

CHRIST, MY IDENTITY & LIFE-GIVING PRAYER

Introduction

Prayer is the act of communicating with God which comes out of our relationship with Him. This is something anyone and everyone can do. Communication is the foundation for all strong relationships. We all have a relationship with God in some way. However, God doesn't want to have just a relationship with you. He wants to have an *intimate relationship* with you. This intimate relationship is equivalent to the relationship He has with His Son, Jesus Christ. Prayer is more than just communicating, it is *communing* with God. Communion is defined as *the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially when the exchange is on a mental or spiritual level*. God desires intimacy and He invites us into that intimacy by sharing His glory with us.

John 17:22-23

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

God is able to extend His glory to you because of who you are in Christ. Your identity in Christ opens the way to an intimate relationship with God. Most Christians do not have a correct understanding of their identity in Christ and therefore fail to achieve intimacy with God. Their relationship with God is built upon their Christian performance, a misunderstood identity, and will always fall short of intimacy. The result of a misunderstood identity is guilt, feeling not worthy enough. Intimacy with God flows out of your identity in Christ.

Prayer, like all faith activities, can either be a laborious chore or it can be a life-giving reward springing out from your intimate relationship with God. When you understand your true identity in Christ, the result is a restored, intimate, fatherly relationship with God. The door to intimacy with God is the understanding of your Christ identity, and the fruit of intimacy is life giving prayer.

Your Identity in Christ

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defined identity as: "the distinguishing character or personality of an individual." I was born in Vietnam and have Vietnamese parents. When I fill out identification forms, I always declare on there that my race is Asian. This is my earthly identity that I inherited by birth. What is your distinguishing character or personality that you were born with?

As Christians, you were born with an earthly identity, and were also spiritually born with a Christ identity. What does this identity look like? Your Christ identity says that:

- You are created in God's image (Gen. 1:27; Rom. 8:29)
- You are a child of God (John 1:12, 13; 1 Pet. 1:3)
- You are forgiven (Rom. 8:1,2; Acts 26:18)
- You are loved (Rom. 1:7; 2 Thes. 2:16)
- You are a saint, perfected through Christ (Heb. 10:14, 13:12; 1 Pet 2:9; Rom. 1:7)
- You are Christ's image to the world (salt & light to the world) (Matt. 5:13, 14; Acts 1:8)

Though you have a physical identity and a spiritual identity, the Christian life is not a mixture of the old self and the new self.

The Christian life is not a mixture of old and new.

It feels as though that your Christian life is a mixture of the old and the new self. However, this is not what the Bible teaches.

Luke 5: 36-39

He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins."

John 3:3-7

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

Nicodemus, in this passage, represents a religious person. He embodied everything that is religious in his society. Nicodemus was a religious scholar, a teacher of the law, and he was also a religious leader. He is your modern-day pastor of pastors, a bishop in some Christian circle. What do religious teachers teach? They teach that in order to please God, you must study God's law and try to live it out to the best of your ability. And if you have trouble living out God's law, then you need to be more devout. You need to try harder, go to more conferences, read more religious books, join a certain Bible study group, etc.

What was Jesus' reaction to religious devotion? He didn't endorse Nicodemus. Instead, Jesus presented him a truth that sounded so strange to him: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Through being born again you are given a new wineskin, a new life. The old has gone, the new has come. This new life is made to contain the new wine, the new truth. The solution is not a mixture of the old and the new. It is not battling the flesh so that your spirit will thrive. However, it is realizing that the old has passed away and the new life is here.

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God...

Here is where the confusion resides. You don't FEEL like a new creation and so it SEEMS as though you have an old self and a new self all wrapped up in one. However, the Bible teaches us that the old has passed away. It has died. You are now a new creation. Paul's letter to the Galatians says this in a more vivid way.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Ephesians 4:21-24

...assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

You have died and you no longer live. You still have a physical body, but it is Christ who lives in that body. You now live by faith in Christ. This is difficult to understand and therefore, does not seem logical. Jesus Christ living in this broken body of ours is a mystery unto our minds, but it is not unfamiliar to the Scripture. In Corinthians the Bible teaches that our "body is the temple of the Holy Spirit."

