and life-transforming way. I commend this book with enthusiasm.”

Paul Tautges, senior pastor, Cornerstone Community Church, Mayfield Heights, OH; author, *Anxiety: Knowing God’s Peace*

“With so much confusion about identity, Steve helps us to see this is an issue of faith. Will we believe what God says about us or the ever-changing narrative of our feelings and our culture? This 31-day resource keeps you face-to-face with God’s truthful declarations about you so that you may see the person you really are.”

T. Dale Johnson, Jr, PhD, executive director, Association of Certified Biblical Counselors; associate professor of biblical counseling, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO

*DO YOU
BELIEVE
WHAT*

*GOD SAYS
ABOUT
YOU?*

STEPHEN VIARS



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

All Scripture quotations are taken from the (NASB®) New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.lockman.org.


Cover design by Studio Gearbox

Cover photo © Linefab Portfolio / Shutterstock

Interior design by KUHN Design Group

For bulk, special sales, or ministry purchases, please call 1-800-547-8979.

Email: Customerservice@hhpbooks.com

 is a federally registered trademark of the Hawkins Children's LLC. Harvest House Publishers, Inc., is the exclusive licensee of the trademark.

Do You Believe What God Says About You?

Copyright © 2022 by Stephen Viars

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97408

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

ISBN 978-0-7369-8442-3 (pbk)

ISBN 978-0-7369-8443-0 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021937929

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 / BP / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To my mother Wanda,
who helped me to shape my identity
by regularly pointing me to Christ and his Word.*

Contents

INTRODUCTION: Your Identity Is a Powerful Part of Your Story . . .	9
CHAPTER 1—You Are Created	15
CHAPTER 2—You Have a God-Created Purpose	21
CHAPTER 3—You Are Fallen	27
CHAPTER 4—You Are Loved	33
CHAPTER 5—You Are Redeemed	39
CHAPTER 6—You Are Adopted	45
CHAPTER 7—You Are Forgiven	51
CHAPTER 8—You Are United with Christ	57
CHAPTER 9—You Are Righteous	63
CHAPTER 10—You Are Indwelled	69
CHAPTER 11—You Are a Worshipper	75
CHAPTER 12—You Are a Sinner	81
CHAPTER 13—You Are a Sufferer	87
CHAPTER 14—You Are a Believer	95
CHAPTER 15—You Are a Thinker	101
CHAPTER 16—You Long Deeply	107
CHAPTER 17—You Are Volitional	113
CHAPTER 18—You Are Emotional	119
CHAPTER 19—You Are an Actor	125
CHAPTER 20—You Are a Speaker	131

CHAPTER 21—You Are Prayerful	137
CHAPTER 22—You Are Blessed	143
CHAPTER 23—You Are Growing	149
CHAPTER 24—You Are a Lamb	155
CHAPTER 25—You Are an Ambassador	161
CHAPTER 26—You Are Victorious	167
CHAPTER 27—You Are Hopeful	173
CHAPTER 28—You Are a Soldier	177
CHAPTER 29—You Are a Student	183
CHAPTER 30—You Are Going Home	189
CHAPTER 31—What Do You Believe?	195
Bibliography	201
Notes	203



INTRODUCTION

Your Identity Is a Powerful Part of Your Story

I have had the privilege of serving as a pastor at the same church for more than thirty years. We teach a class at each of our campuses called *Intro to Faith*. It's a prerequisite for anyone desiring membership in our congregation, but more importantly, it provides a comfortable environment for people to pose any questions they have about the Bible, Christianity, or our church's beliefs.

To help our class members get to know one another better, we go around the first night and ask everyone to tell us their name and one important fact about themselves. I'm always fascinated by what people choose to say. Usually I hear several people talk about how recently they moved to town. Others share their occupation or champion their favorite sports team. I almost always have a few people tell me about their cats, and because it is our first night together, I do my best to smile and nod affirmatively.

