



CHAPTER ONE

Lost Identity

1

Lost Identity

One night, some Christians decided to gather for a time of prayer and intercession; they gathered in anticipation of having a great night of prayer and fellowship. Then suddenly, a woman staggered into the room. She made her way through the corridor, down the aisle to the front of the room, and flopped across the front row with her hands covering her face and her foot dangling off the chair. I turned around and saw the woman lying there. I looked to see if anyone knew the woman. No one knew her. She didn't come to harm anyone, she just desperately wanted prayer. This woman was an alcoholic who was living in poverty.

I noticed the woman was a petite lady wearing all black. I could tell she was in her seventies. I noticed her wrinkled skin; she had lived a hard life. Somehow without words or judgment, we made our way over to this woman and began to pray. One of the women in our group reached out her hand to touch the lady, and when she did, she uttered these earth-shattering words, "God said you were supposed to be a healer to many people." The woman remained there in a heap with her hands still covering her face. And though the message that she was "supposed to be a healer" to hundreds of thousands of people implied she had missed her life's calling, we continued to pray for her; we still felt there was hope for her, a hope that only God could give.

The Cost of Not Knowing Your Identity

This dream left me speechless in the morning. I knew this dream was from God so I asked Him what it meant. In short, in this dream the woman was older in years and much of her life had been ravaged by pain and disappointments from which she tried to self-medicate through alcohol consumption. This woman was meant to be more in life. God had a purpose and plan for her. This woman, potentially, could have held the cure for cancer, AIDS, or

even Alzheimer's on the inside of her--the world will never know. She failed to become a great healer because it was easier to believe in a lie that she was a woman of no value, no worth, a woman who could not succeed at anything in life. Years of pain and disappointment validated this erroneous narrative for her—or at least she allowed it to.

I came to realize this dream was a representation of all the people who have failed or will fail to reach their destiny in life because they did not know their true identity. What are you doing with your time? The Lord once asked me this sobering question and now I ask you the same. What are you doing with your time? How you spend your time in life matters. Making good use of your time is wise, but using your time poorly will cost you. It cost this woman a fulfilling life.

Oddly enough, we felt hopeful for this woman in the dream because with God, there is always hope. As long as there is breath in your body, you still have a chance to do something great in life. "With God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26) I love what Terri Savelle Foy, Christian motivational speaker, always says, "Don't look at the years you lost, look at the years you've got left." Your past doesn't have to determine your future. You are not your past failures nor are you your bad habits; you are so much more than you know.

This woman's purpose in life was that of a healer, but she never realized it because she did not know her true self. You see, knowing your identity is the foundation from which your life is to be built upon. Your identity is tied to your purpose and your purpose is tied to your destiny. Your identity is the launching pad from which you were designed to blast off into your purpose; your purpose is the orbit that leads to your destiny. Life is filled with choices and the consequences of those choices. The ultimate decision you will face is whether you will merely exist in this life, or live the life God has for you. You have only one life; choose to live it!

Where Am I?

On a lighter note, after being a stay-at-home mom for about four years, I decided to find some part-time work so I could get out of the house a bit. So, I started work at a senior home in the

assisted living industry. After about two months of working, I was starting to get familiar with the residents who lived at the facility, in particular those who lived on the first floor, as I was assigned to them most often.

One day, I arrived at work to find nearly all of the residents rapt with enjoyment as they were being entertained by a group of volunteer teenage musicians. All the residents were basking in the music, and I, in efficient fashion, thought, *This is great! I can get ahead and get things prepared before dinner time.* It was then that I saw this man I hadn't seen before wandering around looking puzzled. The man finally approached me and asked if I knew this guy, "Walter" (Name changed for sake of confidentiality). The man went on to tell me he had been looking for Walter, a friend he came to visit. Well, I didn't know Walter. However, I assured this man that I would help him look for Walter's room. The man was very appreciative.

