



May/June 2025

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

Family of God

ALSO: OUR TRUE IDENTITY

Dear Friends:

“Why am I here?” This is a question that nearly everyone asks at some time in their life. Sadly, in our frail human efforts to find meaning and our place in this world, we often grasp at money, power, status, luxury, and other things that do not last.



In May, Pastor Dan Jongsma explores our true identity and purpose in Jesus Christ. As the Bible teaches, we find our true identity by discovering that Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life”—and this truth comes only as a gift from God. Knowing who we are in Christ gives us not only peace and hope for living each day but also assurance for eternity.

And in June, Pastor Joe Huizenga ponders—using stories from his Chicago neighborhood—how we’re called to live as part of God’s family through Jesus Christ. For many people, the word *family* evokes some of their most important relationships and treasured memories. Sadly, though, families can also include broken relationships and bitter, painful memories. The family of God, however, can provide a sense of belonging that transcends our connections to broken family relationships. That’s because Jesus’ sacrifice to make us right with God also makes us part of one big family that includes God’s children all around the world. And this means that whatever the circumstances, we belong to God and to each other in Christ Jesus, now and forever.

May God’s Word refresh, refocus, and renew you each day!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Kurt Selles

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“Our True Identity”
Dan Jongsma



“Family of God”
Joe Huizenga

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ReFrame
Ministries

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

may

Our True Identity

Dan Jongsma

Since ancient times people have wondered about their identity and purpose: “Who am I?” and “Why am I here?” Deep within, we long to grasp our true essence. Often we try to find significance in the opinions of others or in our own achievements. We aim for “bigger and better” things—money, power, status, luxury, security, and more. But all of that is like chasing the wind. The ideals of this world are fleeting. They last only for a while and are soon gone.

As believers in God, who has given us the Bible, we find that our true identity is rooted in the Lord, our Creator, who calls us to live for him. Even more, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, who has shown us how to live and has reconciled us with God through his finished work on the cross. Jesus came to save us from the curse of sin and death in this world, giving us eternal life so that we can live in God’s presence forever. This month, let’s explore and discover who God declares us to be.

Rev. Daniel Jongsma, a retired CRC pastor, lives in Nashville, Tennessee. As a minister of the Word, he shepherded congregations in Elmhurst and Fulton, Illinois; in Dearborn and Kalamazoo, Michigan; and in Nashville. Dan has also served as a church planter in the Chicago area. He and his wife, Gloria, have three adult daughters and four grandchildren.

WHO AM I?

God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them. . . .
—Genesis 1:27

Throughout history, human beings have grappled with three fundamental questions: Who am I? Where do I fit in? What am I supposed to do? These questions have gnawed at us since ancient times. They have shaped our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. At the core of these lies the question of identity as we try to figure out who we really are.

Our world today often tells us we have the power to mold our identity and shape our destiny as we see fit. It claims that we are in control and we can decide who we want to be. But that notion is flawed. We haven't created ourselves, so we do not have the authority to make those claims. According to God, our identity is intricately linked to him as our Creator. We are created in his image, made to reflect his

character and values in all we do.

This month, let's explore the idea of personal identity. Identity is the thing that most clearly defines us. It is tied to our worth, value, and significance. Without a clear sense of identity, we drift aimlessly through life. We become restless, rootless, and fruitless.

When we know who we are, however, we have a firm foundation. We gain the stability we need in order to navigate changes and challenges in life and to become who we are created to be.

Lord, thank you for not leaving us on our own. Thank you for revealing that our true identity is found in you. Help us to reflect your image in our living each day. Amen.

A PROFOUND TRANSFORMATION

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!
—2 Corinthians 5:17

Maybe you have heard some of the profound “I am” statements of Jesus: “I am the bread of life”; “I am the light of the world”; “I am the good shepherd” (John 6:35; 8:12; 10:11, 14). Jesus lived an effective, purposeful life because he knew his identity. With unwavering clarity, he knew he was the Son of God sent to redeem the world.

As we explore the meaning of our identity this month, we’ll find a number of ways to describe ourselves in light of the ways God has created us. We can think of it as a treasure hunt through the Scriptures to uncover our new identity in Christ Jesus.

So often we cling to false notions about identity. We focus on things like athletic prowess, academic achievements, or career success. Or we highlight how funny, famous, or fit we

are. Or even how good a parent we are. But what happens when the applause fades? Do we maintain a firm grasp of who we are?

The apostle Paul explains that when a person comes to faith in Jesus, they undergo a profound transformation. In some ways like a caterpillar emerging as a butterfly, believers transform to become a new creation in Christ. This fundamentally alters the way we think and act. Our identity is no longer defined by fleeting ideas but, rather, by our relationship with Christ.

Lord, thank you for making and remaking us in the image of Jesus. Help us to understand who you have made us to be. Give us the courage to live out our identity in Christ. Amen.