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Romans 6:4-5

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Romans 6:11

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Your life is more than what you perceive through your physical senses and more than what your wisdom or knowledge tells you. Your senses and your mind cannot understand that you have been buried with Christ and you no longer live. Yet this is the truth taught in the Bible. This is who you are. This is where you begin living your new self. This is where you start taking your steps of faith. "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God (Gal. 2:20)."

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Take 3-4 minutes to reflect (meditate) on your identity in Christ and the scriptures about your new self. You may use this time to write your response to #2 below.
2. Write down your thoughts and feelings about the teaching that your old self is dead, and you are now a new creation in Christ.
3. Take 1 minute to end this time with a prayer response to God.

Our needs & God's provision

Life is not about what you need. It is about who you are. God's provision for His children is not a mathematical formula. Being God's children doesn't mean that whatever you want, God is going to drop it out of the sky for you. God will provide for His children, but it's not on your demand. If you know your true identity in Christ, it doesn't matter if you are hungry or if you are living in the poorest part of the world. The greatest provision given to you was His Son, Jesus Christ. Your identity in Christ is your greatest treasure because life is more than just physical needs. It is about who you are. Being a child of God, living Christ's life, is beyond anything this world can offer you. So much that Paul said: "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain (Phil. 1:21)."

Jesus died on the cross in order to give you this identity. He took on your sins so that you can take on His righteousness. You are holy because you have been sanctified by God through Christ. You inherited this by birth. Your Christ identity was given to you when you were born again.

You Receive Christ's Identity When You Were Born Again

God asked me this thought-provoking question that began my meditation journey on this topic. He asked: "Of all the vocabularies in the Hebrew language (or human languages) why did Jesus chose the words 'born again' to express the greatest spiritual truth of Christianity?" I invite you to meditate on this same question and embark on this journey with me.

When it comes to the subject of "Born Again," we tend to gloss over its meaning. Or we substitute the meaning for something else. For example, we tend to define born again as "conversion." You may have heard someone asked, "Have you been born again?" What they meant was, "Have you had a conversion experience where you asked Jesus to come into your life to be your Lord and Savior?" Born again encompasses conversion, but it is more than conversion.

These two simple words transcend all languages. Every language on Earth has a word for "born" and a word for "again." Missionaries and Bible translators do not need to come up with new words to convey the meaning for birth or again. Furthermore, the concept of birth can be understood by an 8 years old to an 80 years old. Birth can be understood by the uneducated tribal people to the great philosophers of the world. The words born again transcend language, ethnicity, age, and education. Anyone, anywhere on Earth can understand God's path into the Kingdom of God. However, the irony is that we tend to substitute the simplicity of this understanding for something else that sounds more "holy." What are some simple lessons you can learn from the concept of born or birth?

Born convey the simple meaning of beginning. Can you tell me about the time before you were born? No, you cannot. Birth is the beginning of your life. From the point of your birth onward, your total focus and energy is on living this life. You do not swing back and forth between the desire to live a past life and the desire of your current life. So why are you doing this in your spiritual life? The "traditional" church has been teaching you to battle your old self. You were taught that your life consists of an old and new self, and you are being pulled on both sides. So, you must fight to resist the old in order to live the new life. Though that idea seems logical, it is contrary to New Testament teachings as I have presented presented to you. Birth conveys a beginning, a time where before that, you didn't exist. You came into existence by birth. Hence, the first lesson we learn is: Birth is the beginning of life. There was no past life before birth.

As I have shared earlier, I am an Asian by birth. That is my physical identity. The second lesson we learn from birth is that it's the origin of your identity. You were born into an identity. You receive Christ's Identity when you were born again. This makes you a child of God. You inherited God's characters and attributes upon this new birth. Christ's likeness lives fully in you. God's DNA, His "seed," is in you because he gave birth to you.

