

# Student Workbook



WHAT DO  
YOU ALLOW  
TO DEFINE  
YOU?

# OVERCOMER

VIDEO-BASED 5-SESSION  
BIBLE STUDY

SESSION 1

# WHO ARE YOU?

*The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said:  
"The Lord is with you, valiant warrior."*

JUDGES 6:12

## DAY1

### WHO You ARE STARTS WITH WHERE YOU COME FROM

Create a list of people and priorities in your life that are important to you. Be as specific as you like, but in some cases a category will suffice. For example, you can record "My family" instead of listing each individual member.

Take inventory to make sure your list is complete, including items of even nominal importance.

Now the exercise becomes more challenging. Start marking entries off your list in order, from least to greatest importance. Which ones can you live without? Narrow your list to only two or three of your top priorities. Those indicate not only what's of great worth to you but also what's absolutely vital in making you who you are.

The old expression "You are what you eat" reminds you to make wise choices about healthful eating, but it holds little weight in creating an identity. A truer phrase is "You are what's important to you."

You define yourself by your values. The problem with that truth is the word *your*, which implies your own sovereignty despite your vast limitations as a mortal. Who are you to determine who you are? Even if you have that authority, where was it derived from? Scripture has the answer.

Read Genesis 1:26.

God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." GENESIS 1:26

What description of humanity's inherent nature and position did God offer in this verse?

God didn't wait to confer with the man to determine what his nature should or shouldn't include and what his calling or direction in life should be. God also created you to bear His image. Right from the beginning, before any of us were formed, God had a plan. For the couple in the garden, that included a definitive purpose.

Read Ephesians 2:10 and rewrite it in your own words.

These words by Paul follow a powerful description of salvation (see vv. 8-9). God has miraculously and graciously saved us to accomplish the purpose He intended.

How does knowing and being reminded of where you come from and why you were created shape your identity?

Revisit your lists for the week, both the one you created in the group session and the one you recorded at the beginning of this personal study. Which descriptions of you and values you hold are consistent with the image of God in you and the good work God planned for you?

Which ones might you need to reevaluate? End today's study by asking God to show you the priorities and pursuits you need to eliminate and the ones you need to embrace in order to define yourself by His purpose for you.

## DAY 2

### **Who You are includes where you've been**

**An important exercise for any Christ follower is to compose a gospel testimony. A basic formula is to answer the following three questions. Take time to answer these if you haven't done so lately.**

**What was your life like before Christ?**

**How did you encounter and begin to trust Christ?**

**What's life like now as a follower of Christ?**

A well-formed Christian identity comes from an understanding of the distinct truth that God Almighty created us to bear His image and to follow His purpose. It also includes a keen, ready recognition of where we've been. All of us began by living a life of sin and rebellion. Only when we trust Christ does He begin to redefine our identity.

Along the way Israel suffered many consequences for its frequent refusal to live according to God's plans. That disobedience was sin. Why did people who had tasted God's goodness drift and adopt an identity apart from God's design?

**Examine Genesis 3:1-6. In this early snapshot of human history, the first man and woman chose to believe a lie. Why did they do that? Based on what you read, specifically in verse 6, why did the couple succumb to the serpent's temptation?**

Are there patterns of sin in your life that formed because you've believed lies? Explain.

Are there patterns of sin in your life that formed because you chose your own pleasure and what you perceived to be good? Explain.

Read Daniel 1:1-7.

It wasn't enough to take over a nation in Nebuchadnezzar's day. To ensure long-lasting dominance, the culture of the ransacked nation had to be replaced by that of Babylon. It was an effective leadership strategy. Nebuchadnezzar selected leaders from the displaced people group and set out to influence them first.

What were the criteria for Nebuchadnezzar's chosen influencers among the Israelites?

