

My Identity in Jesus

'I will give you a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to you, the one who receives it.'

(Revelation 2:17)

Peter Walker
www.1peter1three.weebly.com

***I dedicate this book to every follower of
Jesus***

Introduction

As a follower of Jesus – a Christian – I've struggled with my sense of identity. I continue to struggle.

Every person who truly follows Jesus, has seen him as Lord. And not everyone sees this. For this reason Jesus said to his disciples:

'Blessed are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear.' (Matthew 13:16)

I began following Jesus at sixteen years old, after he had been following me for a long time. I reached a moment when I could not deny him any longer, could not continue living a double life, and stopped, turned around, and began following him. I realized quickly how spiritual this moment was, what a miracle it is to really 'see' Jesus for who he is.

And so it began. I had a new identity to that of the world, and I saw something they did not see...

1. Eyes of a Child

‘Jesus said, ‘Unless you change and become like a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.’ (Matthew 18:3)

True understanding is not just about what we see, but *how* we see. We need to see through eyes that are innocent. This is why more knowledge does not mean more understanding, or more truth.

‘With the increase of knowledge is the increase of sorrow.’ (Ecclesiastes 1:18)

Knowledge – or learning – can actually become a block to truth. Even knowledge about God can become a block to knowing God.

‘Jesus said, ‘You study the Bible because you think that it is the key to eternal life, and yet you refuse to come to me and actually have that life.’ (John 5:39-40)

At the beginning of the Bible we are told the story of Adam and Eve – the first 2 people that God created on the earth. They were given the earth and all its fulness to enjoy, but they were told not to eat of a certain tree, because if they did death would come to them, would enter the world.

That tree was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was a tree of ***‘knowledge’***.

What tempted them to eat of it was that they thought to know more was to become more like God.¹ They were wrong. To reach for more knowledge, with a prideful motive, is to turn our backs on God and on life and purity.

God is spirit. The words of Jesus were '**spirit and life.**'² Jesus calls us to be humble, childlike, in order to access the things of God. This is true, also, when it comes to understanding our identity in Jesus. We need to reach back for what is pure, what is simple, what God teaches.

¹ Genesis 3:1-5

² John 4:24; 6:63

2. My Experience¹

‘Whom have I in heaven but you?’

(Psalm 73:25-26)

I was raised in a Christian home. My parents taught me about Jesus – *‘God with us’*² – and I believed, I received. I was very young, maybe 4 years old.

I grew up in public schools, primarily in Ireland. I soon realized that to believe in Jesus, to follow him, was not an easy road. By the time I was a teenager there were things I wanted to do, to think, to say, that conflicted with my faith in Jesus. I chose the way of the world. I chose to fit in, go with the flow, be one of the crowd – swearing, smoking, partying.

By the age of sixteen, I was deep in. It doesn’t take long to sink deep in. All my ties with my ‘friends’ were with ropes of foolishness and immorality. It was here God met me. Let me explain...

I was away from home for a summer. My father had taken me with him on a trip to Finland where he would be teaching at a youth camp. One evening when I found myself sitting alone in the meeting hall, I felt these words. I ‘felt’ them from the Holy Spirit. He spoke to my heart, my mind,

¹ The initial segment of this chapter is taken from my book, *‘Alone with God’*

² Matthew 1:23

and said:

'You know I am true, but you live like I am not true.'

I was immediately cut to the heart. This one line exposed myself to me. I was false. I had a deep knowledge that Jesus was true, and that his words are true. But I was living with my back to him. I was living like I did not know he was alive, true, present, God. In that moment I was laid bare – to myself. I sat alone and cried. These were not tears of joy, or even, really, regret. They were tears of awareness: I knew where I was, and where I was supposed to be, and I could see the hard road ahead.

Now, this hard road was not one of trying to please God, or do good things. It was simply the true road of repentance that would walk me out of this valley of sin. A true change of direction. This was going to cost me, and cut me, and leave me lonely for a while.

And it was in this season – breaking up with my girlfriend and really all my friends, apologizing to people, staying home, sitting alone at school, being honest, being silent – it was in this season of deep aloneness, that I experienced the truth, the power, of being *'alone with God'*.

I would get up early to read my Bible and pray before school. After school, I would get home, make a cup of tea, go to my room, put on my

lamp, and read my Bible and whisper to Jesus. Jesus was the only person in my life at this time. I had family, but really no one knew what I was going through, what I had given up, lost, in my life outside of home. I felt so alone – even estranged from myself. Like, I felt I had lost my own personality. I didn't know who I was anymore. I was alone. I was lonely. But then, there, I realized, I was *not* alone. I was alone with God. Jesus, by his Holy Spirit, was with me. He was the sweetness in this bitterness. He was the peace in this place. He was a true friend in my heart, in my room, in my mind.