1 Peter 1:23

since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

1 John 3:9

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God

God's DNA is in you. Your job is to live it out. Learn to master that which you have inherited by birth.

The third lesson from the concept of birth is that you play no part in your birth or how you obtained your physical identity. You did nothing to cause your birth, and likewise, you did nothing to earn your salvation nor your identity. You play no part in how your identity turned out to be. I did not choose to have black hair and tan colored skin. I inherited them by birth. We like to think that we have a part to play in our sanctification, but that's not what the Bible teaches.

Sanctification

Sanctification is God's work in you. Sanctification does not require any effort from you. On the contrary, your part in sanctification is to enjoy it. Picture it this way. Sanctification is a new suit that God had tailored and gifted you. Your part is not to do anymore sewing to the already finished work. Your part is to enjoy the new suit that God had put on you. I had no part in having black hair and tanned skin. My Asian looks, even my characters, were given to me. What I did was learn to enjoy my Asian likeness and characteristic.

Go back to the story of Nicodemus. This Pharisee represented everything that is the church today: the law, performance, spiritual growth, etc. The first thing that Jesus said to him was: no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. In other word, Jesus said to him: "Stop being the church. Stop teaching about human efforts, what you must do to enter the Kingdom of God, or what you have to do to retain your salvation. Stop it!" It has NOTHING to do with YOU.

John 1:12-13

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

You are children BORN into God's family. It all has to do with God. You must be born again. You must be born of God! It is not by your human effort, decision, nor your will. It has nothing to do with you! Stop adding to the finished work of

God. Enjoy being God's children instead of trying to be God's children. Your sanctification is not dependent on your efforts. It is something you were already born with. We are not "outsiders" trying to do the right things in order to be "adopted" into the family of God. We are "insiders," we are children by birth, doing the right things so as to enjoy God and enjoy being His son or daughter.

Enjoying God

Place yourself in the Garden of Eden for a minute. There is no sin, no fault to be made right, no troubles in your heart. There is no need to labor and toil for food. Evil is nowhere to be found in people or animals or nature. You are in the middle of a paradise. What would you say is the purpose of God for creating and placing you in that paradise? Would it be to enjoy God? Imagine your children are in this same garden. They don't need to be pressure with schoolwork and career choices. Remember there is no need to labor for food or for money. What would you want them to do in this paradise? Wouldn't it be to enjoy you and you to enjoy them? This is your Father's heart and purpose way back in Genesis and it is His purpose in redeeming you in Christ. God redeemed you for the sole purpose to enjoy Him.

Luke 15:25, 28-32

25 "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

The older son was just as lost as the younger one. Though he didn't run away from home, he was so distanced from his father that he could not enjoy him. He was so wrapped up in trying to please his father that he has forgotten his own identity. He is an heir of the family and a beloved son. His father loves both of them because they were his sons, not because they have earned his love. However, the older son was so busy trying to prove himself to his dad that he was lost to his own identity. He was trying so hard to earn his father's love that when his father showed love, it was strange to him. His definition of his father's love has been so warped that he could not recognize real love. His own misguided idea of earning his father's love has prevented him from enjoying his father's love. You are now release from "doing" Christianity. You are release from trying to prove yourself to God. God is saying to you, "Son/daughter, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. Come, enjoy me."

Intimacy with God

You are loved because you are God's baby. God doesn't just tolerate you; he really loves you. Have you ever met a newborn baby that you don't find lovable? Newborns are wrinkly and messy. They make messes and cry and fuss, but they are so adorable. All babies are so cuddly adorable. You want to know something? That's you. That adorable baby boy or girl is you in God's eyes. You are a newborn in Christ and God loves you so much. Our Heavenly Father want to have an intimate, loving relationship with you! The problem is that you cannot have an intimate relationship with God if you do not have this simple understanding of being born again.