The elements of the royal table in Babylon would have been prohibited by Jewish dietary laws. Later in the chapter Daniel and a few friends requested permission to avoid the rich diet. The implicit fact is that many of Israel's elite gave in. Was it the lust of the eyes, the lies of the enemy, or the overwhelming pressure from their new surroundings that caused the unnamed young men to give in?

All of us have been in a place where something or someone has lured us away from God's plan. Although that's an awful place to remain, it's not a bad place to recall. Knowing where you've been points you to forgiveness and gives God an opportunity to display the attributes of His character that you need most.

If your sinful state has been repented of and forgiven, recalling the darkness of that place provides good motivation never to return. An identity characterized by forgiveness makes the best foundation for your life today.

Pray about any patterns of sin you identified today. Confess and ask God to forgive you and to show you changes you can make to align your life with His plan. If you've already received God's forgiveness for ways you've departed from His purpose, thank Him in prayer today.

# DAY 3

## WHO YOU ARE ULTIMATELY INDICATES WHERE YOU'RE HEADED

In the group session you described who you are with declarative titles. Perhaps you identified yourself by your family role, such as a parent, or by a professional role, such as a teacher. Maybe you opted for more personal characterizations or hobbies, like a dreamer or a reader.

How does the way you describe yourself shape the direction of your life?

When a person operates in an identity other than the one God intended, how does that identity affect the direction his or her life takes?

Recall your study of Moses and Gideon from the group session. Both Old Testament heroes were blessed by a relationship with God. He defined who they were and determined where they went.

Read Exodus 3:12-14. What promise did God make to Moses?

What did knowing God's name provide for Moses?

Read Judges 6:16-22. What similar promise did God make to Gideon?



SESSION 2

# YOU ARE BROKEN

*My people have committed a double evil:  
They have abandoned me,  
the fountain of living water,  
and dug cisterns for themselves—  
cracked cisterns that cannot hold water.*

**JEREMIAH 2:13**

# DAY1

## WE'RE BROKEN BECAUSE THE WHOLE WORLD IS

Ninevites are everywhere. Scrolling through Twitter or watching world news indicates that wickedness abounds. Pause to consider the state of the world today. Don't linger too long, though. It's difficult and depressing.

It's easy to spot examples of sin in false religions, pagan countries, and developing nations. The proverbial "they" is a readily available target. Here at home it's easy to put blinders on and hide behind the assumption that we live in a Christian nation. Our country, however, is equally and collectively just as broken and in need of repentance as foreign ones. We have individually and collectively moved far from God.

### **Read Jeremiah 2:1-13.**

Examine each verse and identify specific ways God's message to Jerusalem applies to your life. For example, have you ever felt like the description in verses 2-3? Describe it.

Review verses 5-9. Have you been or are you currently walking in a season like the one depicted, when you stopped seeking God and turned in another direction? Describe it.

Rewrite verse 13 in your own words.

Record the broken wells in which you've placed your trust and found your identity. As you do, utter a prayer of confession about each one.

Read the following verse.

*Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies. ISAIAH 6:5*

Our individual brokenness is a microcosm of what's wrong with the entire world. Trading the goodness of God's plan for our own individual desires is sin. Furthermore, it never leads to the abundance God desires for us.

Underline the portion of Isaiah's confession in which he recognized his individual sin. Circle the portion in which he announced the broader sin of his whole people group. *Which sin came first?*

Although it's often easier to recognize brokenness everywhere else, it's better to start with ourselves. These facts of individual and universal sin aren't mutually exclusive. They operate in close conjunction. People are broken because the world is broken. The world is broken because each individual has embraced sin by choice and by nature. That broken nature becomes evident when we place our hope, our faith, or our identity in any well other than God's. Acknowledging that truth about ourselves is a step toward healing.

Thank God for using the brokenness in your life to reveal your need for Jesus. Ask Him to heal the brokenness in the world and in your life.