I sometimes refer to this experience as my 'tomb' experience. Jesus died and was buried, alone in the tomb for 3 days. Jesus himself said: ***'Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me will find it.'*** (Matthew 16:25) This experience of mine, in taking steps to follow Jesus, began by losing my life. I felt that everything in my life that had been built on false foundation was being taken away, brick by brick. It felt like a demolition, a razing to the ground of a building, a structure, leaving only grass.

Looking back at that time, I didn't have the jargon I have now, or the clear sense of a new identity and new chapter. All I knew at the time was that I was convicted of sin, taking steps to turn away from this sin, and as a result losing a lot of friends and connections.

And here is a key point regarding our 'identity in Jesus'. I realized at this time that my friends – people I was trying to communicate with about my new-found faith and decisions – did not see Jesus as I saw Jesus. They just didn't. This was so clear to me when it came to choices. I remember a couple friends being interested in what I was saying, coming to a couple meetings with me to hear the gospel, even saying that they believed now, too; but then Friday would come around and everybody was planning to hit the nightclub, and these friends who I thought were on the same page as me, well, they weren't. They didn't see – or feel – the inconsistency of knowing Jesus and going clubbing – and doing all the things that go with clubbing. I did. I saw it clearly and felt it deeply. They didn't.

Here is where I felt sink in that deep and lonely feeling of being a true Christian in a world that does not know him.

'They claim to know God, but deny him by their actions.' (Titus 1:16)

3. Humbling Reality

‘What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.’

(1 Corinthians 2:12-14)

Please read this Scripture above. If you’re like me, I sometimes scan the Scriptures, and jump down to the writing. But the Scripture here is so important to understand, even to soak in.

So let’s just be honest and clear about this one point. This is a ‘point’, or truth, that we experience, and for different reasons find hard, but nonetheless we must face it:

When we came to know Jesus – to see him as Lord and follow him – we entered into a new identity that the world does not ‘see’ or understand. This, my friends, is the truth of God.

Have you felt this? Have you looked into the eyes of another and longed for that sense of ‘sympathy’ or connection where they ‘get’ your

faith or your view of Jesus, but they do not?

What you are experiencing is truth. You are experiencing a person (you) who has seen a revelation, meeting another person who has *not* seen that revelation. One has seen, one has not.

Before we talk about how to live this life of 2 kingdoms, 2 different realities at work, let's first take a deep breath and just accept this humbling truth of Jesus and his gospel: You have seen a revelation of God that others have not seen. This sets you apart. Your citizenship, as Paul writes, is not here, but in heaven. (Philippians 3:20)

The above passage (1 Corinthians 2:12-14) is one of the most powerful along these lines, but here are other key verses on this:

'The world cannot accept the Holy Spirit because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him for he lives with you and is in you.' (John 14:17)

'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.'
(1 Peter 2:9-10)

Why do I refer to this stamping of a new identity as humbling or challenging? Well, I can only really share why I believe it to be so in my own life and journey...

As a Christian we are called to share the news of Jesus with others, as the Spirit leads. We're not sent out on our own to make this happen, but rather we are called to work alongside the Holy Spirit in this move and mission of God:

'Jesus said, 'When the Holy Spirit comes... he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me...''

(John 15:26-27)

So when I became a Christian, I found myself in the midst of a world of people who did not follow Jesus. They knew about him, but they had not bowed to him as Lord of their lives. And I was now a witness to Jesus, someone called to testify to him.

What I realized quickly was just how spiritual and miraculous it is, when someone 'sees' Jesus as Lord. I realized this because despite my own explanations, quotes and insights, I did not possess the power, the influence, to actually open someone's eyes to Jesus. That moment when someone 'sees' Jesus is a revelation, not an explanation.

This was humbling to me. I had no power to convince. I only had power to *testify*. These are

very different. Testifying is simply sharing what you see, what you know, and deferring this to a person, and hoping, praying, that the Lord uses your testimony in his work of revelation in that person's heart and mind. Remember, Jesus asked us to testify to him, saying that the Holy Spirit would also be testifying to him. We are witnesses. We testify. We don't have the power to open eyes to Jesus as Lord.

Humbling to me, in that I have little power. Jesus called me to testify to him, but along the same lines of how *he* testified to himself. He allowed himself to be mocked, rejected, misunderstood, and was gentle in the face of disdain. This is challenging.

I often think of the passage in Hebrews that reminds us that Jesus was not even given the dignity of being killed inside the city walls, but rather was taken outside the city – **'outside the camp'** - to where bodies were burned and unclean things discarded. Then the writer says:

'Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.'

