

Chapter 7

WHO AM I?

Kristen comes to school making sure she has the “in” look. The clothes she wears and how she wears them, her hairstyle, and even her car has to create an image, it has to say who she is and what she is all about. Are you like Kristen or the male equivalent? Or are you like most of the rest of the world, where you have days you wish you were someone else because you think they are just so cool and you aren’t? Do you have those kinds of days when you look at yourself in the mirror and you don’t like the person you see because you don’t feel you live up to the expectations of your peers?

We all have days like that from time to time but for many there are too many of those days. And of course there are the Kristen’s of the world, those who really think they are something special because they are just so cool, so in, and so mislead as to what is really important in life.

What makes you feel good or bad about yourself? In other words, what standard do you use when you judge yourself? We often judge ourselves by how we define the type of person we want to be. For example, if being the most attractive person around is what is important to you, then you will judge yourself by your appearance (and you may judge everyone else by that same standard). If wealth or status is what really matters then you will judge yourself and others by wealth and status indicators.

We typically make lifestyle choices based on trying to live up to the image we create for ourselves. As illustrated in this chapter’s example of Christen, the clothes we wear and the image we try to create with our appearance are often intended to make a statement about what we think is important in life, for many it will be our possessions that are our statement makers. Our spiritual relationship will be affected by the image we try to create and live up to so an important question we should ask ourselves is – who am I?

How do we determine who we are? We determine who we are by how we form our identity. An identity is when we determine our own value (self-worth) by something we identify with. That something can be what we own, do, look like, earn, believe in, and other internal or external factors. In the 60s a common expression was “I need to find myself”. In the 60s old values were being rejected and new values explored. People were in search of an identity. The problem with the 60s was the values being rejected were values that contributed to a healthier society, values such as sexual constraint, self-sacrifice and self-discipline, respect and concern for others, and other biblically based values.

These values were replaced by values that seemed to emphasize self-indulgence instead of self-control. Free love (sex without responsibility) and getting high became the norms of the day. Doing what’s best for others was not as valued as doing what’s best for me. In fact the 60s gave birth to the “me generation”. So what resulted from these “liberating” values? Huge increases in crime, addiction problems, increased suicide rates, the decrease of family stability due to increases in divorce, an endemic of children being born to children themselves, parents not prepared to be parents, huge increases in sexually transmitted diseases, and a bunch of people who are not really enjoying life because they fail to understand what brings true fulfillment. And these are the same values that heavily influence our culture today. Whatever influences our culture also creates peer pressure to conform to those values.

In the 60s people questioned their identity, the values they lived and were influenced by, and more than ever that is what we need to do today, especially since the values our society seems

to accept today does little to add to a high quality life. Too often our identity is based on superficial reasons that leave us with feelings of emptiness deep down inside. We really need to think about the values we accept and how those values affect our quality of life. We need to examine how much our friends, classmates, coworkers, teammates, teachers, and others shape our values and our identity.

Peer pressure at an early age starts most into forming an identity based on meaningless reasons. Mid-school students begin to identify with rockers, preppies, jocks, freaks, and gangs or whatever the categories of the day are popular. Gangs have become a major problem because many are joining in order to feel accepted. Gang members are those who reject their parent's values (often coming from broken families or families that do not teach any values) and being accepted by thugs becomes important because they now have a group to identify with.

The other extreme is teens and young adults who form their identity on materialistic based values such as the clothes they wear and cars they drive. What is really sad is if you asked these individuals how what they identify with makes them a better person they will be hard pressed to give an intelligent answer, especially if asked how they are better in God's eyes.

As we get older we still form our identity on the wrong things but they are just different things. How much we earn, what neighborhood we live in, what we do for a living, what causes we believe in, and what we own become very important to us. People can go to such extremes as even determining their value by the pets they own. Hollywood and the entertainment industry influence many to form their identity on physical appearance and this can make us feel good or bad about ourselves for something we had nothing to do with. We don't choose our genes!