## DAY 2

### **WE'RE BROKEN BECAUSE WE CHOOSE TO BE**

You know that person in your life whose faith through difficulty both inspire you and scares you? You stand in awe of them, wondering how they could remain so strong when their particular trials seem far too heavy. You also shudder in fear, confessing you can't imagine being that strong. Perhaps you've even thought, / don't think I could walk through that experience and still trust God.

Whoever that person is, their trial is so grueling that most people would be inclined to give them an automatic pass from faith-filled living due to the severity of their circumstance. Maybe you perceive John and Amy Harrison's predicament through that lens. His anger and frustration are certainly understandable. Brought to that point, many of us would respond similarly. However, understandable doesn't equate with permissible or beneficial for followers of Jesus.

Calamity reveals where we place our hope and the foundation on which we've built our identity. The way we respond to trouble indicates who we and whom we trust. People are broken not only because the world is but also because we choose broken systems and broken paths in our lives.

Read Jonah 4.

Summarize what God offered Jonah as well as Jonah's response to God.  
God's offer:

Jonah's response:

God extended grace to Jonah, only to be rejected. God appointed the prophet Jeremiah to bring His word of warning to wayward Judah. The nation's collective response was similar to Jonah's individual one.

Read Jeremiah 18:1-12.

Have you ever consciously or subconsciously chosen to remain broken, wallowing in pity and declaring your right to do so? Describe that season in your life.

Read Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

Isolated, this passage could easily be construed as a foundation for works-based salvation. However, salvation is still God's great gift of grace, and in no way can it be earned. This passage isn't about good behavior. It's about faithfully believing that God's way is the best way and that eternal life isn't just in heaven but here on earth as well. This passage reveals the power of choice that lives within the realm of faith.

We can't always choose our circumstances or even the outcomes of those circumstances, but we can always choose the way we respond. Either we can either embrace God's grace, or we can reject it and choose sin.

Does a particular area of your life reveal that you haven't chosen the wholeness of God's plan? It's easy to recognize choices that aren't Christ like. Describe the broken cistern you've chosen for yourself.

How could you choose to embrace grace in order to give a godly response in this difficult situation?

Reflect on the areas of your life in which you've chosen your way over God's way. Regardless of the consequences you've faced, thank God for being with you and remaining faithful. Ask Him to help you live the life He created you to live.

## DAY 3

### We're broken, but we can be healed

Coming face-to-face with our brokenness can manufacture a wide array of outcomes. We can reject the idea of our brokenness and declare our identity as a personal right or an individual choice. Or we can admit that we have no way to fix ourselves and that we need God's grace and mercy, freely available in Jesus Christ, to save us from ourselves. We may even waver back and forth between two commitments, trusting in God's design one day and in our own ambition the next

Ultimately, our goal is freedom from our brokenness. Because people are broken, we often choose to remain that way and build identities on false foundations. Our lives don't have to be that way. God has another plan. If a storm could have swept Jonah away. The fish could have done more than just swallow the prophet. It could have digested him. God provided Jonah a way out and illustrated His great mercy in the way He addressed Nineveh and in the way He continued to lovingly lead Jonah.

God offers rescue from our brokenness today. He can heal our broken hearts; and desires. He promised to do that for His stubborn children in Jeremiah: And Scripture offers more examples.

#### **Read the following verses.**

*The men of the city said to Elisha, "My lord can see that even though the city's location is good, the water is bad and the land unfruitful." He replied, "Bring me a new bowl and put salt in it." After they had brought him one, Elisha went out to the spring, threw salt in it, and I said, "This is what the Lord says: 'I have healed this water. No longer will death or unfruitfulness result from it.' "Therefore, the water still remains healthy today according to the word that Elisha spoke.*

2 KINGS 2:19-22

Elisha, the prophet who followed Elijah, was barely inaugurated into the role when the people of Jericho approached him with a problem. The location of their camp was good, but the water was bad. They needed a miracle. God made the water clean and safe to drink again, meaning the barren land could bear fruit again.

Identify the areas of your life in which you most need healing.

