

IDENTITY:

STORY tells our history – our past.

IDENTITY describes our present.

In the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity. Erik Erikson

But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” And he said, “Who told you that you were naked?” Genesis 3:9-11a

A powerful moment in our life journey is when we look in the mirror and recognize an authentic representation of the person looking back. A healthy IDENTITY starts here. I am who I know myself to be.

When I can tell myself who I am, I can better understand who others think I am. We realize we are not just the sum of our history.

Jesus had a clear sense of IDENTITY. Read the “I ams” Jesus said he knew himself to be. The Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Gate of the Sheepfold, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection, and the Life, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and the True Vine.

In Mark 4, Jesus had a significant IDENTITY test. He had fasted and prayed in the desert for 40 days. Then the devil came to him and asked (or sneered), *Who do you think you are? If you are the son of God, make bread from stones, leap off this wall, and possess all the lands. All you have to do is change your identity from the son of man to the son of hell.*

No one else in recorded history had choices as dramatic as these, yet if we don't know who we are, how can we confidently declare who and whose we are? For many, we don't know our authentic STORY that concludes with ... *and because of knowing where I've been—STORY, this is who I am in Christ and in me--IDENTITY.* And yet. We don't really know our true and full Identity until we know Christ, who gives us the Holy Spirit, who then reveals Christ in us. It is a forward moving, backward turning circle. Understand this process of self-awareness through knowing Christ and spiritual growth is underway.

When it comes to STORY, we only know the STORY we've told ourselves, and the conclusions form our IDENTITY. Consequently, how easily our authentic IDENTITY becomes deformed or even false. Throughout our lifetime, many voices have told us who we are—IDENTITY-- because of what we've done--STORY. Some is true. Some are devastatingly wrong

because the lens and filters through which others saw us were deformed or obscured by their own deformed IDENTITY. Add the filters and lenses we've used to misshape and falsify who we think we know ourselves to be. The result is, most often, a shrunken and deformed version. Usually, our parents gave us an overly positive or negative characterization. Our teasing and sometimes jealous friends were no more mature than we were. And through them, we formed a distorted view of our eccentricities. Big butt, large nose, bushy eyebrows, squeaky voice, skinny or fat body, awkwardness, book nerd, etc. What emerges into adulthood is possibly an IDENTITY bearing only a faint glimmer of truth.

Then, as we got older, employers rewarded certain behaviors and often punished expressions of our individuality. As we matured into our often distorted IDENTITY, we were influenced by what the media told us we should be and look like—and not be and not look like. Often, our IDENTITY became molded within the constraints of skin tone, culture, family prosperity, neighborhood, and gender.

Our stories may be uncomfortable to relive, yet we must own our stories. An authentic and healthy IDENTITY explains how our strengths have sustained us in our STORY and how we've used adversity and opportunity to create growth. By developing an authentic IDENTITY, we can tell how we have turned adversity into strengths and taken great moments of joy and turned them into gratitude.

We form an authentic IDENTITY by declaring who we are becoming.

We find the foundation of our IDENTITY in our self-esteem (the positive and negative values we associate with ourselves) and our sense of individuality (what we think makes us unique). An important question of life is, *who am I because of where I've been?* When we can explain who we are, our life begins to have dimension — depth, width, and substance, not just historical anecdotes. We also engage in a life-long process to own our IDENTITY in Christ and enlarge our STORY that says, *this is who I am in God's eyes, and this is who God is in my new eyes.*

This is basic and core. My identity in Christ is not defined by my past mistakes, my accomplishments, or the opinions of others, but by the unshakable truth of who He says I am. I am a new creation, redeemed by His grace and set free from the bondage of sin (2 Corinthians 5:17). I am chosen, holy, and dearly loved (Colossians 3:12), not because of anything I have done, but because of His great love for me. In Christ, I am no longer a slave to fear or condemnation, for I have been adopted into God's family as His beloved child (Romans 8:15). I am forgiven, made righteous through His sacrifice, and called to walk in the light of His truth (Ephesians 1:7, 1 Peter 2:9). My purpose is found in Him—to reflect His love, extend His grace, and live in the fullness of the abundant life He has promised (John 10:10). No matter what the world says, my identity is secure, for I am His, and He is mine.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

Clarifying IDENTITY

Without overthinking or thinking too long, quickly write down the words that come to mind.

I AM	I WAS

Go back to your storyline. For each significant moment, you wrote down, how did and how that moment shaped who you are today.

SIGNIFICANT EVENT	HOW IT SHAPED ME

You may suspect or clearly know God has uniquely shaped and formed you. But for what purposes? While we need others to complete our ministry—others with different gifts, talents, and abilities than you—God still intends you to uniquely express your humanity and spirituality to bless others while realizing you aren’t the whole gifted package.

Spiritual Gifts, Talents, and Abilities

As you review your IDENTITY, this is an excellent place to stop and take inventory of your unique equipping.

I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn't just a single part blown up into something huge. It's all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. If Foot said, "I'm not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don't belong to this body," would that make it so? If Ear said, "I'm not beautiful like Eye, transparent and expressive; I don't deserve a place on the head," would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it. I Corin. 12-14-18 (MSG)

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:10

What Are Spiritual Gifts or Giftings

There are many resources to take a spiritual gifts inventory. All are rooted in Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. The SHAPE program (go to **Freeshapetest.com**) at Saddleback Church is one of the more widely used. You can also download another printable version at Focusonthefamily.com.



It is commonly agreed that these gifts of talents, abilities, and capabilities make you unique. The gifts of generosity, service, encouragement, teaching, compassion, leadership, and speaking confidently about God's Word are reflected in your personality. These are your "strength gifts," and you are naturally inclined to find your best effort in these areas.

This is an important reminder. God intends for us to be able to function in all areas of ministry. Your gifted strengths are the areas of ministry that seem more effortless.

Also, remember the results are just a compilation of your answers or preferences. The best these assessments can do is point toward your ministering strengths. You've identified the ones you enjoy and find easiest to do. Once you discover your spiritual strengths or gifts, Google or Bing that strength and read more. List your ministering strengths from strongest to least. While Paul lists nine specific gifts, some interpret the list as examples rather than complete.

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