ANCHORED TO CHRIST

Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation. . . .
—James 1:9

Many people today are engaged in a battle for the right to define themselves. It's as if they are saying, "I will invent or reinvent myself, and you must accept me for who I choose to be." But this places immense pressure on people. It also brings on volatility and exhaustion as people try to navigate life together.

God recognizes our need for a stable, reliable identity—one that can sustain us amid the ups and downs of life. He also knows we cannot invent the identity we need. So God made a new life possible for us through Jesus Christ. Jesus willingly gave up his glory, power, and privilege. He came to sacrifice himself on the cross to atone for our sins against God and each other. Through faith in him, we receive his love and righteousness. Our identity is anchored in him rather than

in our achievements or others' opinions of us.

James urges believers who have prospered and become wealthy to recognize their humble position as sinners saved by grace. And he encourages believers who are struggling financially to embrace their exalted position in Christ—loved, accepted, and cherished by God. By doing these things, we can avoid looking down on others and/or trying to outdo others to make up for our feelings of insecurity.

Dear Jesus, thank you for giving up so much, so that we can gain more than we deserve. May we find our identity in you, Lord. Amen.

FINDING MY IDENTITY

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God. . . .
—Romans 1:1

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” Maybe you heard this question as a child or a teenager. Our responses usually focus on some kind of career path or occupation. And as we grow older, we realize that we need some kind of work or career to help us with the costs of living.

Yet consider the nuance of the question. It doesn’t ask, “What do you want to do?” It asks, “What do you want to be?” *Being* has to do with our essence, our character, our identity. And in God’s economy, *being* goes ahead of *doing*. We *are* so that we can *do*.

The apostle Paul opens his letter to the Romans with a defining statement: “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God. . . .” On the face of it, this statement addresses the question “Who am

I?” Yet, looking deeper, we can see that it’s more about “*Whose am I?*” Paul’s identity is inseparable from his relationship with Jesus.

Paul identifies himself as a servant—or, more precisely, a bondservant—of Christ Jesus. In essence, Paul belongs to Jesus, his Redeemer, who called and commissioned him. He no longer lives to please and serve himself but to please and serve the One who has rescued him. This radical Christ-centeredness is the character that every believer takes on. Like Paul’s, our identity becomes inseparable from our transformative relationship with Jesus Christ.

Lord Jesus, guide us to be anchored in your love and to discover our true identity in you. Amen.

I AM BELOVED

"You are precious and honored in my sight, and . . . I love you. . . ."
—Isaiah 43:4

God created you in order to love you and to share a loving relationship with you. That is why you exist—to be cherished by your Creator and to reciprocate that love to him and radiate that love to others. For each one of us, this is the greatest foundational truth we can learn about our existence, and it helps immensely to shape our identity and sense of purpose.

Like many of us, though, you may not always feel loved. Moments of feeling misunderstood, ignored, judged, or even rejected may overshadow your sense of worth. But the Bible reassures us of God's deep and passionate love for each one of us. This love is unconditional—no strings attached. You are God's beloved child—precious, esteemed, and honored in his sight. Go ahead and remind yourself of this truth as often as necessary.

God's love isn't based on our actions or achievements. It transcends our successes, failures, possessions, status, and everything else about us. There's nothing we can do to earn more of God's love or to diminish it. God's love is consistent, steadfast, and true.

Understanding that we are cherished, valued, and treasured by the Creator of the universe shifts our entire perspective. As we embrace this truth, fears and anxieties diminish. We can live with a new sense of peace and contentment, knowing we are beloved by him.

Lord God, thank you for cherishing us. Reassure us of your everlasting love for us each day. In Jesus, Amen.

I AM A CHILD OF GOD

To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. . . . —John 1:12

Because of Jesus and his finished work, all who believe in him are given “the right to become children of God.” In other words, we can become God’s permanent sons and daughters. Each of us can be a child of the King, with a loving Father and a family to belong to.

The bedrock of my identity is that I have a tender, compassionate, loving heavenly Father whose eyes are always on me. As one of his children, I am engraved on the palms of his hands (Isaiah 49:16).

I hope this is true for you as well. Each one of us can be a dearly loved child of God. He describes his beloved children as “the apple of his eye” (Zechariah 2:8).

If you are God’s child, you know that the light of his face shines on you, brightening your heart and mind, filling

you with the warmth of his love and grace, and giving you peace (Numbers 6:24-26).

In the Lord’s faithful care, we know we are loved, “for the LORD takes delight in his people” (Psalm 149:4). “The LORD delights in those who . . . put their hope in his unfailing love” (Psalm 147:11).

The apostle John adds, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1). God loves each of us lavishly and generously as a precious son or daughter. Amazing!

Lord, thank you that in Jesus we can become your children. Help us each day to remember who we are and whose we are. Amen.

I AM A FAMILY MEMBER

“Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”
—Matthew 12:50

Maybe you have had the opportunity to attend a family reunion or an extended family gathering recently. Family members can connect with cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and others that they may not have seen in a while. Gatherings like these can be meaningful, uniting everyone under a common heritage, a family tree.