The way we respond to pressure excavates levels of brokenness in our lives that may have been hidden previously, buried far beneath the surface. We can fake it, making it from one seemingly normal day to the next, but when crisis comes, the truth unravels, and the foundation of our lives shakes.

Where did your brokenness come from? How have circumstances brought it to the surface?

The ultimate remedy for brokenness is forgiveness, but we can't receive forgiveness until we recognize our need for it. Brokenness is often the tool God uses in our lives to help us realize our great need for Him. In this process of recognizing our true identity, we also truly understand repentance. There's a big difference between being sorry for wrongdoing and experiencing true sorrow over our sin. The former is a recognition of an unfavorable result, while the latter admits the underlying root of our sinful condition. Once we've recognized the root of our sinful heart, we're ready to accept forgiveness and be made new in Christ



Record a prayer expressing your need for God's healing in your life. Confess ways you've been stubborn and unrepentant. Ask for complete freedom from sin through God's forgiveness.

SESSION 3

# YOU ARE CHOSEN

*He chose us in him, before the foundation of the world,  
to be holy and blameless in love before him.*

**EPHESIANS 1:4**

# DAY1

## THE GOSPEL CHANGES YOUR IDENTITY AND GIVES You A PURPOSE

In the film OVERCOMER the gospel of Jesus gave John Harrison a purpose beyond who or what he thought he was. When the foundation on which he had built his identity was ripped away and replaced by something less than ideal, the gospel entered and gave him more than he ever knew he wanted. The gospel pulled Hannah out of the shadows and gave her a purpose far beyond what her physical limitations prescribed. The gospel of Jesus has the power to change a person's identity and to give purpose in life beyond all limitations and expectations.

Solomon was one of Israel's most famous kings, second only to his father, David.

Read 1 Chronicles 22:7-10.

What does this passage say about Solomon's true identity?

What does this passage identify as God's purpose for Solomon?

How clearly do you understand God's purpose for your life? Use the spectrum provided to pinpoint your current level of awareness and plot an X on that spot.



Your identity in Christ makes you God's child, enjoying all of the rights and blessings of sonship. Your purpose in life makes you God's servant, dedicating your life to following His will.

According to God's words to David, Solomon wasn't just the king of Israel's son. Solomon was a child of God with a clearly defined purpose. This isn't true just for homegrown kids like Solomon who were born into the right religious family. It's true for the very enemies of God, like Saul in the Book of Acts, who was dramatically changed by an encounter with Jesus to become a Christ follower. That's good news for us.

**Read Paul's testimony in Acts 22:3-16. Where did Paul place his identity before meeting Christ?**

For some people, a life-changing experience on their own Damascus road will be exactly how God reaches them. For others, life before Christ wasn't as dramatically distant and didn't require that level of encounter. No matter what type of testimony you have, change is part of it. Paul himself wrote:

*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has **passed** away, and see, the new has come! 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17*

**Record some before-and-after changes the gospel has made and is continuing to make in your identity and your purpose.**

Post and reread 2 Corinthians 5:17 several times throughout the week. Use it as a reminder of the power of the gospel to change your life. Pray that God will keep your newness in Christ fresh this week. Pray that God will plant this verse in your life and that He will shape your identity to reflect its truth.

## DAY 2

### The gospel changes your community

An online search for the definition of *community* offers these ideas:

- A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common (for example, the scientific community)
- A feeling of fellowship with others as a result of sharing common attitude interests, and goals (for example, the sense of community that organized religion can provide)

Those two definitions sum up community pretty well. People likely have a variety of different pockets of community, some that overlap and others don't seem to intersect.

List your personal pockets of community. Be as inclusive as possible. Give a name or label to every type of community you feel a part of.

For believers, it's ultimately the gospel that connects us, gives us a family, and defines what it means to be a family. The gospel gave Hannah a coach who was far more than a coach and a principal who was far more than a principal. It ultimately reconnected her with an earthly father whom she could love and be loved by. It gave her a community and a place to belong.

