

FREEDOM Series - Identity

May 15, 2016

Have you ever been let down? Have you ever put all of your effort, energy, and passion into something just to be let down?

One of my greatest let downs happened on September 12th, 2012. I woke up at 2 am on Saturday morning and drove 2 and a half hours. Front row of college game day, Tennessee was ranked, this was the day. We were going to break the curse of a 9-year losing streak. We were predicted to dominate this game. 100,000 fans going nuts, Tennessee was leading, but then it happened. We fell apart.... Florida goes on to dominate the rest of the game. I was left sitting in my seat disappointed maybe a few tears with a long drive back home, we have all felt the feeling of disappointment. Maybe for you your stomach still drops at the thought of Christian Laettner making the shot... or maybe it's something a bit more serious.

Maybe you put years of hard work into a business that fell through, or all your time and energy into a marriage that ended and left you wondering, *where do I go*, or maybe you were not able to accomplish expectations that others put on you and you feel like you disappointed everyone around you.

We have all been let down. We get so consumed with our passions, positions, possessions, and labels that instead of these things being part of who we are, they become who we are and that my friends is a dangerous road....

Philippians 3:7 (NLT) "I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless....."

Many times our identity comes from our success. Webster defines success as, "the fact of getting or achieving wealth, respect, or fame." Remember, success is good and it should be a part of who we are, but not who we are! Where do you find success?

Maybe your idea of success is climbing the cooperate ladder. You spend all of your time and energy into getting that next big promotion, which can be a

great thing. There is nothing wrong with getting a better job or pay raise, but you must be willing to sacrifice time with your friends and family. Even if you are able to obtain that raise or position, one day you will have to retire or give up your business. When that day comes what will you have? So maybe your job isn't that great, because it's not going to last the test of time...

Maybe success for others is popularity. I deal with popularity on a daily basis with our students. All students desire to be known, valued and loved. They will fight and sacrifice anything to have friends and have the approval of their peers. If they can just hang out with that one friend group they will have it made, but sadly they are willing to give up who they are to be who others want them to be. However, this doesn't stop in high school. Everyone desires to be known, valued and loved. Adults are just as guilty of changing themselves to make [themselves popular] whether they are at work, out with friends, or even with their families. We get so caught up in other people that we lose ourselves. Look at Facebook or Instagram. We are taking pictures with celebrities or with other people so that people can see us. So we can show others we are not alone. Even at work or at home we act differently so that others will accept us. So, if popularity didn't stop at high school, will it ever last?

Success for others may come from the good things they do. Many of us find our identity in the places where we put our time and money. You spend your time helping others, giving back to the community, or donating your money to a variety of helpful organizations. You volunteer for a local youth sports team, soup kitchen, or help at a nursing home. All of these things give us a sense of purpose, but no matter how much we love them we can't let them be who we are. They are not the best thing. They can be a part of who we are, but they can't become who we are. It's great to feed the hungry, but that will only satisfy them physically, but they will need to eat again. You can donate clothes to those less fortunate, but one day those clothes will become too small or unwearable. Money is a great way to help others, but eventually that money will be spent. Those things are not the best, so maybe we shouldn't be identified by the things we do.

Identity is not determined by Earthly Positions [social class].

Success is not the only thing that determines our identity; we also find our identity in earthly positions.