Unfortunately, many of us were taught differently. We were taught a performance Christianity. We were taught to "bear fruits in keeping with repentance." And if you do not bear fruit, God will cut you off from the vine. Performance Christianity will only produce pride or shame. It does not produce intimacy. You always come to God trembling in fear because of some past sins. This is not at all what it means to be born again. Let me reminds you who you are in Christ. You are a newborn baby learning to live this new life with God. You are still messy, fussy, and stumbling. You are imperfect. But when God looks at you, He sees a perfect, beautiful baby. He is wrapping His arms around you and hugging you with His everlasting bear hug of love. What is your reaction? You are squeezing Him back with your tiny arms that barely wrapped halfway around Him. This is intimacy. When you are released from your performance, intimacy pours out. Intimacy does not require words. You can just sit quietly in the arms of God and your heart would be full of joy, enjoying His warm embrace. You can just sit and reflect on a few words of Scripture and find it fascinating, life giving. This is intimate prayer. You can be busy with life and yet still feel His warm arms embracing you. Sometimes His smile would peek through the clouds. Or His hands brushed you with a gentle breeze and your heart just flutter with the phrase, "thank you Jesus." Prayer flowing from intimacy does not stop. It never ceases. Living in this intimate, fatherly love will release you from the need to "do" things for God. It turns you to living a life of enjoying God. It leads you to true rest.

Matthew 11:28

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Hebrews 4:9-10

So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

Psalms 23:2

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

God is "making" you to recline on His shoulder today, and everyday going forth. Your focus each day is to learn to enjoy God. Come taste and see that He is good. Two prayers that I often pray to God after understanding my identity and what it means to be born again is:

"Lord help me to live You in me today."

"God, I want to enjoy You. Help me to enjoy You today."

Intimacy comes from knowing who you are and who God is to you. Prayer no longer is a thing that you do. Prayer is now life. It is like breathing. It doesn't stop, and it's not time defined. You wake up in the morning and you are in prayer because God is there with you. He has prepared this new day just for you. Read a short passage of Scripture to start your day. Or Reflect on a Scriptural theme that God has invited you to meditate on. Reflect on it throughout the day and listen to God. He will commune with you throughout the day or touch you in some way to let you know He is there. In these moments, breath out words of thanksgiving to Him. Or you will encounter things that will be opportunities for you to breath out an intercessory prayer. In the past you have encounter these moments, but you would gossip about it or give it food for thoughts that feeds your wondering minds. Today, that's different. You pray instead of talking. You actually care for the people or subject matter that comes to you and you say a short prayer for them.

My prayer is that when you understand your true identity in Christ, the result would be a restored, intimate, fatherly relationship with God. The door to intimacy with God is your Christ identity. The fruit of intimacy is life giving prayer and enjoying God.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Reflect on your sanctification journey. Are you burden with trying to be a Christian? Read through the Scriptures in this section again and listen to God speaking to you.
2. Write down what God is saying to you.
3. Picture yourself as a cuddly little baby in God's arm. Does this bring you joy? Jot down these feelings.
4. End this reflection time with these two prayers.
"Lord help me to live You in me today."
"God, I want to enjoy You. Help me to enjoy You today."

CHRIST, MY IDENTITY & LIFE-GIVING PRAYER
Scripture text: John 3:1-15, Galatians 2:20, Luke 15:11-32

Preliminary Homework

Read these Bible verses.

- Luke 5: 36-39
- John 3:1-15
- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- Galatians 2:20
- 1 Corinthians 13:11
- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- Romans 6:4-5
- Romans 6:11

1. What do these verses say about your old self?

2. What do these verses say about your new self?

Read these Bible verses.

- 1 Peter 1:23
- 1 John 3:9
- John 1:12-13

3. What do these verses say about your new birth?

Read these Bible verses.

- Luke 15:11-32
- Matthew 11:28
- Hebrews 4:9-10
- Psalm 23:2

4. What do these verses say about work and rest?