One night, an eleven-year-old African-American girl walked in with two of her friends. Normally the class is for adults, but we make it clear that anyone is welcome. When this young girl's turn came to introduce herself, she unwaveringly said, "My name is Sharia, and Pastor Joey is teaching me to be a follower of Jesus."

I wish you could have observed the looks on the faces of everyone else in the class. This young girl's pointed answer melted our hearts. She fearlessly nailed it in a roomful of people far older than herself. In an economy of words, she gave us a powerful answer to the question, *Who are you?* Her response rolled off her lips so naturally and comfortably because that is the way she thinks about herself. She's learning to become a follower of Jesus, and that self-image impacts the way she chooses to view her life and the people around her. Even an eleven-year-old can choose to believe what God says about her.

You, too, have a running list of answers to that question playing in the background of your mind every day. *Who are you?*

It's there when you wake up in the morning. The answer is confirmed or challenged when you take your first look in the mirror. You carry your self-image around your house, your community, your workplace, and your church. That's one of the primary reasons you talk frequently, or do not talk at all. Your self-image goes a long way toward explaining why you are happy, or angry, or worried, or talkative, or shy, or hundreds of other behaviors and attitudes we could mention.

The plot thickens as you interact with the world around you. There's a steady stream of people, businesses, and institutions that want to tell you how to think about yourself. You need to be thinner. You're the most important person in the room. You're so beautiful. You need to work harder. You're dumb. You're a victim. You don't measure up. You deserve a new car. Often these analyses are filled with lies or half-truths that can impact your heart and life in all sorts of negative ways.

When was the last time you slowed down long enough to evaluate the way you've answered the question *Who are you?* Have you ever done that? What if you are carrying around an entire cluster of thoughts about yourself that are simply untrue? How damaging and demoralizing would that be? And how does your answer compare to what God says about *you*?

GOD'S WORD TO THE RESCUE

The Bible has an amazing number of ways to help you answer that question. Sometimes the Lord says it straight on with statements like, "You are _____." More often however, our heavenly Father gives metaphors or word pictures because he wants us to understand, remember, marvel over, and enjoy how our relationship with him impacts who we are.

The purpose of this book is to help you, or perhaps you and a select group of friends, to develop a biblical view of self. I hope to arm and challenge you with thirty-one crisp answers to help you think about yourself in a way that's consistent with what the God of heaven affirms to be true. Why thirty-one? I think it is helpful for us to set aside a full month to focus on this all-important aspect of our story. The chapters are purposely brief because I understand that we're all busy people.

I'm assuming you have already decided to become a follower of Jesus Christ. This material is written for those who are Christians. If that is not yet true of you, this book might be helpful as you contemplate the identity that is available to you in and through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Welcome to the journey.

I also hope that as you read this book, you feel like you are having a comfortable conversation with someone who cares about your story. My training is in pastoral ministry and biblical counseling, and I have the privilege of spending hours each week talking to people. I have discovered over the years that the issue of self-image is a critical piece in the puzzle of growing closer to the Lord. It also impacts the way you relate to the people God has placed around you. Having a correct set of answers to the question *Who are you?* is vital to loving God and people well.

MEET OUR FELLOW TRAVELERS

I hope you don't mind, but I've invited a few others to join us in our conversation. Often it helps, when trying to practically apply a concept from God's Word, to think about how the principle would impact

someone else's life. That's why the Bible is filled with narratives and stories. The Lord teaches us in living technicolor as we observe truths lived out in real-life examples in Scripture.

As we contemplate the Bible's various answers to our core question, we'll test-drive them in the stories of our newfound friends. Becoming skilled in the art of biblical application will serve you well on this journey.

First, please say hello to Andy. He's a hard-working employee at the local factory. His clothes are worn; his handshake is firm. But Andy struggles with anger—a lot. He often becomes sinfully angry at work, at home, at the ball field, and even at church. Andy carries a low-grade anger in his soul all day long. However, he carries something else—a running list of answers to the question *Who are you?* I wonder what those answers are. I wonder where they came from. I wonder if they are true. I wonder if they match what God would say.