How many of you remember your first car? Growing up, one of the greatest days your life is being able to drive to school by yourself. I remember when I was in high school and I dreamed of the first day I could roll into my school in my first car. It was going to be the moment that I was officially an adult, but little did I know it would determine how my friends viewed me. In high school I wanted my first car to look like it came straight out of the Fast and Furious, but that's not what I got. I rolled into school with my 2002 Chevy Cavalier. It was not like the cars in the movies. What about you? Was your car what you expected? See, what I did not know was in high school your car shows your social status. If you're rich you have a nice car, if you have a crappy car you're poor, and if you have an old truck you're a redneck. The moment I rolled into that school parking lot, I parked next to a BMW and a huge lifted truck.... I quickly realized what social class I was in. People knew my social class by the car I drove, but we do this our entire lives. People define us by the neighborhood we live in, the cars that we drive, and the clothes that we wear. People no longer see us as who we are, but what social class we are. We are defined by our social class. If you're rich people see you as snobby, if you're middle class you're just average, if you're poor, people look down on you. So we spend our lives trying to upgrade everything we have to try to impress. We become consumed with trying to better our stuff that we lose sight of who we are. We are no longer identified by who we are, but what we have. As a result, it leaves us disappointed because we can never impress or be equal with those around us. Our social status will always leave us wanting more or thinking less of ourselves.....

Our families also determine our identity. In my opinion families are one of the greatest gifts that God can give us. If you have known me for any amount of time you know that I am crazy about family and I am so proud of them.

My world was drastically changed when my little nephew came into the world. I had no idea how much better my life would be being an uncle. I have one of the coolest nephews you could ever meet. His name is Kiefer, and he is literally my mini me. I teach him things that his parents probably don't like, but I am uncle so I can get away with it. I love being around him

because he makes me feel like I am the greatest human being to ever live. The world literally stops when Uncle Jordan comes home and it is one of the best feelings in the world. Many of you moms and dads understand that feeling. When your little girl says, "Daddy," or when your son runs to his mom anytime he is hurt. You feel special, you feel important. I believe that these are all great things, but too many times our identity is in being a Mom or Dad. Again these things are great; however you are more than that! Sadly, I see many parents that have lost their relationships when their children leave the home. They have put everything they have into being a parent and when their kids leave they no longer know who they are. They have no idea what to do with their lives. They lost who they are as an individual. I am not saying you're not a mom or dad, because I will always be my parents "Baby Boy", however our primary identity cannot be in being just a parent, or spouse alone, because

You are more than a mom, dad, or a spouse.....

There are parts of sermons that really touch the soul and this is one of them.....I'm about to step on some toes. I used to live in a place where sports teams are not the norm. Crazy! This place is called Arizona. On game day people go about their normal lives. Saturday evenings in the fall are just like any other week.... college basketball is just a game, but then God called be back into the real world. To a place where everyone proudly supports their colors! Where college sports dominate our lives and we proudly support our teams. One thing I love about Kentucky is the pride in your teams and your state! There are very few places like the Kentucky fan base, I mean y'all camp out for weeks for an inter squad game! Big Blue madness is as crazy as the super bowl! However, as we all know whether you're a Kentucky fan, Louisville, or a Tennessee fan. We have felt disappointment. We cry when our teams lose, we spend mass amounts of money on them, and schedule our lives around game days, but the sad reality is that we place our identity in our teams. Teams that we will never play for nor will they do anything for us.

One of my favorite movies is "Fever hitch" where a guy who is a diehard Red Sox fan is talking about choosing his girlfriend or going to a Yankee game that determines the playoffs. He is talking to his middle school students about the situation. Then the middle school kids say something

profound that we all need to hear, "Let me leave you with this though, you love the Sox, but have Sox ever loved you back?" This one cut me deep. So think of the love you have for your teams, but have they ever loved you back?

We all desire to be loved. It's the way we are designed, however we cannot allow others to give us our identity. Every day we are labeled whether we like it or not.

Our friends, families and even strangers label us on a daily basis. Everyone knows you as that soccer mom or the cool dad. Or maybe your wife tells you you're the greatest husband to walk this earth, or your wife is the greatest spouse of all time. (Husbands, you probably want to tell your wives that right now.) Unfortunately, in many homes not all labels are good. In your home you are told that you are a big disappointment and you're not the person they thought they were going to marry, or you get told that you're the most selfish person they have ever met, or you're lazy, or all you'll ever be is a liar. Sadly, good or bad, we listen to these voices so much that we begin to believe them. We believe that these words make up who we are and we look in the mirror and that's all we see....