As a believer in Christ, I am a child of God—and so is every other believer. This means all of us are spiritual brothers and sisters—no matter where we are throughout the world! And although we may be different from one another in some ways, we have a common heritage—we are rooted together in Christ. We have the same heavenly Father and the same ultimate goal: to do the Father’s will. As part of God’s forever family, we share in the same

eternal inheritance that Jesus has secured for us through his death and resurrection.

Sometimes people say that biological family bonds are stronger than other relationships. But in today’s passage Jesus declares that all who follow the Lord are part of his family, and this relationship lasts forever.

In a world of many divisions, it’s good to be reminded of our family connection in Jesus. It’s also good to learn that we are called to serve God together, for we will be living in eternity with these family members from all nations and places!

Father, give us the eyes to see all who follow you as precious family members, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

I AM A MASTERPIECE IN PROGRESS

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

Imagine a skilled artist, carefully crafting a masterpiece. Each detail is carefully chosen to inspire appreciation, imagination, and more. In our Scripture passage today we are reminded that we are God's handiwork. He brings together the pieces of our lives to create a masterpiece for his glory.

The original Greek text for "handiwork" in this passage was closely associated with "poetry." In other words, we are considered as poetic works of art. We are molded and fashioned by the Lord of all into priceless treasures.

But our purpose is not simply to be put on display and admired by passersby. Instead, we are molded and shaped "to do good works." God has purposes and plans for us to fulfill, assignments to complete.

What's more, God is still working on us. We are a good work in progress. We are called and led to keep learning, growing, trying, and trusting as we live by faith for the God who loves us and makes us part of his family. Whether we are bailing hay, studying for a test, teaching a child, washing dishes, creating a website, or doing any of a million other things—we are to work wholeheartedly for the Lord. By the work of our hands we are called to point others to the divine Master of all masterpieces.

Lord, like a canvas or a block of clay, wood, metal, or stone waiting for the artist's touch, may we be open to your leading and guiding hand. May we bring you glory in all we do and say today. Amen.

I AM A PILGRIM

He was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.
—Hebrews 11:9-10

A pilgrim is someone who travels to a place where they long to be. Following a kind of calling, they might journey to a sacred place where they can worship. Or they might move around, ever seeking a place to call home. Followers of Jesus are pilgrims who are called to live for God as they travel through life on their way to their eternal home.

The Bible tells about a pilgrim named Abraham, who followed God's call to go and live in a land that God would show him. God led Abraham to the land of Canaan, where he pitched his tent and worshiped the Lord (Genesis 12:1-8). Yet Abraham lived as a stranger and foreigner in that land. His security was not in a plot of land but in the plan of God. He envisioned an eternal city, to which he spent a lifetime traveling. Abraham lived as a

pilgrim rather than as a permanent settler. Walking by faith rather than by sight, he modeled what it means to follow the Lord.

A pilgrim is different from a settler. Pilgrims never feel totally comfortable with the values and lifestyles of their surrounding cultures. They are careful not to drive their stakes too deeply into the ground. They live with a holy detachment, careful not to hold on to places or things so tightly that they can't go on without them. Pilgrims also regularly long for home. In other words, they live with eternal aspirations, not simply earthly ones.

Lord, help us to live in a such a way that we long for heaven but also aim to represent you here each day. Amen.

I AM AN INVITER

The master told his servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full."

—Luke 14:23

Receiving an invitation is usually seen as an honor, and most people welcome a gracious request to join in. In God's kingdom, our main approach should be simply to invite people to "come and see" what God offers us in Christ—salvation and full life forever! This is often more effective than getting into a debate about a teaching or criticizing others for their beliefs.

In Jesus' parable of the great banquet, God the Father is portrayed as a generous host who wants to share his abundance and joy with others. The host prepares a feast, ensuring that everything is taken care of. God undertakes everything needed for our salvation—even footing the bill by sacrificing his own Son for our sake. And he opens the doors of his kingdom, extending his invitation to all. Ultimately God wants his

house filled with all whom he has invited.

And as followers of Jesus who have become God's servants, we receive an expanded role. We become inviters and bringers, actively seeking and urging others to join us. This role has sometimes been described as "one beggar telling another beggar where to find food"—or, as in this parable, one invited guest informing another guest about the banquet hall brimming with eternal blessings.

Heavenly Father, may we share your good news freely with others. Make us winsome witnesses and inclusive inviters, for in you there is more than enough grace to go around. Amen.

I AM A SERVANT

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.”

—Matthew 20:26-27

What is the pinnacle of achievement, the ultimate honor in life? Is it an Oscar or a Grammy award? An Olympic gold medal? A championship title? A Nobel or Pulitzer prize? How do we measure greatness? Jesus explained that the highest honor and the greatest achievement in life is to be recognized as a servant of God. In God’s kingdom, this calling is second to none.