Sitting next to Andy is Dee. She is a young Hispanic mother with two energy-filled children at home. Dee has gained weight since giving birth, and she doesn't like what she sees in the mirror. She is also tired all the time as she runs from changing diapers to making meals to satisfying her husband's seemingly unreasonable demands. Dee feels depressed, and though her doctor has prescribed an antidepressant for her, the feelings persist. Does the way Dee thinks about herself have any bearing on the way she feels? Does her heart have anything to do with her story?

Next comes Curt. Do you have any questions about what might be wrong in the world? Curt will happily tell you because he complains about everything. He can tell you about the shortcomings of the government. He can detail the failures of his wife, his children, his boss, his pastor, and the officers at the local police department. Generally, less than sixty seconds go by between the moment Curt opens his eyes in the morning and his first complaint comes spewing forth. In fact, Curt is a complaining machine. He has a well-defined way of thinking about himself. Not surprisingly, it's practically all jaded or down-right incorrect.

Then there's Faye. Sweet Faye. She was trained in engineering and worked hard at a local company for forty years before retiring recently. Faye has a problem she rarely discusses with anyone. She is gripped with fear. Her engineering background has not prepared her for all the uncertainties that come at this stage of life. She cannot fix all her health problems. There's no spreadsheet capable of solving the tensions she has with her daughter-in-law, who refuses to let Faye see her grandchildren. Faye is afraid of the people who live in her deteriorating neighborhood and afraid of noises in the night. She barely recognizes the woman she sees in the mirror anymore. *Who am I?*, she asks. Good question. What would God say, and does Faye believe him?

Take a deep breath and say hello to Pete. What a piece of work. Pete is a college athlete who loves to talk about his accomplishments. His pride is thick and plentiful. He knows he's the most handsome person in the group, and the fastest, strongest, and the one with the most trophies on his living room mantle. If you don't know it yet, you will, because Pete loves to drone on about himself. However, he's terribly lonely because others do not seem nearly as interested in discussing Pete's wonderfulness as he does. There's not much doubt about what Pete thinks of himself. The question is, can he ever change?

Then there's Walt. You'll like Walt. He's a young African-American man who worked his way through college and just passed his CPA exam. Now he's an accountant at a solid firm and has a bright future. Three cheers for a fine young man like this. But wait a minute. Walt's heart is filled with worry. What if he can't measure up? What if he makes a mistake? What if he misses a house payment? What if his girlfriend is unfaithful? What if his company fails? His mind is crammed with worry. Who is Walt? What would Walt say? More importantly, what would Walt's God say?

There's one more chair in the circle. It's comfortable with soft leather and an ideal amount of padding. Amazingly, your favorite beverage is already on the adjoining table along with your Bible, a pen, and your well-worn notebook. Please have a seat because *you* have an important story as well. In fact, yours might help Walt, while Faye's might help

yours. We might even find a way to help proud Pete, although have you noticed? He's getting on our nerves already.

You have an answer to the question *Who are you?* In fact, you have a lot of answers. The question we need to answer over the next thirty-one days is this: *How does God want your answers to change?* Let's get started on the task of aligning our self-image with God's sufficient and relevant Word.



CHAPTER 1

You Are Created

The Bible wastes no time answering the question before us. In an economy of words, God explains how he created the heavens and the earth. The descriptions are crisp and riveting:

- The earth was formless and void.
- Then God said, “Let there be light.”
- Let the earth spout vegetation.
- Let the waters team with living creatures.

No wonder the psalmist would later proclaim, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1). Look to the sky on a starry night and contemplate the power and majesty of our creator God.

Then Genesis 1 makes a startling revelation—next, God created human beings. Imagine what that day would have been like.

God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the

earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Genesis 1:26-27).

ARE YOU KIDDING ME?

The Lord has blessed my wife and me with four grandsons. Our three-year-old Jack (whom his parents have affectionately nicknamed Jacknado) and I love playing a game with one another while talking on FaceTime. I’ll make a statement, and he’ll say, “Are you kidding me, Papa?” Next, he’ll make a statement, and I’ll respond in kind. Then we break out in giggles as if we’re the funniest people on earth.