Even worse, we are labeled by people that have no clue who we are. One of the best and worst moments is when a stranger labels you. It makes my day when someone I don't know compliments me. It boosts our confidence makes us feel great about ourselves. However, what about when someone you don't know tears you down. It is one of the worse feelings in the world. I'm the student pastor here and one thing that I see in our schools is the way students tear each other down on a regular basis. People they don't know call them ugly, worthless, annoying, liar, or they hear rumors and just assume that's who they are, but that doesn't stop when you're a kid. As we get older adults gossip on a daily basis. Have you ever heard a rumor about you that was not true it at all? It makes you want to punch hole in the wall, but the worst part is people define you by the things they have heard. They see you as a liar, a cheater, drunk, home wrecker, and many more. Maybe even some of those things are true, but that doesn't make up who we are. The sad part about it is that we begin to identify ourselves as all of these labels. We think that if that's what people think about us then that's who we

should be. I am here to tell you today, that is not who you are. That's not what you are defined by....

We have spent the last 10-15 minutes talking about all the things that we devote our time and energy to. Some are good and some are bad. All of these can be a part of who we are, but they should never be who we are. Paul tells why.....

Philippians 3:7-10 (NLT)

7) I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. 8) Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ.

Paul says everything in this world, both good and bad, should be considered garbage COMPARED to your relationship with Jesus. It's all worthless. The only thing that matters is your relationship with Jesus, but you need to ask yourself if you have a relationship with Jesus. Not just, "yes, I know Jesus. I go to church. I pray every night", but a real relationship with Him. Where you truly love Him and need Him for your daily lives.

Many of you here might think that you can't have a relationship with him, because your identity is so many other things. Or you still can't get past that sin that Doc challenged you to let go of last week. You all allow these sins to separate you from the one who loves you the most, and you think He really can't love you, but that's not true. Paul says EVERYONE is welcomed into a personal relationship with Jesus no matter how close or how far away you think you are right now in this very moment.

Colossians 1.21-22 (N,

21) This includes you who were once far away from God. You were His enemies, separated from Him by your evil thoughts and actions. 22) Yet now He has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in His physical body. As a result, He has brought you into His own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before Him without a single fault.

We were all enemies of God. At some point in our lives we have allowed other things to overtake us and instead of being part of who we are, they become who we are. We spend our lives pursuing earthly pleasures that are both good and bad, however, God, the maker of everything, has chosen to reconcile us with Him - anyone who wants to follow Jesus, into His kingdom. Not only does He welcome us into His presence, but He nailed every label or any identity that we have to The Cross.

The Cross makes us new. We are no longer slaves to this world or the things of the world. We have freedom in Him through His son. This freedom makes us Holy. That's your new label; blameless! That's your label! Why? How? How could I become so perfect despite my terribly imperfect life? It's easy. Because of Jesus Christ! Jesus took all of those world labels and died so we can be reconciled with the Father; so that we could be seen without one single fault. It comes down to you making the choice to follow Jesus. If you chose to follow Jesus and make Him your Lord and Savior you are then adopted as God's son or daughter.

Romans 8:15-16 (NLT)

15) So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when He adopted you as His own children.[a] Now we call Him "Abba, Father." [b] 16) For His Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children.

You are now a child of the living God!!!! You are no longer restricted by others or how you view yourself, You are looked at as a child of God. That's it! That's all that matters in this life, if you are identified as His son or daughter.

So which life do you want? Do you want a life filled with restrictions [because of] the identities this world gives you? Or do you want to live a life of Freedom by being identified as son or daughter of God? Only you can make the choice!

All of these things that we mentioned today have one thing in common if you follow them [whether] good or bad things. They will end, but a life of following Jesus is the only thing that will ever be eternal....

1 Timothy 2:6 (NLT)

6) He gave His life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time.