From our Scripture today we learn that Jesus measures success differently than we do. He doesn’t rate us by material wealth, academic accolades, corporate status, or athletic prowess. Rather, he calls us to humble service—teaching us to use our talents and resources for selfless service to others.

Jesus’ disciples had quarreled about who should have the high ranks in his kingdom.

They were ready to vie for a throne but not for a servant’s towel. But true greatness, joy, and fulfillment are not found in gratifying oneself. In God’s economy, these things emerge organically as a result of serving God and others.

Jesus not only preached this principle; he exemplified it by laying down his own life for us. When our everyday lifestyle consists of serving others, we honor God—and in turn we are blessed.

Lord Jesus, you have shown us how to live. Give us a servant’s heart and a humble, teachable spirit. Help us to follow your lead, living by the law of love. Amen.

I AM A SAINT

*[From] Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To God's holy people in Ephesus. . . .* —Ephesians 1:1

What do you usually think of when you hear the word *saint*? Most of us think of some revered religious person. But what about the person you see in the mirror?

Though most of us don't see ourselves as saints, that is what we are when we believe in Jesus. Because of his work, we are being sanctified, made holy, as we live out our lives serving the Lord—and that means we are saints.

Because of Jesus, I am not what I or others will often perceive me to be. Instead, I am who God declares me to be. Through Jesus' sacrifice for my sake, I am now declared righteous and holy.

Paul understood that we are profoundly transformed in God's sight when we come to faith in Jesus. That's why Paul begins his letter to the Ephesian

believers by addressing them as "God's holy people." Literally, he refers to them as "the saints in Ephesus." Despite being new to the faith and still having a long way to go in their spiritual development, Paul recognizes them as saints.

A saint is someone consecrated to God and set apart for God's service. Through baptism, believers are marked as God's treasured possession, set apart for his divine purposes. Just as it would be foolish to build only a doghouse on the foundation of a skyscraper, it would be foolish to build anything less than a sanctified life on the foundation Jesus established for us.

Lord God, thank you for making us holy in Jesus. Help us to live into our new identity as saints each day. Amen.

I AM A SOLDIER

Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. —2 Timothy 2:3-4

The Bible depicts a cosmic battle taking place between good and evil, between God's kingdom of light and Satan's kingdom of darkness. So when we place our faith in Jesus, we not only become part of a family; we also enter a battlefield. We enlist in a mission to serve faithfully in God's kingdom.

So, what does it mean to be faithful spiritual soldiers? First, we pledge unwavering allegiance to Jesus as our King. We wholeheartedly acknowledge his sovereignty and yield to his authority. We recognize that chaos would result within and around us without submitting to Jesus' authority.

Second, good soldiers know their enemy. They understand that their battle is "not against flesh and blood," as Paul puts it, but against spiritual powers. They understand that neither

conventional weapons, brute force, nor human strategies are going to defeat this spiritual enemy. They study the enemy, know his game plan, and understand how to defeat him—with fervent prayer, godly praise, and self-sacrificial love.

Third, good soldiers are also equipped for battle. They practice spiritual disciplines and put on the armor of God so that they can "stand against the devil's schemes" and faithfully execute their mission.

Lord and King, we are called to serve you in truth and righteousness, faith and prayer, ready to share the good news of Jesus by the power of your Spirit. Amen.

I AM AN AMBASSADOR

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. —2 Corinthians 5:20

An ambassador is a government official who represents their country to another nation. This is often a pivotal role in bridging gaps between nations. An ambassador aims to promote goodwill and cooperation while minimizing outbreaks that could lead to hostility. The aim is to build understanding and tolerance between nations and cultures.

This means ambassadors need to listen and communicate effectively. They should express themselves with tact and diplomacy, demonstrating unwavering loyalty to their own nation while also caring for the people of their host nation. Rather than viewing the host nation as an adversary, competent ambassadors seek to build bridges, not walls. As a result, they are deeply invested in the outcomes of diplomatic negotiations.

What does it mean, then, for believers in Christ to be his ambassadors? As believers, we have been called to be official representatives of God and his kingdom in this world. We serve as emissaries for our Lord and King, speaking and acting on his behalf. This appointment carries honor as well as responsibility. We are entrusted with a message, becoming the voice of the Lord to a broken, hurting world. Under his authority, our aim is to build bridges instead of barriers, seeking to share the good news of Jesus so that people can come to know him as their Savior and King.

Lord Jesus, what a privilege it is to be your ambassadors! May we speak and act faithfully, that the world may know you are the Savior, the Prince of Peace. Amen.

I AM A STUDENT

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.
—2 Timothy 2:15

In the first two decades of life, most people are students. The instruction we receive during that time provides us with the building blocks we need for a productive life.

As believers in Christ, we are also students. We need to learn God's Word and grow in the grace and knowledge of the Savior. We need to absorb God's Word continuously in order to be transformed by the power of his Spirit, who works in us and teaches us the truth and wisdom of God. On a daily basis we need to walk in step with the Lord and his Spirit, growing to know God and to share his love with others everywhere.