When Christ died, He didn't just give us salvation, though that was more than enough. He also gave us the Holy Spirit and much more. He gave us the church.

The gospel changes who we are and whom we're connected with. The gospel gives us a community of faith that supports us in Christ, encourages our growth in Christlikeness, and holds us accountable to Christ's call in our lives. People who are united by the gospel need one another.

Read 1 Peter 2:9-10 and record everything the writer declares believers to be.

Notice that every declaration is plural. Peter didn't declare a Christian to be a royal person or a holy individual. Each layer of his promise-filled declaration is applied to the body of Christ, the church.

Read Hebrews 10:19-25.

The first part of this passage discusses our nearness to God through Christ. Then the writer highlighted the necessity of our nearness to one another because of Christ.

In your own words, how does the gospel give you community and encourage you to be part of a community?

In what ways does community help you live out the gospel?

Praise God for expressions of the gospel in community. Thank Him for people who've represented the gospel well to clearly show you Jesus, both recently and throughout your life.



## DAY 3

### The gospel changes your outlook

Recall the most extravagant gift you've ever given someone. What was it, and to whom did you give it?

In all likelihood the gift you described was temporary. Unless you thought of a time when you shared the plan of salvation, anything you exchange in life has an expiration date. Nothing surpasses what Christ accomplished on the cross. On the cross He took on all our sin and brokenness and gave us a new identity that's secured by His sacrifice on our behalf. Nothing is better than that.

God gave His absolute best when He offered Christ as the payment for our sin. Paul gave his absolute all in communicating that message of hope to the whole world. The gospel isn't just for eternity, though. It's for everyday living. The gospel doesn't just alter a person's forever. The true gospel shapes a person's outlook every day.

Peter is a prime example of a transformed outlook. His encounter with Jesus caused him to recognize his own tragic sin.

Read Luke 5:1-11. How did Peter respond to Jesus' net-casting instructions?

How did Peter react to the crazy boat-breaking catch? Why do you think that miracle prompted Peter to respond the way he did?

Peter did what Jesus asked in that moment. He followed Jesus. So much water went under the bridge in Peter's ministry with Jesus following that initial call. So much living. So many stories. So many great miracles and challenging teachings. Peter would later fail miserably, but the gospel restored him and empowered him to faithfully carry out his calling in the early church

**Read Acts 10:9-16,34-35.**

An angel visited a faithful Gentile named Cornelius and instructed him to reach out to Peter, whose vision prepared him for the encounter. Following Peter's vision described in verses 9-16, servants arrived and took Peter to Cornelius, who told Peter about the angel's visit. Peter's response was to present the gospel. Prior to that encounter, like the other Jewish Christians, Peter believed the gospel was strictly intended for Israel. Not only was Peter's life changed by the gospel, but his everyday outlook was also influenced by following Jesus.

In the movie *QVERCOMER* what felt like the worst thing to happen in the town, particularly to the school and the Harrison family, was the best thing to advance God's purposes in the gospel. Sometimes when we face difficulty, the outcome reveals that a better, more gospel-centered purpose was at play.

**Read the following verses.**

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. You are being guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 PETER 1:3-7*

In a letter to dispersed and discouraged believers, Peter offered words of encouragement. Their disaster was an opportunity for the gospel to spread to places and to people Peter would have previously counted unworthy. That change in Peter's outlook and in early church history is one only the gospel could have fostered.

**Describe something about your life that has changed or is changing because of the gospel.**

**Pray, identifying the parts of your outlook that need to be touched by the gospel. Ask God to change your perspective so that you see the world and even yourself as He does.**

SESSION 4

# YOU SURRENDER

*You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time,  
if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials so that the  
proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold.*

**1 PETER 1:6-7**

# DAY 1

## Peter readily followed Jesus

"Because I said so" might be a phrase from your childhood home that you vowed never to repeat to your children. Before you take such a hard turn, let's evaluate it from a different perspective. According to the wisdom of God Almighty and His infallible Word, parents are the divinely appointed authority in a child's life.

