

TRUE IDENTITY

April 2024

DAY 1 A LETTER to the CHURCH

Scripture: [Ephesians 1:1-23](#); [2:1-22](#)

Reflection: From a Roman prison, Paul wrote a letter to the churches around Ephesus, a city in southwestern Asia Minor. In this letter are many key themes found in Paul's other writings, namely the purpose, identity, and calling of the Church. Notice that Paul's introduction to the letter addresses it as "to God's holy people" (NIV). This letter was written to all of the followers of Jesus who are trying to live holy lives, meaningful lives, fruitful and God-honoring lives. Paul writes to all of them, and he writes to all of us who are trying to live Jesus-centered lives in the 21st century. And that means Paul writes to you. You are one of those saints! Paul's words of wisdom, encouragement, and challenge are for all the saints in Christ Jesus, in all places, at all times.

As you read Ephesians chapters 1 and 2 today, look for repeated words and phrases. Look for Paul's long sentences (they were even longer in Greek!) and try not to stop when you see those little verse numbers. Look for the Trinity as you read. Look for descriptions of Jesus- His person and His work. You may need to read both chapters several times, and that's okay! Take your time! Let these words wash over you in the morning, afternoon, and evening.

- Maybe read it once on your phone.
- Next time, grab a journal and your physical Bible.
- Use at least two different translations.
- Try listening while you walk, drive, or eat lunch.

Paul's original audience would have listened to it being read, probably more than once over multiple days. Put yourself in their shoes and sink into his words.

Pause to Pray: The psalmist prayed, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law." (Psalm 119:18). Ask God to open your eyes to His wonderful truth found in Ephesians 1-2.

Take a Next Step: Journal your honest response to this prompt: What are eight identity markers that describe you? (If you get stuck, start here: what you do, your appearance, who you love, where you're from, personality)

Find this plan and more by downloading the YouVersion Bible app and searching for "whoisgrace."

DAY 2 BLESSINGS UPON BLESSINGS

Scripture: [Ephesians 1:1-14](#)

Reflection: Verses 3-14 are one long sentence in Greek. Wow! Try to say it all out loud without breathing! Paul captured the glorious work of God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which are the many blessings poured out on every Christian as they live and work each day. Underline or write down all the many blessings found here. What has He done for you? What have you received from Him?

Ask Yourself:

- How do these many blessings reveal the character of God?
- What do these many blessings mean for my identity?

Pause to Pray: Use what you learned about the person and work of the Trinity and pray that back to God today. Praise Him and thank Him for blessings upon blessings...

Take a Next Step: Look at your journal responses from yesterday's prompt. How do the blessings upon blessings from the Lord give you a different perspective on your answers? Will you edit or add to your list of identity markers?

DAY 3 *THAT YOU MAY KNOW...*

Scripture: [Ephesians 1:15-23](#)

Reflection: Paul shifts to a prayer of thanksgiving for what God has done in pouring out blessings upon blessings in the Church, and Paul prays that all of those blessings will be fully realized in every single believer's life. *"That you may know..."* are Paul's words in verse 18. Follow Paul's thought (another long sentence!) and identify the three blessings that he longs for them to know and understand (2 in verse 18 and 1 in verse 19).

In verses 22-23, Paul emphasizes Christ's supremacy over everything, including the church. And he makes an interesting statement- that Christ fills all, but that the church is also His fullness. Christ is the head of the church. The Church is his body. Each individual son and daughter make up the larger whole. Altogether, we fill the whole world with His presence and His light. The Church reflects Christ's work and His image to the world. In other letters, Paul calls the church the "ambassadors" of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). Jesus commissioned his followers in Matthew 28:18-20,

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

He fills us. We are His fullness, His body. And we fill the world with His presence.

Ask Yourself:

- What has Paul taught me about Christ in Ephesians 1?
- What am I learning about my identity and purpose?