Very attractive individuals can put too much importance on their appearance while neglecting more important character development. The other extreme is individuals who have low self worth because they feel they do not compare to super-models or super-studs. For women this has caused serious health problems such as anorexia. Sexual morality is effected because guys are influenced to conform to peer pressure that views women as sexual conquests while women face peer pressure that puts an over emphasis on sexuality.

We are too easily deceived by the entertainment media as advertisements, fads, and peer pressure brought on by the influence of the media cause us to make unimportant things important. Too often we go with the flow or go with the crowd without thinking about what we are going along with. Maybe this is one of the reasons we are often described as sheep in the bible and Jesus is referred to as our shepherd. We have a herd mentality and left without proper guidance we easily wander off and fall prey to "spiritual wolfs". The secular entertainment industry is a big, bad wolf that feasts on our culture.

Even something as meaningless (I am talking primarily from a fans point of view) as sports can effect our identity. I have always enjoyed sports and know people involved with sports can suffer from misplaced identities big-time. Have you or anyone you have known lived or died by how their favorite sports team did? I have been very guilty of this. I am from Cleveland Ohio and often my worth was tied to how my beloved Indians, Browns, or Cavaliers did. A victory or loss could effect how I felt for days or even longer. None of my teams have won any championships since 1963 so after four decades of frustration I am finally "cured".

Coaches often value themselves, and are typically valued by others, by wins and losses, even those who are "volunteer" coaches for club type (YAFL, AAU etc.) teams. Parent's egos are effected by how their child performs in a game or if their team wins. I always am amazed when I read about parents getting into fights at the games of their children. We often read about violence

from fans after major sporting events. A goalie was actually murdered because he allowed a game-winning goal in a World Cup soccer game!

The identity problem is much worse for those actually participating in sports and I want to address this issue because athletics is a major part of the culture for college and high school students. Athletes can be very guilty of forming their identity on their performance. A talented athlete can develop an inflated self-worth. This can cause him or her to hurt the team and be uncaring of others because of selfishness. An athlete with lesser talent or an athlete in a “slump” can suffer from a deflated self-worth that can affect future performances as well as relationships because he or she is so unhappy with him or herself. These problems are magnified in high profile sports because performance is in clear view of many to see and judge

Self-worth can even be affected by external factors such as team performance (any organization you work for or are involved in can be viewed as your team) or the expectations of others. I know a very talented volleyball player, an overachiever in my opinion, who was robbed of enjoying a great college career because she allowed her value to be tied to the team's losing record. Playing on a winning team can be equally or more difficult because expectations are raised. Often sports fans, coaches, and players will set standards much higher than should be realistically expected and if a team does not meet these expectations they can feel like they are “losers”, even though the team may have a record many other teams would envy.

You can develop a poor self-image if you don't live up to the expectations of others even if those expectations are totally unrealistic. These problems are not unique to sports. Placing our value on performance expectations can be a problem in jobs or relationships as well as sports. We can consider ourselves failures when outsiders looking in would do anything to trade places with us (i.e. many high school athletes would love to play on any losing college team). Problems such as these that cause us to feel like failures will be discussed in more detail in chapter 9 – Dealing With Failure.

Unfortunately not much changes for Christians concerning our self-image. We are as guilty as anyone in basing our identity on performance expectations as well as material possessions. We can form our identity on how spiritual we are or are not. We can develop a prideful attitude of superiority based on spiritual gifts we have, how often we attend church each week, or our position in the church. The following chapter on pride (chapter 8) deals with this issue in more detail because we need to be aware pride can be a serious problem. Conversely our identity can suffer if we start to compare ourselves with those who go to church several times a week or appear to be more “spiritual”.

Christians can get involved with dangerous cults if they identify with a charismatic leader who tells them only what they want to hear. The truth is not important to many individuals involved with cults, especially if it reminds them of their sinful condition, as a message or teaching that reinforces a cause they believe in and that they identify with. In other words they are more interested in justifying their actions or beliefs than knowing God's truths.