"Because I said so" can communicate that we know best and lovingly care for our children through limits and instructions.

Read Luke **5:1-11**.

Peter's "Because You said so" obedience in verse 5 is a model for us. His repentance in verse 8 is a challenging inspiration to us. His sacrificial decision to follow Jesus in verse 11 is an unparalleled sign of authentic surrender.

**Read the following verses and rewrite them in your own words as confessional declarations to God.**

*"Master," Simon replied, "we've worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I'll let down the nets." LUKE 5:5*

*When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, because I'm a sinful man, Lord!" LUKE 5:8*

*They brought the boats to /and, left everything, and followed him. LUKE 5:11*

Each verse conveys an aspect of surrender. The first is ready-made obedience when the instruction seemed pointless. Peter was a professional. He knew fishing. Yet because Jesus said to lower the nets, he obeyed.

Describe a time when God asked something of you that seemed wild, when you thought you knew better, or when His instruction didn't seem to make practical sense?

It's important to note that Peter didn't question or hesitate. Remember Moses and Gideon's reluctance? Peter's ready-made obedience is refreshing and inspirational. That obedience also led to radical repentance—in other words, worship—in verse 8. Finally, the act of obediently following Jesus and going fishing in a moment and a manner that didn't make sense birthed a willingness to leave what was familiar in order to follow. Is each of these responses evident in your life?

Where do you or would you like to see radical obedience in your life?

Where do you or would you like to see radical, repentant worship in your life?

Where do you or would you like to see radical, willing sacrifice in your life?

Read again Luke 5:5, 8,11. As you do, invite the Holy Spirit of God to craft each form of surrender in your life. Then pray, expressing your desire to readily follow Jesus. That means taking on His character, His truth, and ultimately a new identity.

Have you ever felt compelled to boldly declare your connection to Christ or communicate the truth about Jesus, but you shied away from the opportunity? If so, describe that experience.

Have you ever felt compelled to boldly declare your faith, and you shared the gospel truth with someone? If so, describe your experience.

Copy Jesus' words to Peter in Matthew 16:18.

Read Acts 4:1-12. In this defense Peter referred to Jesus as the cornerstone (see v, 11). Considering Jesus' promise to build the church on the rock of Peter's confession, why is it significant that Peter used the word *cornerstone*?

In a sense Peter was reminding the Sanhedrin of the authority of the words in Psalm 118:22 by connecting Jesus to the great King David and the holy Hebrew Scriptures. He was clearly, unequivocally declaring that Jesus is the One in whom light, life, and salvation are found. And he was making that bold declaration from the dark shadow of a possible prison sentence.

What's the greatest risk you've faced or the greatest loss you've experienced because of Jesus? Was it worth it? Would you do it again? What would you do differently?

To boldly declare Jesus in the face of fear is to believe that the world needs more of Him and less of you. It's to believe that any risk you take in confessing Christ will be worth it.

Pray, boldly proclaiming that you want more of Jesus In the world and less of you. Dedicate your life to representing Jesus rather than yourself.



## DAY 3

### Yet peter still denied Jesus

Matthew 16 was a win for Peter. He must have clung tightly to that moment. Without hesitation Peter proclaimed Christ as Savior. Jesus' prophecy for the future church must have been affirming. And yet denial remained on the horizon for Peter.

Read the full account of what happened in Luke 22:31-34,54-62.

Epic fail. If Matthew 16 is the episode you never want to forget, Luke 22 is one you hope no one remembers. It's easy to get caught up in the pendulum of vacillating faith. While being boldly surrendered in one moment, we know the enemy is ready to attack our weak spots, causing us to deny the most essential truth in our lives. Peter denied Jesus in a moment of weakness and fear but later boldly proclaimed Christ to an audience who had their own reasons to be afraid.