Pause to Pray: Ask God to fill you with knowledge and understanding so *"that you may know"* who you are called to be and what you are called to do.

Take a Next Step: In his book, *The Vertical Self*, Mark Sayers describes the horizontal self as formed by looking outside and within yourself. The vertical self is formed by looking to God the Father, your Creator, and His thoughts about you. The vertical self is who you want to be! Return to your journal and reflect on your identity markers. Are you defining yourself by the horizontal or the vertical?

DAY 4 DEATH TO LIFE

Scripture: [Ephesians 2:1-10](#)

Reflection: After reading these ten verses, close your eyes and listen to them. Picture a dead man or woman walking in sin. Picture the incredible transformation of coming alive in Christ. The mercy and love of God are astonishingly good news! For we were all dead persons walking, but now we are alive. What does it mean to be alive? Well, start looking for the answers in verses 8-10. Remember that Paul writes to all of God's people. When he writes "you" he is saying "all of you." You are not excluded but included. You are not forgotten or left out. Like the men and women on your right and left, God brings life, identity, and purpose to your life.

Ask Yourself:

- What does it mean for my identity that I am created by God?
- What does it mean for my identity and calling that He has given me life?
- What does it mean for my calling that He has prepared good works for me?

Pause to Pray: Praise God, for whoever you once were, you are no more. Praise Him for the life He has given you. Ask Him to open your eyes to see the good works He has prepared for you.

Take a Next Step: Once again, pull out your journal. How do today's truths further inform your identity (your vertical self)? Is a picture of your life and identity beginning to form from God's word in Ephesians and your reflections? Consider drafting a sketch, poem, or essay, inviting God to pull your thoughts together.

DAY 5 KILLING HOSTILITY

Scripture: [Ephesians 2:11-22](#)

Reflection: Paul pivots in this fascinating little section of Ephesians to remind everyone in his audience that no matter who they are (Gentile or Jew), there is no longer any barrier dividing them. Literally! In Jerusalem, only Jewish visitors to the Temple could enter the inner courtyard. There was literally a wall or railing that kept Gentiles confined to an outer area. However, through the work of Jesus, that barrier is destroyed, and Jew and Gentile are now one, both members of the Church, the body of Christ.

Christ came to kill the hostility that separated men and women from God and one another. Christ came to reconcile, restore, and bring peace.

Ask Yourself:

- Where is there hostility in my relationships with other people?
- Do I sense any barrier in my relationship with God?
- Am I hostile toward myself in any way? Do past hurts mar my self-perception?
- How have these hostilities led me to develop a horizontal rather than a vertical self?

Pause to Pray: *Thank you, Jesus, for bringing peace and ending hostility. You made a way to be in a relationship with God and with one another. Remove any shame, anger, or pride from my heart so that I might live in peace and share your peace with others... Amen.*

Take a Next Step: What is one thing you can do to begin removing a barrier between yourself and someone in your life?

*Note: Healthy boundaries are important, especially if you have experienced codependency or suffered from abuse of any kind. Professional and/or pastoral counseling is the best next step when you are dealing with unhealthy relationships.

DAY 6 WHO AM I?

Scripture: [Ephesians 1:1-23](#); [2:1-22](#)

Reflection: Too often, we go looking for ourselves in a store, in a mirror, in a self-help book, in a like-minded group, or the affirmation of someone else. Over the last five days, you have been looking for yourself in God's Word. And I hope you found some good stuff! But most importantly, I hope that you saw Jesus Christ. The source and center of your identity and calling has always been and will always be rooted in Him. The more you look for Him, the more you discover yourself as He made you.

From *Gay Girl, Good God* by Jackie Hill Perry:

"It is the identity that we ascribe to God out of doubt or faith in his Scriptures that will determine the identity we will give ourselves and ultimately the life we inevitably live. If he is the Creator, then we are created. If he is Master, then we are servants. If he is love, then we are loved. If he is omnipotent, then we are not as powerful as we think. If he is omniscient, then there is nowhere to hide. If he cannot lie, then his promises are all true. It is faith in the truths of God's character that has the power to completely revolutionize how our lives are lived out."
(p.160)

Ask Yourself: Return to your journal again and start a new entry.