(Hebrews 13:13)

You see, the challenge of Jesus is to stand with him in a world that rejects him. There is great power here, but not the type of power that we as people – even as Christians – like to wield. There is power in that when we do humbly stand with Jesus, the Holy Spirit meets our testimony

there and convicts hearts, opens revelation to people, vindicates our faith. But our part is usually just to stand with Christ, in word and deed, and be willing to bear the disgrace he bore. If people mock, we smile kindly; if people argue, we simply side-step with a gracious word...

‘When they hurled their insults at Jesus, he did not retaliate; when he suffered he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.’ (1 Peter 2:23)

Simply put, I have found my God-given identity difficult to accept, because it means I don't have an explanation for it that meets with world admiration or acceptance. I simply have seen and known that Jesus is Lord, and I can't prove this to you. I can only share this with you.

4. 20:20 Vision

'When he was at the table with them, he took bread... and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.'

(Luke 24:30-31)

Recently I've noticed that my vision is blurry when I read. This is new for me, and it's an aging thing.

There are degrees of 'sight'. You can have perfect vision, or be partially blind, etc. This is also true spiritually. Jesus sometimes said to people that they were ***'near to the kingdom'***.¹ Not there yet, not seeing the *full* light, but seeing much light. On the way.

What is it to see the *'full light'*? It is to see and know that Jesus is Lord, and to turn and follow.

It is not simply to see and know. It is to see, know, turn around (i.e. to repent of sin) and follow.

Many have seen Jesus, but not followed. They did see, they knew, they felt a call, but walked away. Paul refers by name to 2 men who ***'swerved from the truth.'*** (2 Timothy 2:18)

I have *'swerved from the truth'*, knowing Jesus was Lord and yet denying him in my actions,

¹ Mark 12:34

words, deeds. Until one day, in one deep moment, Jesus weighed in on me with conviction and called me to be true. That's when I turned from my sin and followed him.

Receiving a deep and true revelation of who Jesus is, does not necessarily mean we bow to it. We still have that choice.

In the same way that Jesus referred to some people as being **'near to the kingdom'**, the people in your life will have different measures of light or understanding when it comes to Jesus. It's not as simple as the light on, or the light off. Some may have 20:20 vision but not be willing to follow Jesus. Others might have an open heart to Jesus, but not yet fully understand who Jesus is and his call on their life. Again, others may cross your path at a time when they have caught a fresh vision of Jesus, and need your encouragement, your help, to maybe pray with them to receive Jesus into their lives, to commit to walking with him.

What is important to understand is regardless of where others are at with Jesus, and his revelation of himself, *you* stand fully in that light. You have seen Christ as Lord. You acknowledge him. You are a citizen of heaven.

'To all who received Jesus, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.' (John 1:12)

5. Safeguard

‘Jesus said, ‘Anyone who publicly acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before the angels of God. Anyone who publicly disowns me before others, I will disown before the angels of God.’ (Luke 12:8-9)

This sounds pretty harsh. But Jesus is not speaking here about obnoxious or awkward proclamations of being a Christian. Jesus was always about being Spirit-led, full of peace, even dignified.¹ Jesus silenced people on occasion because even demon-possessed people can shout proclamations of truth about Jesus.²

What Jesus is saying here is simple and sound. When we believe on him, follow him, we must be true to acknowledge him. Don't be afraid. Be clear. Where the occasion arises, say that you are a believer in Jesus, and that you follow him in your life. Let it be known.

I remember times in my life where I had *not* taken opportunities to make clear who I truly was – i.e. a Christian, and a committed one. And then I found myself at awkward dinner parties or in the middle of conversations, where I didn't belong. The reason I found myself in these compromised situations was because I really had not made my identity clear with people. I

¹ Proverbs 31:25

² Luke 8:28; Acts 16:16-18

remember deciding that I wanted to be quicker, bolder, clearer to make known my Christian identity, as a *'safeguard'* for myself, as well as a testimony. Now I strive to be a kind friend and colleague to all, but am very happy when I realize that I have *not* been invited to this or that event because it might not jive with my values, and I'm not included in office gossip. This reassures me that my testimony is known, and hopefully whispered about.

Again, I don't make rash or brash proclamations about being a Christian, but rather pray and listen for the Spirit's leading. I ask him to give me Spirit-led opportunities to identify with him. Even Jesus looked to the Father for guidance in his working. Mysterious, but deep. And most of all, the perfect example of how we access guidance from God in our work and witness here on earth:

'Jesus said, 'I can do nothing by myself. I only do what I see the Father doing, because whatever the Father does, I also do.'

(John 5:19)

I do pin up Scriptures in my work cubicle. I do have a Bible in my cubicle, and some simple resources – like booklets and verse cards – that I might share with colleagues if an opportunity arises. I pray consistently for my colleagues. By God's grace, it is now clear in my workplace that I am a Christian. I thank God for this safeguard and testimony.