It should be evident we are all guilty of forming our identity on things that do not bring true fulfillment because of the competitive nature of our culture. God knows what fulfills and what doesn't and He knows what we have been brainwashed to think what is important only stands in the way of having the type of relationship He desires. This is why Jesus said these words -

Luke 16:15 He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

Putting our identity in the things we typically do sets ourselves up for problems with our pride on one end of the scale and on the other end we get set up for major disappointments because life is so uncertain and we are so human. We lose heart when we fail to live up to the image we desire, and believe me this happens all too often, and we feel inadequate. We can always find someone who earns more, owns more, looks better, goes to church more, prays more, or does what we do better. This causes us to covet (desire to have what someone else has) and takes away from enjoying the blessings God has given us. Feelings of inadequacy and guilt can start entering our life when we compare our lives to others. This is when we start to wish we were someone else or we don't like the person we see in the mirror. Or what can be just as bad, we think we're much better than we really are for all the wrong reasons.

We need base our identity on our relationship with God. We need to find out what is important to him and make it important to us. John 1:12 tells us all who "receive" Jesus, accept him as our savior, have the right to become children of God. So our identity needs to be as a child of God and if we adopt this identity it will change our view of what is important.

The following verse makes it very clear how our relationship with God should impact how we view ourselves, and it is quite obvious the standard we should use is very different from what the world typically uses to judge success and the value of an individual. Knowing God, our father, should be what is most important to us.

Jeremiah 9:23,24 This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

And please understand you can know of God but not know God, and know God and not know of Him. Knowing or not knowing scripture is not what really matters (for new believers) because there are many who know scriptures but do not have an understanding of who God is and what is important to Him, like the Pharisees during the time of Jesus. A new believer may not know scripture (long-time believers should have an understanding of scripture because they should have a desire to know all they can about God and reading the bible is how you know Him) but their heart is longing to know Him and that matters. If your heart is right, if you have a desire to know and understand God's Truths, you will be changed and your life will have tremendous value because this is what pleases God. Your value is based on your heart, not your income, education, or whatever!

Having a different identity, having a changed heart, than what we had before we committed to a relationship with Jesus is a significant aspect of the Christian life. This is why Jesus said in John 3:3 you must be born again – in other words we are to become a new (reborn) person. We should be changed individuals! Being born again means we should have a new perspective on life. It should change what we view to be important and what has been important to us should become less important, especially if we have placed a high value on the things the world typically values. What is important to God should become what matters to us.

There are only two "rituals" performed in or through the church that are vitally important to believers and both are highly symbolic of our identity as children of God, therefore members of God's family. Baptism and Communion (often referred to as "The Lord's Supper") are rituals expected of us by Jesus because he wants us to understand how our spiritual relationship should change us. Our faith in him should create an identity in us that should make us different from non-believers, our faith should set us apart from them.

Being willing to perform an outward ritual as an inward commitment to become a member into God's family, and as evidence that his followers are to be different than those who do not follow him, has been a method God has required of his people ever since his covenant with Abraham, which is recorded in the book of beginnings – Genesis. An understanding what a “covenant” is according to biblical context is important because our salvation can be viewed as a result of God's covenant with us.

A covenant is an unchangeable, divinely imposed legal agreement between God and man that stipulates the conditions of their relationship. Mankind either accepts or rejects these conditions, there is no negotiating with God, and as a result either enjoys the blessings associated with the covenants or suffers the consequences that will result from not accepting his conditions. The core principle behind God's covenants is his desire to draw mankind into a relationship with him.

In the 17th chapter of Genesis God confirms an earlier covenant he made with Abraham, a promise to provide land, in other words a country (Canaan) for Abraham's descendants. In verse 1 God tells Abraham to walk before him and be blameless, a condition set forth in this covenant. This was a call for integrity, a call for Abraham (and it is inferred this holds true for his descendants) to know that God's eyes were always on him and for him to be fully devoted to God. As a constant reminder, a sign, of this covenant God required all those in the household of Abraham, servants as well as family members, to become circumcised. Circumcision was also required of all his descendants, all those that were called to be God's people. God's end of the deal was that he was to be their God, along with protection and blessing that come with following him, and that Abraham would be fruitful, the father of many great nations.