-WHO IS JESUS?

-WHAT HAS JESUS DONE FOR ME?

-What have I learned about who I am created to be (vertical self)?

Pause to Pray: *I adore you, Jesus! You are... Thank you, Jesus! You have done so much for me... Lead me... Give me understanding... Open my eyes to see clearly... Strengthen and embolden me to live for you... Amen.*

Take a Next Step: How does this picture of Jesus compel you to live differently today?

DAY 7 I AM a CITIZEN of GOD'S KINGDOM

Scripture: [Mark 12:13-17](#); [Philippians 3:18-21](#); [Revelation 7:9-10](#)

Reflection: Now that you have established a foundation for your identity found in Ephesians 1-2, we'll spend the rest of this study digging beneath the surface of some prevailing identity markers of our day.

One of the catchphrases of our modern time is "identity politics." Political positions seem to be exclusively based on identity issues such as gender, race, or sexual orientation. But there is a much more sinister problem, and that is when politics becomes your identity. The political polarization of the world

is evident. But polarization is just one problem. The greater issue is the morphing of politics into a religion. For many, politics isn't more important than their religion; politics has become their religion.

How do you know if politics has become your religion? You have become so entangled with your political ideology that if someone pushes back on your politics, they are pushing back on the core of who you are. All your beliefs have become enmeshed, so to critique a political leader is to critique your party. And to critique your party is to critique your values, maybe even how you read the Bible and your conception of God. The critique hits you at your core, your deepest center, your identity.

But the truth is that as a Christian, you are a citizen of a different Kingdom that is not defined by political parties or borders.

In Mark 12, kingdoms collide when the religious leaders lay a trap for Jesus. It appears that if Jesus responds either yes or no, he will be in trouble with someone. But Jesus doesn't take sides and responds with the wisdom of the Spirit of God.

Ask Yourself:

- How is Jesus' response a foundational statement for a Christian view of politics and religion?
- If all Christians are citizens of God's Kingdom, how does that impact how we treat one another, regardless of political opinions or nationality?
- Reflecting on Revelation 7:9-10, what is God's vision for all humanity, united in His Kingdom?

Pause to Pray: *Lord, I belong to you. Teach me to live as a citizen of your Kingdom...*

Take a Next Step: Go back to your journal- did politics find its way onto your list of identity markers? In what practical way can you live as a citizen of God's Kingdom when you find yourself in a conversation about politics?

DAY 8 I AM a CITIZEN of MY COMMUNITY

Scripture: [Jeremiah 29:4-7](#); [Mark 12:28-31](#); [Ephesians 2:14-21](#)

Reflection: In Jeremiah 29, the people of God, exiled in a foreign land, are commanded to seek the peace and well-being of the city where they now live. Even in exile, God hasn't abandoned them. Instead, He has given them purpose in the present and hope for the future. It's like God is saying, "I will rescue you from exile, but in the meantime, be good neighbors!"

What does it mean to love your neighbor? It means wanting your neighbors to have the same opportunities, freedoms, and protections you enjoy — even when those neighbors are very different from you. This means when you step in the voting booth, you're not simply asking which candidate will do right by you, but which will do right by your neighbor.

Living in peace and loving your neighbors also means rejecting fear. Fear has become the currency of our political process and all news surrounding politics. We must declare that while fear is natural and human, even understandable, this is a device of our spiritual enemy and is to be rejected. The world will prey on our fear, but our Lord told us time and time again — Fear not! The love of God is the defining dimension of who we are as people of faith, and His love is our core identity as children of God and

citizens of his kingdom. This great love of God casts out our fear, and it is the transformative power that can be channeled through the church to heal our country.