What are your self-prescribed legitimate fears? What might cause you to occasionally define yourself by "I can't" or "I'm not"?

In his first letter to dispersed Christians, Peter articulated his understanding of fear. Knowing the temptation to deny Jesus would be fierce, he wrote these words:

*You are being guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

1 PETER 1:5-7

Paraphrase that passage in your own words. Then read it aloud. Hear the promise of hope offered by someone who knew what it was like to be on top, as well as what it was like to be crushed by anxiety in the moment.

Which is better for you—a friend who tells you without hesitation that everything is going to be OK or someone who comforts you but understands and verbally recognizes your difficult circumstances?

In this brief passage Peter did both. **Underline the part in which Peter boldly declared, "God's got this."** **Circle the part in which Peter recognized that the believers would face hardship.**

Consider the final part of this passage, the concept of being refined by fire. Temperatures upwards of one thousand degrees Celsius literally burn the impurities from raw, extracted gold until only purity remains. Peter won in Matthew 16. The pressure was on and the fire was hot in Luke 22. It burned, but it molded Peter more closely into the image of Jesus, fashioning him into the leader he needed to be in order to lead God's church. Is it possible that we need Luke 22 moments as much as we need Matthew 16 ones?

Pray, thanking God for difficulties in life. Tell Him that being shaped more closely into the image of Jesus is worth the hardship.

SESSION 5

# YOU DECLARE

*Everything that was a gain to me, I have  
considered to be a loss because of Christ.*  
PHILIPPIANS 3:7

## DAY 1

### PAUL HAD AN OLD IDENTITY

Paul vividly described the transition from the old identity to the new identity this way:

*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17*

When Paul wrote, "The old has passed away," he probably intended to convey the meaning of the old adage "Gone but not forgotten." We don't forget who we used to be apart from our identity in Christ. But we actively choose not to live in that identity any longer.

In this final week of personal study, we'll explore the transformation that occurred in the life of Paul.

Read Philippians 3:3-14. Name the reasons Paul considered himself the ideal Jewish leader in verses 4-6.

You can almost hear Coach Harrison exclaim in the principal's office, "I'm not a cross-country coach! I'm a basketball coach!"

What we identify as the sin of idolatry and a false identity was rooted in the persona of a devout man doing what he thought was right in the eyes of Israel's God. Paul gave a litany of qualifications that defined his identity, exposing his confidence in fleshly things, even pitting himself against anyone else as someone who had more reasons to be proud.

You've already exposed the sinful foundations of your life through this Bible study. Many of them were probably just attempts to be the best person you could possibly be.

**What are some good, even God-honoring pursuits people find their identities in? What labels are used in the church to elevate people over simply being crucified with Christ?**

The misplaced priorities in Paul's life were hurdles only an encounter with Jesus could overturn. Similarly, any false identities in your life have prevented you from establishing a firm foundation in Jesus and from aligning your goals with God's purposes.

**Describe Paul's new goals in life, outlined in verses 7-14.**

**Record any new goals you've set for your life, based on your experiences over the past five weeks in this study.**

**Record a prayer asking the Holy Spirit of God to help you overcome obstacles to fully realizing your identity in Christ and to make your Christ-honoring goals a reality.**

## DAY 2

### PAUL FOUND AND ROOTED His LIFE IN FAITH

Moses wrote five books to express all of the mighty deeds God did to establish His people. His song in Deuteronomy 32 expressed that gratitude, along with his farewell words. Try to imagine these words put to music:

*I will proclaim the LORD'S name.*

*Declare the greatness of our God!*

*The Rock—his work is perfect;*

*all his ways are just. A faithful God,*

*without bias, he is righteous and true.*

*DEUTERONOMY 32:3-4*

Remember in Exodus 3:13 when Moses asked God for His name? Here in this song Moses proclaimed it loudly! Deuteronomy 32:3-4 sounds as if it belongs in any modern praise chorus. The rest of the song? Not so much. From verse 5 nearly all the way to the end, Moses highlighted Israel's sin as much as God's power. This final declaration was hardly from a man who lived in fear. He passionately issued a warning to his people about the consequences of living contrary to their true identity in the Lord God.