6. Your Unique Identity in Jesus

'I will give you a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to you, the one who receives it.' (Revelation 2:17)

Your citizenship in heaven is only the starting point, your 'general' identity. Like all citizens of a nation, well, that identifies them all in one way. But God is not just about making you part of the family, but about your own very unique identity within that family.

The verse above is deep and stirring. We ache as people to have a special identity, to be special. We ache for this because God made us this way. We are really only reaching for what is true, and trying to find that out – who we really are.

The Bible speaks to us about our identity in Jesus, and all that this means. For example, in Jesus, you are:

A citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20)

A new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Forgiven (Acts 3:19; Isaiah 1:18)

Filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13)

A child of God (John 1:12)

And in Jesus you *have*:

Eternal life (John 3:16)

A family in Jesus (Matthew 12:48-50)

Provision (Matthew 6:31-33; Philippians 4:19)

Protection (Psalm 91)

Unconditional Love of God (Romans 8:38-39)

These things above we *all* have as citizens of heaven, as children of God.

But then there is the unique you. God has also carefully created you to be a unique expression of himself. You were made in his image, in many ways like others, but also in unique ways that only you are.

Look at the verse above. (Revelation 2:17) Jesus says that to the faithful one, he will whisper that name – that new name – that only that person will know. This is your unique self. Such a deep name and identity that only you will know. It will be an identity beyond words, beyond definition, residing deep in your soul between you and God. And out of this you will live and act. It is the God-given you, and no one can dispute it.

There are 2 ways this unique identity is 'identifiable', so to speak. In your 'spiritual gifts', and in your God-given personality and dispositions.

(1) Your Spiritual Gifts:

We are all given spiritual gifts to serve God and serve people. Some of these are named in 1 Corinthians chapter twelve, such as the gift of

'teaching' or of preaching and serving and even believing (the gift of 'faith').

This chapter (1 Corinthians 12) is not an exhaustive list of spiritual gifts, but it does highlight that we are not all the same, and yet we all work together by the power of the same Spirit. (vs.6-7) It is worth reading this chapter, and thinking, praying, asking God what your spiritual gifts might be, and how to grow these, or as Paul says, '**fan them into flame.**' (2 Timothy 1:6)

(2) Your Personality:

Secondly, the way your unique identity in Jesus manifests itself is in your own perspective, feelings, leanings, tendencies, insights, discernments, preferences, etc. In other words, your God-given personality and character.

As you walk with Jesus, your mind and perceptions change and are touched by God. We are told in Romans:

'Be transformed by the renewing of your mind...' (Romans 12:2)

Even the apostle Paul sometimes just gave an opinion, saying that he had *not* received this instruction from the Lord, and yet this same 'opinion' *became* instruction of the Lord. Others heard and recognized that this letter of Paul, these words of Paul, were, in fact, wisdom of God, inspired of God. (see 1 Corinthians 7:6,12)

In many ways the *'truest you'* is a mix of things you know to be spiritual in your life and mind, and also those things that God's Spirit just blows through you or has made you, that are truthful and unique to you. Much like Paul offering an opinion, but because it filtered through a man full of the Holy Spirit, and walking with God, it was in fact not just an opinion.

For this reason, when Paul – who knew his calling in Christ – was 'judged' by people, questioned by people (in this case by Christians) he said the following:

'I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court. Indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but this does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.' (1 Corinthians 4:3-4)

This is a really key verse – and truth – to note, and maybe adopt. Paul was clear in his calling. He knew his spiritual gifting, and he also knew the value of his faithfulness to the Lord, that this, too, had weight.¹ And yet this wisdom and conviction led him *not* to defend himself when judged, but to deflect it, defer it to God. In doing so he was at peace (***'my conscience is clear...'***), and in doing so he was at the same time commending his 'judger' to that same judgement. In effect, Paul was saying, *'We'll let God speak to your questions about me.'*

¹ 2 Corinthians 12:1-6

As you grow in your understanding of both your general identity in Jesus, and your specific, personal identity in Jesus, you may encounter challenges to your identity and your authority from people and from the devil himself. People may ask you (believers and unbelievers), *'Who do you think you are to...'* and the devil may whisper, *'How do you prove that you can...'*

In both cases, my brother, my sister, don't swerve. Don't be moved. It is shallow, it is a trap. Don't quarrel. Be gentle. Simply whisper, ***'I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court. Indeed I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but this does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.'*** (1 Corinthians 4:3-4)

Thank you for taking time to read this book. I hope it encouraged you!

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***'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;
before you were born I set you apart.'***

(Jeremiah 1:5)