



ENTER INTO YOUR NEW IDENTITY

In Christ

Welcome to step three in your journey of centering your life around Jesus!

Everyone who is united to Jesus Christ by faith receives a new identity under grace. The Bible often refers to our union with Christ and this new standing under grace simply as being “in Christ.” Being in Christ by faith means we are no longer under condemnation and God’s wrath. Rather, God now relates to us as his fully accepted and beloved children. This frees us to stop chasing cultural and heart idolatry and gives us reason to celebrate!

Now, in order to enter into our new identity in Christ we first need to step out of our old identity which was shaped by our idols in the world.

I. LEAVING IDOLATRY

Paul rejoiced with the new believers in Thessalonica and affirmed their genuine response of faith in the gospel. He wrote that others gave a good report that they had “turned to God from idols” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). This is important for us too, because like these Thessalonian believers, God’s grace frees us to stop practicing our functional idolatry and to instead experience life in Jesus. This doesn’t mean that a believer won’t lapse or be tempted to return to familiar idols, even if these never ultimately satisfy. Being aware of our functional idols can help us avoid compromise and reject these futile attempts to satisfy our hearts. This is important because King Jesus requires exclusive allegiance to his supremacy. Also, because he is the ultimate treasure that truly satisfies the heart (Matthew 13:44; Mark 8:34-38; Colossians 1:18). The good news is that we can now find our greatest delight in Jesus and the gospel of God’s grace, but we must leave our functional idolatry.

The following twenty statements will help you probe the functional heart idols you need to reject as a futile attempt to find life apart from Jesus. Before you start, pray and ask God to help you with this next exercise. Begin by reflecting on the 20 statements below to deeply probe your functional idols (adapted from pp. 203-204 in *Counterfeit Gods*, Timothy Keller). Identify the top one or two areas of functional idolatry that you may personally struggle with at times.

After you have identified areas of idolatry, then continue to the biblical texts about God’s gracious rescue of you and your true identity in Christ.

II. PROBING FUNCTIONAL IDOLATRY

"Life only has meaning / I only have worth if..."

1. I have power and influence over others. (Power Idolatry)
2. I am loved and respected by . (Approval Idolatry)
3. I have this kind of pleasure experience, a particular quality of life. (Comfort Idolatry)
4. I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of . (Control idolatry)
5. People are dependent on me and need me. (Helping Idolatry)
6. Someone is there to protect me and keep me safe. (Dependence Idolatry)
7. I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone. (Independence Idolatry)
8. I am highly productive and getting a lot done. (Work Idolatry)
9. I am being recognized for my accomplishments, and I am excelling in my work. (Achievement Idolatry)
10. I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions. (Materialism Idolatry)
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11. I am adhering to my religion's moral codes and accomplished in its activities. (Religion Idolatry)
12. This one person is in my life and happy to be there, and/or happy with me. (Individual Person Idolatry)
13. I feel I am totally independent of organized religion and am living by a self-made morality. (Irreligion Idolatry)
14. My race or culture is ascendant and recognized as superior. (Racial/Cultural Idolatry)
15. A particular social grouping or professional grouping or another group lets me in. (Inner Ring Idolatry)
16. My children and/or my parents are happy and happy with me. (Family Idolatry)
17. Mr. or Ms. "Right" is in love with me. (Relationship Idolatry)
18. I am hurting, in a problem; only then do I feel worthy of love or able to deal with guilt. (Suffering Idolatry)
19. My political or social cause is making progress and ascending in influence or power. (Ideology Idolatry)
20. I have a particular kind of look or body image. (Image Idolatry)

What are the top one or two areas of functional idolatry you may struggle with? (from the list above or another type of idolatry in your heart that wasn't on the list)

III. ENTER INTO YOUR NEW IDENTITY "IN CHRIST"

Everyone who repents and believes the gospel receives a new standing in Christ. This new identity under grace helps us experience joy and walk in freedom. However, we all have some bad "tapes" running through our head and heart that may keep us in bondage to empty idols or to sinful practices that God has rescued us from in Christ.

Our rescue by God is like a young boy falling through the ice into the frigid waters of a lake while ice skating. He is unable to save himself. When his father sees his son's desperate condition, he quickly finds a rope, runs to his son and rescues him from the icy waters. After the boy is

rescued, his dad carries him safely home. He's given dry clothes and a seat near the fireplace with the rest of the family. Our rescue by God is much like this boy who was rescued from the deadly waters to the safety of a warm home to be with his father and his family.

Apart from Christ we needed God's rescue. But now in Christ, God's rescue has provided all believers a new standing under grace that's filled with hope. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, God has rescued you from your old condition and has restored you to His original plan for your life into a new standing and a new creation therefore now you have a new identity in Christ. Scripture declares,

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." —2 Corinthians 5:17

The following sampling of biblical passages contrast who you were apart from Christ with who you are now in Christ through God's rescue and restoration of His original plan for you. Record in the right column spaces the truths about who you are in Christ. Then, read through all that these verses affirm about who you are in Christ now, in contrast to who you were apart from Christ.

APART FROM CHRIST I WAS...

Lk. 15:8-10, 3-7, 32...lost
 John 3:18...condemned
 Rom. 2:5...storing up God's wrath
 Rom. 5:10-11...God's enemy
 John 1:12-13...not God's child
 Eph. 2:4-6...spiritually dead
 Col. 1:13...under the domain of darkness
 Rom. 3:9-10, 20...unrighteous & my works would never cause God to declare me justified (right with him)
 Rom. 8:9...without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit
 John 10:26...without the Good Shepherd
 Eph. 2:11-12...a stranger to the covenants of promise... far off...cut off by a dividing wall of hostility from God's people
 Eph. 2:12...without hope and God in the world

"IN CHRIST" I AM NOW...

Lk. 15:7, 10, 32...
 John 3:18...
 Rom. 2:5...
 Rom. 5:10-11...
 John 1:12-13...
 Eph. 2:4-6...
 Col. 1:13...
 Rom. 5:1...
 1 Cor. 6:19-20...
 John 10:27-30...
 Eph. 3:6...
 Titus 2:13...

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Now that you've considered this good news about your rescue and restoration, it's time to celebrate! List below the top one or two biblical truths about your rescue and your true identity in Christ that's most encouraging to you.
2. After you've listed these, pause and pray. Talk with God and confess any known idolatry. Remember what God has said in his word about your true identity, then thank God for his grace to you in Christ.
3. As our hearts are captivated with the spiritual blessing we have in Christ under grace, we are motivated to love and serve Jesus more faithfully as his loyal disciples. We must remember, grace is never a license to disobey God. Rather, God's grace to us fuels our motivation to love him back with steadfast loyalty, godly living, and all-out-service for others in love (1 Cor. 15:58; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 4:10-11). Now that you have been reflecting on God's love and grace for you in Christ, it's time to personally love God back with your actions. Record below just one step of obedience or act of service you will freely take that you believe will honor God.

We encourage you to memorize this powerful truth:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." —2 Corinthians 5:17