Ask Yourself:

- What things stir up my worries and fears?
- How have I experienced the love of God through people?
- Who are the good neighbors in my life?

Pause to Pray: *Lord, I believe that my place in this neighborhood at this time is not an accident. No matter where your people are, we belong to You, and You have good plans for us. Open my eyes to see my neighbors. Open my heart to love my neighbors. Open my hands and show me how to be a good neighbor...*

Take a Next Step: How can you show a little love to a neighbor today?

DAY 9 GOD'S PLAN FOR RACE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Scripture: [Genesis 1:26-27](#); [Genesis 12:1-3](#); [Joel 2:28-32](#)

Reflection: Now, let's turn our attention to Race and identity. From the beginning, God gives value to all people because they are made in his image. Even when God shows a preference for one family, which grows into a nation and race, his goal is still that all nations would be blessed through them. Throughout the Old Testament, it can be hard to keep this in view because of the effect of sin on how the Jewish people interact with those around them. They fail at living out the calling of God to bless all nations. Yet, God still promises through the prophets that this is his heart: to see everyone, in all their uniqueness, come to worship Him as Creator and Lord.

Like the Israelites, Christians have failed in this, and we still have so much to learn about God's heart for the nations. We all have blind spots from our culture, education, upbringing, etc., about what it looks like to engage with those who are different from us. But unlike the people in the Old Testament, we have the Holy Spirit in us to help us to see those blind spots. As we learn to know the value and worth of all people, made in God's image, we can "bless the nations" by honoring and building up those who are different than us.

Ask Yourself:

- What have I learned from God's Word, the Church, and others about my blind spots?
- Who could help me continue learning and growing, helping open my eyes and heart?

Pause to Pray: *Lord Jesus, help me see how I fall short of viewing others as you view them. Reveal the blind spots I have and help me address them...*

Take a Next Step: Identify a resource that will help you learn and grow- a person in your life, a book, a podcast, etc. *Be the Bridge* by Latasha Morrison is a great book to get you started.

DAY 10 GOD'S PLAN FOR RACE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Scripture: [Mark 11:17](#); [Acts 2:1-12](#); [Galatians 3:26-28](#); [Revelation 7:9-10](#); [Revelation 21:23-26](#)

Reflection: As we look to the New Testament, Jesus affirms God's plan in the Old Testament. While his mission was primarily to the Jews, He regularly healed and invited those who were Gentiles (every other race) to come to Him. He wants all to know Him as Lord and Savior, and his charge in Matthew 28:19 was to send the disciples to *all nations*. When Peter and the apostles begin preaching the good news of Jesus in every language, this power of the Holy Spirit is confirmation that all nations are welcomed into the family of God. Paul reminds Christians in Galatians that our identity in Christ is our primary identity, which crosses barriers, bridges divides, and brings us into unity with one another. Race and ethnicity are still essential parts of understanding the beauty and complexity of God, but they are united in Christ. And we look forward to the new heaven and new earth when every man, woman, and child from every time and place gathers to worship God our Father! Each race, ethnicity, and person He has created finds worth, value, and family in God's perfect kingdom!

As mentioned yesterday, it can often take work for us to view ourselves and others as having value in God's future kingdom. As we address our blind spots and strive to work together under the uniting identity of being Christ followers, we can see a glimpse of the future kingdom here and now. We can approach others with compassion, humility, grace, honor, and love, for God desires that all people come into his family.

Ask Yourself:

- Reread Revelation 7:9-10. What might a gathering of all nations look like? Sound like?
- How is this picture different than what you see in your neighborhood, workplace, or Sunday services?

Pause to Pray: *Lord, Help me be a small part of bringing all nations to worship you. Show me the next steps to take where I live, work, study, and play...*

Take a Next Step: How can you take a step to build a genuine friendship with someone from a different ethnicity? Start with an invitation to share a cup of coffee or tea so that you can get to know one another.