Contemplating the implications of Genesis 1:26-27 is an “Are you kidding me?” moment for sure. However, the joy is not because of Grandpa’s silliness—it’s the delicious notion that an essential aspect of our identity is that we were purposely and personally created by God himself.

Walt, I wonder if that could impact the way you think about the situations that worry you? Pete, should this truth affect the way you talk about your accomplishments? Faye, if God created you, is he also powerful enough to provide help that will replace your fears with calm and confidence?

IN GOD’S IMAGE

In the ancient world, kings established images of themselves as a powerful reminder to everyone of their presence and position. Amazingly, the Lord created human beings to be visible representations of him. We were given a position of dominion over other aspects of creation so that we could joyfully serve and submit to our rightful king and, in so doing, give others a better understanding of his character.

Christ affirmed that truth in a marvelous sermon he preached on a mountainside: “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven”

(Matthew 5:16). He did not say that to the rocks, or the trees, or the animals in the vicinity. He said it to human beings because we are uniquely created in his image.

David wrote a song about this astounding truth. This may have been written one night as he watched over his flock of sheep:

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8:3-9).

David was wise to contemplate these ideas. They helped him understand his position in God's plan. We have been crowned "with glory and majesty" because of the potential we have to represent our God well.

While our culture might think that Dee's care for her children is insignificant, the Bible tells a far different story of what her faithful and sacrificial love represents. When Walt performs his accounting tasks with integrity and truthfulness, he is giving others a right opinion of his God. Both Dee and Walt are living out the importance and dignity of their created purpose.

WE SHOULD PRAISE HIM

This truth should motivate us to thank and honor our God, who created us in this fashion. That even includes all our quirks and idiosyncrasies because the Lord knows about every one of them. In another Psalm, David explained:

You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my
 mother's womb.
 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and
 wonderfully made;
 Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very
 well.
 My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in
 secret,
and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;
 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in your
 book were all written.
 The days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was
 not one of them.
 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!
 How vast is the sum of them!
 If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand.
 When I awake, I am still with You (Psalm 139:13-18).

David's response to these magnificent truths was to give thanks to God. Our position in the Lord's created order is because of his power, not ours. The result of reflecting on how God views us should be amazement, not pride. The fact that God formed us individually in our mother's womb and then gave us the possibility and responsibility to represent him on his earth is a jaw-dropping reality. The next time you look in the mirror, pause and consider this astounding reality: You are created by God.

WITH THE ABILITY TO WORSHIP

The Bible's final book echoes this same theme.

Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created (Revelation 4:11).

Every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them,

I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever” (Revelation 5:13).

Curt should think about this as he complains with the tongue God created. So should Andy as he recalls the many times he has exercised his God-given emotions by venting and exploding on the people around him. Is this why God created them? Are they worshipping their Creator with such words and actions? Remembering their identity calls them to something far better. Will they choose to believe what God says about them?

The good news is that God stands ready to help us change. He is remaking us in the image of his Son (Romans 8:28-29), the one who enables us to progressively live more consistently with the purpose for which we were made. Rejoice that an essential aspect of your identity is that you are created by the God of heaven and earth!

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. How should the fact that you are created impact the way you think and live each day?
2. If this concept of being created by God had a more prominent place in your identity, what would be different in your life, your thinking, your relationships?
3. Which of the individuals in our study are most like you? Explain your answer.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Note: I have designed these questions so either individuals or groups can respond to them.

1. What are some of the characteristics of men and women who view themselves through the lens of being created in God's image?
2. Work together to find applications of this biblical truth of being created as it relates to Andy, Dee, Curt, Faye, Pete, and Walt. How should this truth affect their thoughts and desires? How should it affect their words and actions?
3. What are some ways this truth could impact you in a practical way? If you are in a group, consider asking for accountability as you move forward together.