A divine calling concerning the covenant was again made known to Moses. The book of Exodus, which is the story of the deliverance of God's people from Egypt, an exodus led by Moses, tells of the laws, including the ten commandments, and rituals (chapters 19-24) required to sustain the covenant between God and man. Again the core principle behind God's covenant is – a calling to be different from those who do not follow God. Part of being different was obedience to God's laws and standards, and with this obedience came blessings (Psalms 25:10: All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful to those who keep the demands of the covenant).

In the Old Testament book of Jeremiah (a Prophet of God) we are given a preview of a new covenant with the same old theme – a calling to be different because of our relationship with God. In chapter 31 verses 31 – 34 God states he will make a new covenant and it will not be like the old covenant. He states he will put his laws on our hearts and minds, a reference to us being “in the Spirit”, and he will be our God and we will be his people. He tells us in verse 34 he will forgive us our sins and remember them no more, a prediction of what our Savior Jesus Christ will do for his believers.

The New Testament book of Hebrews, especially chapters 8-11, explains the connection between our superior new covenant with God, a covenant based on our faith in Jesus, and the covenants with Abraham and Moses. The covenant made known to Moses required many rituals and sacrifices that were important in order to maintain fellowship with God. Our new covenant only requires faith in Jesus because his death was the final sacrifice that had to be made, but it is a faith that should make a difference in our lives, a faith that should make us different from those who have no faith in him.

To drive home the point that we are called to be different, to have a new identity that should not be the same as how the world typically desires to form an identity, the Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:14-18 that we are not to be yoked (this can be interpreted as meaning don't identify

with) with unbelievers. He asks - “what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever”? Paul goes on to remind us of the basic covenant principal when he quotes Old Testament scripture “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they will be my people.” “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord.” “...I will be a father to you and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”

Baptism is to Christians what circumcision was to Jews who lived under the old covenant – a sign of our covenant relationship with God and Jesus expects baptism from his believers. Jesus commanded his disciples in Matthew 28:16-20 to go out and teach the word about Him and baptize all nations. In Acts 2:36-38 when a crowd of individuals who just heard a moving sermon about Jesus asked, “what shall we now do”, they were told to repent and be baptized, then their sins would be forgiven and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This new identity we should have, our new life, will be influenced by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit helps us to know God’s truths (writes God’s laws on our hearts and minds) and equips us to live our new identity in Christ. Chapter 11 (The Game Plan) will go into more detail about the role of the Holy Spirit.

There are several examples of new believers being baptized in the Bible. Jesus was even baptized by John the Baptist. Baptism written about in the Bible nearly always describes an immersion in water. There are a couple of household baptisms recorded in the bible but the method is not described so there is no contrary evidence to the assumption that immersion was the method used. Another key element to baptism is there is always a profession of faith from the person about to be baptized (Acts 2:41, 8:12, 10:44-46, 16:14,15, 1 Cor.1:16). Baptism as recorded in the bible always comes from someone that wants to be baptized in order to demonstrate a spiritual commitment to Jesus.

The symbolism of baptism is significant and quite clear. Going under the water represents dying to your old self (being buried) and coming out or being “raising up” from the water because of Christ represents you being a new, “reborn” person because of God’s gift of grace. Romans 6:1-4 illustrates this point by explaining we were buried with Christ through our baptism and when we rise we have a new life. The picture of a spiritual cleansing or washing away of our sins (Acts 22:16) is also an important image of the ceremony.

It should be evident when we are ready to be baptized we should be ready to shed whatever old identity we have had and take on a new identity, in other words live a new life because of accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior. In this new life we should not want to sin like we have done in the past. Our hearts should be changed, therefore changing who we are and how we value others and ourselves, and what motivates us in life.

Do we have to be baptized in order to be saved? Some denominations claim (Catholics for example) the act of baptism does bring salvation and begins the regeneration (being born again) process. This belief is behind infant baptism where water is sprinkled on the infant’s head during the ceremony. There are many scriptures (see Chapter 4 – The Only Way) that draw a clear picture of what it takes to be saved, and it should be evident we are not saved by “works”, but works should be a result of our faith. Claiming baptism brings about salvation is saying we in part are saved by a “work”.