DAY 11 SEXUALITY

Scripture: [Genesis 2:18-25](#); [Matthew 19:4-6](#); [Romans 8:1-2](#); [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:3-8](#)

Reflection: As we turn our view to how our true identity impacts our view on sexuality, we want first to make sure that you know that you are dearly loved and that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1-2). This plan does not attempt to cover all things related to sexuality. Think of this as a first step in exploring and understanding how our identity in Christ relates to our sexuality.

The American culture emphasizes that happiness is based on how you feel and that we each need to find our own identity within ourselves (remember the horizontal identity on day 3). This impacts the sexuality and identity conversation in two ways.

First, we must consider the value of our bodies and gender association. God created our bodies as male and female in his image. Both genders have value in being expressions of who God is, and we all have value in our gender. A result of the fall is the brokenness in our acceptance of our bodies and the deep anguish some people feel about being in the wrong body. Jesus wants to meet people in that struggle and help restore their embodied identity by following him. As Christians, we must love all people well,

including people struggling with their gender identity. And we must point people to Jesus, for He is the one who loves us best and from whom we learn to love ourselves as He made us.

Second- the way we view sex. American culture glorifies sex, seeing it primarily as a way to fulfill our physical desires. Since we find our identity within ourselves, and we should do what makes us happy, then expressing our sexual identity however we desire sounds right, whether that be through viewing pornography, sex before marriage, homosexuality, or adultery. Our identity as Christians is so much more than our sexuality! Following Jesus means surrendering our whole self to His ways. Jesus wants us to follow him, not our desires.

1 Corinthians lists several sins that will not be a part of the kingdom of God. Among them are sexual immorality and homosexuality, yes, but there is also greed, slander, drunks, and thieves. Every person in the world is included in that list. There is no sin that is bigger or more important than another. All of them need us to seek God's forgiveness and deny our desires for God's desires. The historical Biblical teaching is that sex is reserved for marriage between one man and one woman. Anything else, viewing pornography, sex before marriage, homosexuality, or adultery, all fall short of God's good plan for sex. He wants to protect us from sin and provide for us to experience the fullness of his design by creating these boundaries for sex.

Christians must live counter-culturally and hold our identity as children of God as more important than our sexuality. It's not easy, and it takes intentionality and care, but Jesus will be with you and walk you through it all.

Ask Yourself:

-If my primary identity is hidden in Christ, what sin do I need to repent of- sexual, idolatry, greed, selfishness, etc.?

Pause to Pray: *Lord Jesus, help me to see my identity in Christ as better than my sexuality. Help me to love others well who may be struggling with their sexuality.*

Take a Next Step: Commit to learning more about the historical Biblical teaching about sexuality by listening to a podcast, reading a book, or exploring the resources provided by the Center for Faith, Sexuality, and Gender.

DAY 12 ME and YOU

Scripture: [Ephesians 1:1-23](#); [2:1-22](#)

Reflection: Read or listen to Ephesians 1 and 2. What jumps out to you? Hebrews 4:12 tells us that God's word is alive and active. It is like a sharp sword penetrating the deepest parts of us, soul and spirit, thoughts and attitudes. How has God's word pierced you during this reading plan? Where have you been challenged, convicted, frustrated, or encouraged? God's Word will do all that and more if you approach it humbly and with a teachable spirit.

Ask Yourself: Return to your journal

-What are eight identity markers that describe you?

-How have your answers changed as a result of your time in God's word?

-How will you live what you have learned?

Pause to Pray: *I adore you, Jesus! You are... Thank you, Jesus! You have done so much for me... Lead me... Give me understanding... Open my eyes to see clearly... Strengthen and embolden me to live for you... Help me to see others the way you see them and to love them well... Amen.*

Take a Next Step: We learn best and find accountability for living out our learning when we engage in good discussion with a trusted mentor or friend. Make a plan to further your learning through reflection and conversation- who will you invite?

Find more resources on YouVersion when you search “whoisgrace” and make Grace Church “my church.”