There's a tale of a man on a stroll who hears a voice say to him: "Gather some pebbles." Though he sees no one, the voice persists: "Gather some

pebbles and put them in your pocket, and tomorrow you will be both glad and sorry."

Intrigued, the man thinks, "Why not?" So he picks up a few pebbles and puts them in his pocket. The next day he discovers they have been transformed into diamonds. Then he feels gladness for taking some, and he is sorry for not taking more.

Similarly, our study of God's Word may not reveal its benefits right away. Yet over time, nuggets of truth and wisdom will prove to be valuable treasures—blessing our lives in countless ways.

Lord and Teacher, guide us into your Word. May its truths transform our hearts and minds, that we may grow in your wisdom. Amen.

I AM AN INTERCESSOR

I urge . . . first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people. . . . —1 Timothy 2:1

Maybe you have seen a plaque or a sign that says “Prayer Changes Things.” Indeed, God has shown in the Bible that he uses the prayers of his people in his kingdom-building work in this world. Many examples show that God often provides what his people ask for in prayer.

But that doesn’t mean God is something like a good-luck charm or a magic genie that grants our wishes. Our prayers need to be in line with God’s will for our lives and for his kingdom work in this world (see Matthew 6:9-13; 1 John 5:14-15). And while God will often answer our prayers aligning with his will, there are times when the answer may be different from what we ask. At times we don’t understand God’s will or his plans or even his ways (Isaiah 55). Sometimes God’s answer may be “Yes, but not yet” or “Not

in the way you think” or even “No.” (See Luke 22:42.)

In 1 Timothy 2 Paul urges believers to intercede (pray) for everyone—including “kings and all those in authority”—because “this is good, and pleases God our Savior.”

When we intercede faithfully for others, we become personally involved in God’s redemptive work. Each spiritual victory, I believe, is a testament to the fact that someone has been praying.

Lord and Savior, help us to pray faithfully for others, that they may come to know you and have faith in you. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And when we struggle, Lord, please give us your peace. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

I AM A STEWARD

"It will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them." —Matthew 25:14

A steward is someone who takes care of and manages someone else's property or belongings. The steward is not the owner but is responsible to the owner for all that the owner has entrusted to them.

The Bible includes many examples of stewardship. When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he charged them with its care (Genesis 2:15). Since the beginning, humans have been entrusted by God to steward his creation, his blessings, and the very lives he gives them.

In Jesus' parable in our Bible reading today, three servants received bags of gold from their master before he left on a journey. They were expected to be productive, innovative, and enterprising with what they had been given. Specifically, they were to invest their master's resources in

worthwhile ventures, aiming for growth and multiplication. While two servants faithfully embraced this responsibility, one did not. The master's approval clearly fell upon the two who were faithful.

As the Lord's stewards, we don't possess anything on our own. All we have is entrusted to us by our gracious heavenly Father. Yet while we live and breathe, we are called to nurture and care for what God has given us, using it for his glory. Then one day we too will hear the Master's words: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Lord, may we honor you with the time, talents, and treasures you have given us. Guide us to be faithful stewards of all your resources. Amen.

I AM A TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? —1 Corinthians 3:16

The Bible teaches that ever since we fell into sin and brought destruction into God's world, the Lord has been working out a way to live among us and make us holy again. This restoration project is accomplished through Jesus, who came to save us by paying the price of our sin, conquering death, and sending his Spirit to live in us.

Jesus even declared himself to be the temple of God, like the Old Testament one—that sacred space where the presence of God came to dwell among his people (see 1 Kings 8; John 2:19-22). At Jesus' death, the temple curtain tore in two, from top to bottom (Mark 15:38), unveiling the Most Holy Place where God's presence was to reside. This symbolized the removal of the barrier between God and sinners and the restoration of fellow-

ship with God for all who believe. Through the shed blood of Jesus, we are granted access into the Father's presence.

And since Jesus is the new temple, his Spirit has come to live within the heart of every believer. So in this way we have become living temples of God. Rather than dwelling in a building, God now lives in his people—both individually and collectively.

In our hearts God's Spirit works to cleanse and purify us, remaking us to be holy, shaping us to be like Jesus as we live for him. In what ways has God been shaping you lately?

Spirit of God, purify us to live for you, that we may share your love with others, serving faithfully in all you have entrusted us to do. Amen.

I AM A BRANCH

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."
—John 15:5

Have you ever seen the damage to trees after a heavy windstorm? Limbs and branches are often strewn about the landscape, and some land on houses and cars, causing even more damage. Often those branches still have healthy-looking leaves and fruit, but we know they will soon die. When a branch is severed from the main trunk, its vitality is lost. Its lifeline is gone. Its leaves will wither and die, and its fruit will decay.