Mark 16:16 sometimes is used to justify the view we have to be baptized to be saved because Jesus tells us “he who believes and is baptized will be saved”. The rest of the verse goes on to say “but he who does not believe is condemned”. In other words, not being baptized does not condemn, but not believing does, so faith is what matters. Jesus is simply assuming believers will become baptized.

Then why is it important to become baptized? It is important because it is a sign of where your heart is! Are you willing to be obedient to Jesus? Are you willing to make a public statement about what really matters in life – your commitment to Christ? If you are then your first act of obedience should be your willingness to become baptized into God’s family. And just as obeying the conditions of the old covenant brought on blessings, obeying continues to bring blessings under the new covenant. This is why in Hebrews 10:36 we are told - “you need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he promised.”

Just as baptism is a sign of beginning our relationship with God, a statement that we are willing to become a changed person because of our faith, Communion (The Lord’s Supper) is a sign of continuing or maintaining that relationship. Again we have a ritual that points to taking on a new identity – the identity of Christ. You will find throughout the Bible many scriptures referring to being “in Him” or “in Christ”. This means we should pattern our lives after Jesus and we should try to view life as Jesus viewed it. The following scriptures again make this point – we should have a new identity in Christ. We should not be the same person as we were before we became a Christian, and what is important to the world should not be important to us anymore.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Communion is when some form of bread and wine (many churches use grape juice) is taken by church members as a reenactment of the last supper that Jesus had with his disciples before he was imprisoned and crucified. Just as baptism creates a picture of the life impacting affect of our faith, the symbolism of Communion also creates crucial imagery for the believer. Jesus tells his disciples in Matt. 16:26-28 after he and blessed and broke the bread “take, eat; this is my body”, and when he took the cup and gave thanks he said “drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”.

We then picture life sustaining spiritual nourishment that truly gives life (see John 6:53-57) as we make Christ part of us by digesting him, absorbing him into our own being. And just as our physical nourishment should be a continuous process, so should be our spiritual nourishment. Communion also draws the picture that as we need food to live, we need Jesus to truly live – to have eternal life in heaven and the “abundant” life on earth.

Another aspect of the imagery from Communion is the death of Jesus, the pouring out of his blood, so we may live. Jesus states in Luke 22:20 “this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you”. So Communion reminds us of the new covenant that went into effect when Jesus died for us. Each time we take Communion we should remember because of God’s great love for us he sacrificed his one and only son, the final sacrifice required, so the whole world could have fellowship with God (see John 3:16) by simply believing (believing is more than just acknowledging his existence or office, it is trusting and acting on his words) is Jesus is their savior.

Communion also represents the unity of believers. Paul states in 1 Cor. 10:17 “because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of one bread”. Jesus was eating with his friends, his spiritual family during the Last Supper. Eating supper is typically, or at least has been up to the day of our “we don’t have the time anymore to eat with each other” society, an important time for families, a time of sharing, a time of communicating, of just being together in fellowship. Families that are together, that have close relationships, are strong families and strong families are the backbone of any culture or society.

Strong families are unified families, and strong families make individual members stronger and strong individuals make the family unit stronger. Our values, our idea of what is right and

wrong are typically shaped by our family, primarily from our parents but reinforced from other family members. A strong family is a productive family. The same effect holds true for our spiritual family, the body of believers. Our heavenly Father forms our values while our “brothers and sisters” help reinforce those values.

A strong church will produce strong members, and strong individuals spiritually will help create a strong church. A major part of that strength will be the unity of the family, a unity brought on by a commitment to live God’s will for our lives from each member, a commitment to be “in Christ” and to take on his identity. It will also be a willingness to put the “team” first above our own individual ambitions, especially our selfish ambitions. As a body of believers we are a team, and as any athlete can tell you, a team united in purpose is a strong, “winning” team. As a body of believers our goal as a team should be to become a positive force in our community and a light to those who do not know God. It should be a team others want to join.

So the next time you take Communion in your church, or the first time if you have not taken Communion before, I hope you understand it is far more than some superficial religious tradition or ritual. Communion is an important event with the intent of helping believers see what our Christian identity should be all about. If someone takes Communion scriptures warn us to have the right frame of mind, or right heart when sharing in the Lord’s Supper because we are making a very important statement to God as well as a public statement about our life and our faith.

