

Grappling with Your Identity - Section Summaries

Part I Overview – Falling Short & Faking It

Occasionally, after a stunning success, we bask in others' approval. Yet far too often we fall short of our goal and fail to receive the affirmation for which we hunger. At those times, the uneasy times, people and circumstances, not to mention our own self-judgmental thoughts, generate a nagging fear that we are flawed to the core. Most of us doubt our self-worth.

Such self-doubt spawns a host of unwise choices. We begin with self-absorption (which only increases our awareness of our failures), move into a quest to improve ourselves (good luck), and end up with various phony roles behind which we hide. We turn falling short into faking it. We're wasting our time – self-effort won't rid us of self-doubt.

The first part of this book details our predicament. Chapter 1, Self-Confusion, exposes our doubt of our worth and our confusion about who we are. Chapter 2, Somebody Besides Me, shows us the need to be aware of others. Chapter 3, Identity Problems, unmask the roles behind which we hide and assures us that God gives us worth that won't disappear, even when we fail.

What if, when we fall short, we no longer have to fake it?

Part II Overview – Real Worth & Pseudoworth

An early Russian cosmonaut after announcing that he couldn't see God in the heavens, gloatingly declared his fallacious conclusion: God must not exist! Too bad the cosmonaut relied on his skeptical eyes.

We buy into a similar fallacy about our worth. We look for visible evidence of our value (possessions, successes, youth, beauty), find a lot of contradictory evidence, and conclude that our self-worth is more defective than our flabby abs. But what if our value isn't tied to the visible? What if we (the person inside) can't be seen but can be known? What if value, though not visible, is nonetheless real?

The second part of this book sets the worth God has given us side-by-side with the pseudoworth we manufacture on our own. Chapters 4-6 reveal three Biblical perspectives on who we are. Chapters 7-9 unmask the false selves we substitute for the self whom God has created.

Are you hungry for real worth?

Part III Overview – Death Begins

When Adam rebels against God, his decision profoundly alters his identity. Though the image of God is not lost, it is damaged. Adam's living self morphs into a dead caricature of God's original design; his initial beauty suffers a deep and devastating change. Adam, the living being, is now Adam, the dying being.

Adam's death spreads to us all. Each of us starts our life physically alive but spiritually dead. We all bear the damaged image brought about by Adam's act. God will provide a way to restore that damaged image to its original aliveness, but before we can appreciate His re-creation of life, we must understand the death from which we need rescue.

The third part of this book reveals our desperate need for release from death. Chapter 10, The Entrance of Death, describes Adam's deadly rebellion. Chapter 11, The Spread of Death, connects Adam's rebellion

with the spread of death throughout the world and shows how Adam's choice to disobey God affects us all.

How does Adam's death impact you?

Part IV Overview – Life Begins Again: A New Identity

When we accept Jesus, God recreates in us the inner life and wholeness that Adam lost when he sinned. Adam didn't lose his worth, but he did lose his aliveness. Adam's identity shifted.

God's second creation, a birth from above, reverses that shift. We become no longer dead but alive, no longer corrupt but new and clean, no longer fragmented but whole in Him. We receive a new living self.

The New Testament account of this second creation sounds uncannily similar to the original Genesis event: living spiritual beings reflect God's image, God blows into earthen vessels, the Spirit hovers near at the birth of new life, new creations spring into being, and selves become complete. The parallels are unmistakable. God does with us what He originally did with Adam – and we don't believe it. God gives all Christians a gloriously new inner being, yet most of us believe we're still inwardly appalling.

The fourth part of this book details the changes occurring at this birth from above. Chapters 12-15 describe the new self given at salvation. Chapter 16 challenges Christians' tenacious doubt that they have a new identity.

How would you describe who you are?

Part V Overview – Blindness to Sight

Christians have a new self. That's a fact. But that fact doesn't ensure that we'll believe we've been changed, and it doesn't guarantee that we'll differentiate who we now are from who we were.

The fifth part of this book sorts out our unbelief and confusion. Chapter 17, *Blind Men Walking*, points out our trouble seeing reality. Chapter 18, *Pirates, Mirrors, and Glory*, tells how we can perceive what can't be directly seen. Chapter 19, *Expectations and Exhaustion*, shows how our efforts to "act new" drain us of energy. Chapter 20, *Double Vision, Single Self*, exposes the typical (and erroneous) Christian confusion of flesh with self. Chapter 21, *Not Self but Sin*, differentiates between self and that ungodly flesh-sin-death trio. Chapter 22, *Double World, Single Focus*, helps us experience the new self that God has already produced.

*Do you delight in who you are?
Do you think God delights in who you are?*

Part VI Overview – Authenticity & Dignity

How do we apply what we've been talking about? How do we start to live out who we are? That depends on whether we're spiritually alive or whether we're not.

How about you? Are you joined to Jesus or are you still living on your own? Either way, the choices before you are profound.

Authenticity and Dignity, the final part of this book, lays out the practical and significant consequences of knowing who we are. Chapter 23, *Being Who We Are*, summarizes the profound influence that self (and our view of self) has on our thoughts, emotions, and choices. Chapter 24, *Being Me at the Airport*, details

how the Lord carefully planned an overseas trip to teach the author how to move from the shame of humiliation into the glory of humility.

God gives life and glory. Will you embrace His gifts?

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