Jesus conveys a similar message in John 15, saying, "I am the vine; you are the branches." He helps us to see that if we break away from him—the true vine—we will not have his spiritual life in us. Though we may appear vibrant for a while, we will lack the capacity to produce spiritual life, health, or fruit on our own. Only if we

stay connected to Jesus can we bear spiritual fruit that endures.

The main function of a vine such as a grapevine is to bear fruit. And fruit-bearing sums up our purpose as followers of Jesus. In fact, Jesus explains that every branch that bears no fruit will be cut off. But with his Spirit living in us, we will yield fruit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Galatians 5:22-23). This is our calling.

Holy Spirit, by your life-giving power, produce a crop of spiritual fruit in our lives. May your glory shine forth, and may others be enriched by the fruits of our lives. In Jesus, Amen.

I AM A WITNESS

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth."

—Acts 1:8

Before going back to heaven, Jesus called each of his followers to be a witness for him. A witness is someone who can attest to what they have seen or experienced personally.

This calling applies to all of us who follow Jesus today as well. We are called to be reliable witnesses, sharing with others the grace of God that we have personally witnessed and experienced in our lives. This lies at the heart of our identity as followers of Christ.

The task that Jesus has entrusted to us is to carry his life-saving message wherever we go. This magnificent, global mission began with Jesus' first-century followers, and it continues with his 21st-century followers today.

Empowered by his Spirit, we have a story to tell and a life-altering encounter to share. While others may have doubts

about the Bible's teaching or quibble about theology, they cannot refute our personal experience. They cannot change what we know to be true about God's work in our hearts and lives.

Jesus recognized that a transformed life becomes an unstoppable force for good and for God in this world. To the people around you, there is no one better positioned to testify to the life-changing power of God than you.

Think of a story you can share with someone about the Lord's work in your life. Whom will you tell today?

Dear Jesus, fill us with your Spirit. Empower us to be living testimonies of your grace and love, sharing with others our stories of your grace-filled work in us. Amen.

I AM A LIGHT

"You are the light of the world. . . . Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."
—Matthew 5:14-16

When Jesus, by his Spirit, comes into our lives through faith, we undergo a transformation. Our spiritual life is changed as we become new creatures in Christ. As new creations, we transition from being self-serving to being self-giving. We radiate the light and life of Jesus wherever we go.

In Matthew 5, Jesus uses two simple yet profound metaphors—light and salt—to illustrate this personal transformation and the new role we take on in our daily living. Light is life-giving. It brings warmth, energy, and clarity to any situation. When Jesus' power flows through us, we become a catalyst for positive change in our surroundings.

This doesn't mean we are like the sun—generating light on our own. We are more like the moon, reflecting the light of

Jesus so that others don't have to stumble in the darkness of this world.

However, if we hide our light under a bowl, if we try to keep Jesus to ourselves, we make ourselves ineffective. And, worse, people will remain stuck in darkness, blinded by sin. For the sake of the world that Jesus came to save, we need to break out of our holy huddles and shine brightly for Jesus.

Lord and Savior, thank you for shining your radiant light into our hearts and warming us with your love. Help us never to underestimate the impact we can have when we allow you to shine through us. Amen.

I AM SALT

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?"
—Matthew 5:13

My wife is fond of salty snacks. Pretzels, popcorn, and potato chips are among her favorites. It's often appealing to add salt to snacks, vegetables, and other things we eat because it enhances the flavor. When Jesus used this metaphor, he was illustrating the believer's distinctive role in the world. He implied that we are to add a similarly positive influence on our surroundings, in a way like salt can.

Think of how salt can melt snow and ice. As Christ-followers, we can help to thaw the cold indifference that this world often portrays. God's love, which fills us and overflows from us, has the power to soften hardened hearts, thaw frozen relationships, and dissolve disagreements.

Think too of how salt enhances the flavor of foods, often making them more tasty and palatable.

Christ's presence within us can similarly add taste to life. Our presence can inject joy and zest into our homes, schools, workplaces, and communities. We can help make gatherings and settings more pleasant, positive, and welcoming.

In addition, salt serves as a preservative. Before we had refrigeration, salt was the primary method of preserving perishable foods. Similarly, we can help to turn back the corrosive effects of sin in the world. As followers of Jesus, we can bring God's healing, regenerative power to bear on all kinds of situations.

Lord Jesus, use us to bring helpful change in the lives of the people around us, for your glory and for the restoration of this world. Amen.

I AM A RECONCILER

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

—2 Corinthians 5:18

Hostility, conflict, and division seem to be the narrative of our times. Society is splintering at an alarming rate. Yet in this toxic environment we are called to be followers of Jesus Christ. As new creatures, we have been given a calling to extend the reconciling work of Jesus to our world.

Following Jesus' example, we are to work at bridging chasms that divide people. Instead of fueling disagreement with inflammatory speech, we can season our speech with grace and kindness. With a humble spirit of goodwill, we can strive to find common ground with others. We can seek to build networks of understanding. We are called to be God's peacemakers in a divided world.

Our main mission is to assist people in reconciling with God and discovering peace with

him through his Son, Jesus Christ.