In 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 Paul explains “whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord”. He states “a man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup”. “For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself”. In verse 30 Paul points out that taking Communion in an unworthy manner, having a heart that is not right, is why many in the body are weak and sick, and even why some have passed away.

We are not to take lightly our responsibility as a Christian – our responsibility to live in God’s will for our lives, and our responsibility to other believers. We shouldn’t eat supper with our friends, our family, if we are angry with someone in our family or we are not taking our faith seriously by living in constant sin. We need to have a repentant heart for our sins and a forgiving heart for the sins of our family members, as well as a loving heart for them when we take the Lord’s Supper. That is how we stay strong and make others stronger!

Our focus should be on loving and not judging, giving instead of taking, worshiping instead of complaining, being thankful instead of feeling lacking, and serving others instead of living to serve ourselves. If this is how we can train our heart, what we own, earn, look like will not be so important anymore. Impressing our friends, peers, or neighbors will mean nothing to us, pleasing God will mean everything. The values of the world should be of no value to us because they have no value to God. Living for God is priceless.

Communion is a constant reminder to us, a reaffirmation of our commitment to live as a child of God. Our identity as a “child” of God is so appropriate because it will take a childlike heart to live this new identity.

Matthew 19:14 Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Little children have not formed their ego and the identities Satan influences us with. Their parents are their identity, their world, who they emulate, and whom they trust in. God is our father, God is

who we should trust in, and God is who we should look to guidance for all aspects of our lives, God is who we should live to please and honor.

One of the great aspects of our identity in Christ is that it is so compatible with personal achievement. We can be spiritual and still be good at what we do and in fact spiritual growth actually makes us better at what we do (see Chapter 2 – Peak Performance). Our identity in Christ helps us deal with the real world and helps us to reach our God given potential. God given is a key concept because He gave us our brains and our abilities and as our creator it makes sense He would want us to use what He has given us. Even our understanding of “sin” contributes to achievement because understanding and admitting to our weaknesses is a first step in overcoming our weaknesses.

We live in a competitive society and competition does push us to do our best. There is a downside to competition and that is why there are always advocates for not assigning grades in school or even keeping score for athletic events. We often determine our own value and the value of others by how we “stack up” to others using grades, income, or sports statistics.

What we have to do to counteract the negative aspects of competition is to maintain the balance between trying to achieve our potential while holding on to the attributes of love and humility toward others. If we can keep this spiritual balance we will be able to achieve our God given potential, live out a life to the full, the abundant life, without compromising our spiritual relationship with God and with our spiritual family, the aspects of our life that will give us peace, contentment, and value to others.

Think about what statement you have been trying to make with your life and your identity. Examine what is important to you and what should be important to you. The fact that we all cling to meaningless identities illustrates how much Satan deceives us. Now we don’t have to go around wearing white robes and sandals but we should at least recognize the fact that we too often make unimportant things important, and recognizing this will help us refocus our priorities. The most important step we have to take is to make the effort to know God because this will give us the desire to change our identity to one of being more Christ like.

Changing our identity can take time because old mind-sets are not easy to alter. But if you are sincerely convicted to be the type of person God wants you to be, and you ask for God’s help, you will become a new person. God may have to have you go through trials or tough times to get you to change, and this subject will be dealt with in chapter 9, but the results will be worth it. You will have a new mental strength and outlook that will make a powerful impact on your life and the lives of others.

One of the first things drill instructors will do to new recruits in the military is humiliate the new recruits with the intent of destroying their old identity and then build them up in a new identity suitable for the military (coaches often use this tactic as well). In order to be effective in God’s army we need to die to self, destroy our old identity and take on the new identity Jesus, our drill instructor, has given us. This new identity will put less importance on self and more on others. It is what will equip us to defeat discouragement, tough times, and the deceptions of life the enemy uses to rob us of the true contentment and joy God wants us to have. You will read this statement often in this book - it will be spiritual growth that will make the difference. Our growth will be what equips us to take on the identity Jesus wants us to have.