

Week 5 (Feb 9 + 11)

“A Place Where You Belong”

Of all the subjects we discuss in this series, “identity” might be the most abstract. For most of human history, people haven’t spent a lot of time wondering who they are. If you don’t know who you are, we tend to call that a crisis. Yet in our culture, we give people lots of freedom to find themselves, define themselves, adapt and even change their identity. Things that used to give us identity—family, geography, occupation—we tend to see as optional. We decide those things. And what’s more, we tell them who we are, based on our inner desires.

There’s a lot of good that comes from being able to choose. Life can be unnecessarily hard when someone else chooses who you marry, or when your only option for work is whatever your dad does. But we also do a lot of damage when we leave everything up to the individual. In one heartbreaking example, there are parents out there now trying to raise their kids without assuming a gender identity. They may have given birth to a boy, but they can’t call him “son.” They are waiting for him to tell them whether he’s actually a boy or a girl based on his inner feelings. In the process, they put incredible pressure on the person they should be nurturing.

That’s a rare, extreme example, but that same burden faces all of us in many areas of life. The problem is no matter how many movies tell us to look inside to find out who we are, no matter how many songs inspire us to make ourselves, chase our dreams, or let go of people’s expectations, we find we can’t. When we look inside, we find our desires are often conflicting, selfish, and elusive. What’s more, they change over time.

And even in this modern, secular approach, we still need outside validation. While the world promises freedom from the rules, it has actually just changed the rules. You can’t simply declare who you are, you have to be seen and accepted by your peers. Quite often you have to impress and achieve in order to belong in your chosen space.

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If you're feeling this pressure, there's good news. God sees you. God made you who you are. God gives you an identity as His creation and offers you a greater identity by adoption. You have a chance to be His son. Your identity isn't found looking outward or inward but upward. And He offers a family where anyone can belong, no matter how different they might otherwise be.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

What aspects of your identity are most important to you?

Have you ever gone through a season of trying to figure out who you are? What did that look like?

What does it mean to receive an identity from God? How do you live out of that identity?

Where are you tempted to seek validation or affirmation in the wrong places?

How can you be a light to others, to help them navigate a confusing DIY ("do identity yourself") culture?

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NOTES FROM PERSONAL REFLECTION + GROUP DISCUSSION