As reconcilers, we serve as linking agents of God's mercy and grace. With one hand extended to a hurting world and the other firmly held by our gracious Lord and God, we aim to help others connect with God and find forgiveness and new life in him.

In what ways can you bring the peace of God into your surroundings today?

Spirit of God, empower us to stand in the gap, clarify your message, and radiate Jesus' love to the people around us. May we be vessels of your peace in our world today. Amen.

I AM A FOLLOWER

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said. . . .

—Matthew 4:19

In the children’s game “Follow the Leader,” one person takes up the role of the leader. The rest of the group lines up behind that person, mimicking their actions.

It’s natural for us to follow someone, and we all have role models we admire. These are people we want to pattern our lives after. But we need to ask, “Whom are we following? Whose footsteps are we walking in?”

In the Jewish culture of Jesus’ day, a rabbi (religious teacher) would invite students to join and work with him for a period of time—often years. The invitation would be a call to walk in their way, mirror their actions, and become their disciples. Luke 6:40 describes this process: “The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.” This in-

cluded learning by experience and being shaped to a new way of life.

Jesus extended that kind of invitation to Andrew, Peter, and others, saying, “Come and follow me. Walk closely with me, learn from me, and become my apprentices.” Today Jesus extends that same call to each of us: “Walk in my way, learn from my teachings, and become my disciples. Do life with me so that, over time, you may resemble me.”

Lord Jesus, what an amazing privilege it is to be invited to follow you and learn from you. Guide us, as your disciples, to follow you faithfully each day and bring the good news of your kingdom to people everywhere. Amen.

I AM A FISHER OF PEOPLE

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”
—Matthew 4:19

Imagine receiving an invitation that changes the entire course of your life. Simon Peter and his brother Andrew received that kind of invitation. One day Jesus approached them with a life-changing proposition. In effect, he said, “Until this time, your whole life has centered on catching and selling fish. How about joining me, and I’ll teach you how to catch precious souls for the kingdom of God?”

Note that for Jesus, discipleship (following him) and evangelism (fishing for people) go hand in hand. Once we find ourselves in the safety of Jesus’s lifeboat, we are to extend a hand to help others climb aboard and join with Jesus too. This mission calling isn’t merely an accessory to our lives; it’s integral to who we are and what we do as followers of Jesus. Every believer is called by God to be a

fisher of people. Every congregation is called to be a mission outpost for Christ’s kingdom.

To excel in this calling, we must learn to think like a fish—seeking to understand their ways. We must also keep casting toward nibbling fish. If the fish aren’t biting, we can move on and come back later. Some fish might not be hungry right now, but maybe they will be six months or a few years from now, when God’s Spirit has prepared their hearts. We wait patiently for God to work while we keep fishing for others.

Lord Jesus, thank you for rescuing us and making us part of your rescue team. Guide us as we invite the people around us to find new life in you. Amen.

I AM A FRIEND OF GOD

"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends."

—John 15:15

Having friends is a great blessing. Friends multiply our joys and divide our sorrows. Friends walk in when the rest of the world walks out. Friends know all about us, and they still love us anyway. Proverbs 18:24 notes that "a friend . . . sticks closer than a brother." In other words, a true friend can be relied upon and is always there for us.

The amazing thing is that Jesus, the Savior and King of creation, calls believers his friends. As believers in Christ, we are not just subjects or servants of the Lord of the universe; we are his friends. And he is loyal and true, sticking closer than a blood brother. In John 15, Jesus explains that, like a true friend, he is transparent and open with us: "Everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." No secrets, no deception, no

masks—just an open heart entrusted to his friends.

The truest sign of friendship is sacrificial love. Jesus says, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." Jesus demonstrated this when he went to the cross to pay the price for all our sin. He considered friendship with us so important that he surrendered his very life in order to secure it.

Lord Jesus, it's overwhelming to know that we have a friend in you. Grant us strength in knowing that you want to walk with us through life as our constant, faithful friend. Amen.

I AM GOD'S CHOSEN POSSESSION

He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.
—Ephesians 1:4

The Bible explains that believers have been freely and generously chosen by God. This choosing is not based on our appearance, intelligence, personality, status, or anything else. It's not something we earn or deserve. Instead, it's a purely gracious act.

God, in his great love, initiates the process of salvation. By his sovereign will and good pleasure, God has decided to save us, making rescue and redemption possible for all who have been made in his image (Genesis 1:26-27). Even though we were ensnared in sin, Jesus died to deliver us from the curse of sin and death to make us holy in God's sight.

Being chosen by God is an overwhelming blessing that fills us with humility and helps us see that there is no room for pride or boasting. It also instills in us a sense of security

and confidence, recognizing that our salvation is not based on our religious performance. Instead, as God's chosen possession, we belong to him. Body and soul—in life and in death—we are his, and nothing can snatch us from his hand (John 10:28-30).