If your study over the past few weeks could culminate in a warning for yourself and others, what would it be?

By the time the events in Acts 28 occurred, Paul had already been shipwrecked, diverted, arrested, tortured, imprisoned, and worse. Yet the chapter closes with the apostle welcoming people and boldly declaring his faith in Jesus. It sounds as though he had quite a few reasons to recant, but none of his circumstances could erase his identity in Christ.

Read Acts 28:30-31

Basically under house arrest, Paul spent two years in a rented house displaying a beautiful picture of Jewish hospitality to everyone who visited, for the express purpose of declaring God's goodness in providing salvation through His Son, Jesus. Once you find that treasure, you can have joy even in the worst moment.

Verse 31 says Paul witnessed "with all boldness and without hindrance." Copy that phrase here.

What do you think it means to live a life that declares faith "with all boldness"?

What does it mean to have no hindrance?

"Without hindrance" translates the Greek word *akolutos*, which means "to prevent, to hinder, to forbid, to withhold, to deny."



Denial.

"I'm not a good speaker."—Moses

"I'm not a strong fighter."—Gideon

"I'm not a cross-country coach."—John Harris

"I'm not \_\_\_\_\_ You

(Fill in the line)

We can share Jesus "with all boldness and without hindrance" when we stop denying who we are in Christ. In Jesus we can overcome any obstacles that get in our way of living fully rooted in faith and passionately sharing that faith without hesitation. Do you believe that? Does your conviction show?

Confess your "I'm not..." statements to Jesus and leave them with Him. Praise God for making you an overcomer, not by your might but by the transformational power of the gospel.

## DAY 3

### Paul was made new

#### And led from a position of strength

Peter wrote about faith that's refined by fire (see 1 Pet. 1:7). The process is similar to exercise. Muscles that are unused eventually atrophy. Exercise builds muscle and strength by actually tearing down muscle fibers. When the body recovers and the muscles rebuild, they're stronger. Breaking down muscles makes them stronger.

When you consider the danger, turmoil, and difficulty Paul faced, it's not hard to see why his spiritual muscles grew strong. Though developed in difficulty, Paul's faith was rooted in his confession of faith in Jesus Christ, birthed from his life-changing encounter with the risen Lord.

Who's more inspiring to you—believers fervently following Jesus with no scars or marks of their trials or believers with deep wounds who remain radically faithful? Explain your answer.

Read Paul's words that follow.

*[The Lord] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness." Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ For when t am weak, then I am strong.*      2 CORINTHIANS 12:8-10

Highlight each word above that conveys hardship.

Even while Paul was in prison, people recognized Christ in him and were changed. His faith under fire was inspiring, and he leveraged it to share Christ without fear or hindrance. Others were inspired to proclaim that same gospel, and Paul rejoiced even in his own affliction because Christ was being declared. That result makes adversity worth the cost.

Though our worldly identity can easily lead to pride, our identity in Christ exposes the sheer strength of living faithfully in spite of outside adversity and inner weaknesses. Because celebrating adversity and heralding our weakness are the opposite of the world's tendency, they're shocking.

When you think of Coach Harrison, fast-forward and imagine the possibilities. Imagine his testimony five years later, coaching a new state-champion runner, profusely thanking God for taking away basketball and his misplaced identity. Observing the way his faith developed in that season of fire could have a great impact on someone else who faced a trial.

Summarize any life change you've experienced during this Bible study.

What outcomes do you hope for as you leverage what God is doing to refine you and to solidify your identity in Christ?

Thank God for any life change you've experienced through this study. Pray that in the future, the way you see yourself and the way other people see you will be colored by Jesus.