What an exhilarating honor—to be chosen, wanted, and valued by the most significant being in the universe!

Gracious God, thank you for choosing us. Thank you for being the author, perfecter, and finisher of our faith. May we live with the assurance that you will complete the good work you have begun in us. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

I AM A CITIZEN OF HEAVEN

Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. —Philippians 3:20

Citizenship has its privileges. Citizens of a nation can have access to education, community services, social services, health care, and more.

Being a citizen of heaven takes us to a different level altogether. When our identity is rooted in Christ, his home becomes ours, because through him we become children of God with an eternal inheritance. Even though we still live here on the earth, we are privileged to live abundantly as part of a kingdom not crafted by human hands.

Being citizens of heaven prompts us to pursue higher goals and take on a broader perspective than mere earthly citizenship can offer. This transforms our priorities, redirects our ambitions, and empowers us to endure.

If you have seen the launching of a hot-air balloon, you

understand the struggle. The more the balloon fills with heated air, the greater the struggle to keep the basket earth-bound. The cords holding it to the ground become taut and strained. And when they are released, the balloon majestically ascends toward the heavens. Similarly in some ways, the more we are filled with God's Spirit, the stronger our vision for life in God's eternal kingdom becomes.

Focusing on these things moves us to live in a way that not only longs for heaven but also seeks to bring a taste of heaven to earth.

Heavenly Father, as we navigate the challenges of this world, may we always put you first in our lives. Help us to anchor our hope in full life with you forever. Amen.

I AM A SEED-PLANTER

"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. . . ."
—Mark 4:26

When Jesus came to live and teach among us, it was common for a farmer to sling a bag of seed over his shoulder and to walk through his fields scattering handfuls of seed onto the freshly tilled soil.

As Jesus explains the process of the seed sprouting and growing in this parable, we can see that the seed symbolizes the good news of salvation, bringing the potential for new life. As Paul explains similarly in Romans 1:16, "The gospel . . . is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes." The gospel is a potent force, capable of transforming lives and entire communities. Like seed hidden beneath the surface, its message takes root out-of-sight, deep within the human heart. There it grows and matures, eventually yielding a harvest of righteousness.

Rather than hoarding the seed of the gospel, we are called to scatter it generously as we journey through life. We scatter seed by supporting missionaries or mission organizations, volunteering for a community service project, inviting a neighbor over for coffee, and more. We sow gospel seed when we nurture spiritual conversations with our family members and friends. We sow seed with colleagues at work. When we spread the good news of Jesus, we participate in the process of bringing forth spiritual fruit.

Lord, you have shared the good news with us and have given us new life. Help us to share it with others, knowing you will make it grow and bring forth a bountiful harvest, to your glory. Amen.

I AM A CONQUEROR

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
—Romans 8:37

In times of uncertainty and seeming chaos, it's natural for people to seek out a strong leader to restore order and bring resolution. It may be a military hero, a political figure, or a charismatic leader. We often look to our own resources to bring stability to a volatile situation, don't we? Yet when we discover the ultimate victor and King, Jesus Christ, we learn, as he states in John 16:33, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Through his triumph over sin and death, Jesus declares victory over every force that opposes God and his plan of restoration. His victory brings hope to believers, promising peace and triumph despite the trials and struggles they may endure.

In light of this, Paul boldly proclaims in Romans 8, "In

all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." The victory Jesus won through his death and resurrection is now shared with his followers. Our identity in Christ transforms us into victors who have new, full life forever in Christ.

When we align with Jesus, no other power or influence can defeat us or keep us down.

Victorious King, thank you for securing the ultimate triumph for us. Guide us to walk with confidence today, knowing that nothing we encounter can ultimately hold back your good purposes for our lives. Amen.

I HAVE A NEW IDENTITY IN CHRIST

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” —John 10:10

Identity theft is a growing threat today. Scammers try to steal our personal information and gain access to our financial accounts.

In the spirit world, another identity thief lurks as well. The master deceiver, Satan, tries to rob believers of the assurance of their new identity in Christ. He tries to sow seeds of doubt, despair, confusion, and insecurity within us. If he cannot possess us, the devil wants at least to wear us down and make us feel defeated, limiting our service for God and his kingdom.

But we are not alone. We have the presence of God in our hearts, and we have God's Word to assure us and strengthen us with the truth. Jesus promises that we will have life to the full, and no one can snatch us out of his hand (John 10:28-30). The Lord and his Word remain our best protection, affirming

that we are not defined by past successes or failures but only by our union with Christ. Through faith, we receive his righteousness and become the children of God. We are forgiven, cleansed, and commissioned to be his representatives in the world. As God's handiwork, we are created to do good works that honor the Lord and bring blessing to others. As God reassures us through his Spirit and his Word, we are redeemed, beloved, and empowered to live out his purposes with confidence and grace each day.

Lord, help us to see that our worth is defined by you, not by the opinions of others. By your Word and Spirit, assure us always that in you we have full life forever. Amen.

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