I looked and looked for Walter's room, but could not find it. I even asked a coworker if she knew Walter and where his room was—but to no avail; we could not find Walter! As we were searching, the gentleman seemed a bit frustrated and confused that no one could find Walter. I'm sure he thought, *These idiots work here and can't find their resident, Walter!* He was adamant about the fact that Walter had moved to the facility. The man finally accepted the fact that we couldn't find his friend, and I guess he decided to go find someone who could. After dinner, a visiting guest inquired about a new resident. The guest wanted to know how the resident was adjusting to the facility, what meds he was taking, And whether he experienced any changes in his physical and mental health since his arrival at the facility.

The visitor said that the resident had seemed a little disoriented and that was not his norm. Well, you wouldn't believe who the visitor was inquiring about . . . it was Walter. Come to find out, this man was a new resident and his name was Walter. Walter was looking for Walter! You can imagine my befuddlement when I realized that Walter was in fact Walter; it was his nickname, but Walter nonetheless. He had been trying to find himself for over an hour. When I couldn't help Walter find himself, he became so frustrat-

ed—and I mean downright dejected. Poor thing, he was confused and I confused him even more. Turned out, his confusion was a side effect of the meds he was prescribed. But I have to be honest, I had a few laughs about the situation.

On my day off I began to think about old Walter looking intently for himself for hours, and when no one would or could tell him what he wanted to hear about Walter, he became terribly frustrated and disappointed. I began to think, *Now how ironic is that?* The truth is, there are many people in the same boat as Walter. How often do many of us wander throughout life in search of ourselves? When met with obstacles and unforeseen circumstances that should offer clarity about our identity, we find that they only leave us more frustrated than we were. We become displaced, disappointed, defeated, and yes, downright dejected.

When uncertain, we so often look to others to provide clarity about who we are, but any efforts to gain an understanding of your true self outside of God will only leave you wanting, and more confused about who you are. I have found that many people are not aware of what it is they are devoid of—hence, never getting to the root of their disappointments nor their frustration with life. Metaphorically speaking, many people walk up to others all through life looking for themselves, asking others, *Can you help me find myself?* Many become dependent on others to aid them in their quest for answers to identity concerns, looking for affirmation and even validation as to who they really are. Many are lost because they have not found themselves. When we are blind to the truth that our identity comes from God and is in God, we spiral into an identity crisis.

What Is Identity?

Before we can establish what an identity crisis is, we must first understand the meaning of identity, and how identity is formed. I personally define identity in this manner: *the distinctiveness, uniqueness, and continuity of one's individuality in attributes, personality, character, and purpose in life.* There are various forms of identity. There is gender identity, racial identity, national identity, cultural identity, and individual identity to name a few. One's gender, race,

and nation of birth are aspects of an identity that help to define the distinctiveness, personality, and attributes of a person.

Culture identity is made up of two or more persons that share the same values and beliefs. Within cultures we see sub-cultures that hold shared values and beliefs. A self-culture is also an identity. It is one person that holds a certain belief that goes against culture; their beliefs and values stands alone. A self-culture is an identity of one that is a by-product of a greater culture but is individualistic and unique. The development of identity is a blend of many aspects that are shaped by one's surroundings, education, influences, awareness, geographical location, etc. Despite the many types of identity we will be focusing on personal identity throughout this book. Your personal identity is the key to your happiness and wholeness in life. Now let's get a better understanding for how an identity is formed.

The on-set of identity formation takes shape at the point of conception, something so miraculous and unique takes shape inside a woman who has conceived. From the time her newborn baby enters the world, he or she begins a lifelong journey of exploration of the world around them, and little by little, they become familiar with their surroundings and begin to make sense of their environment. As infants grow and mature, so does their worldview. The way they view their world is defined by moments in life. Every experience they encounter becomes a lens through which they view, know, and understand the world around them. A philosophy of life takes shape during childhood and follows the child throughout life. So, it becomes apparent that every external encounter molds a child from infancy to adulthood; forming the identity.

The Development of Personality and Character

Let's look at personality and character development. When a child enters the world, he or she is a genius at being themselves. With children, you witness openness, purity of thought, curiosity, and uniqueness. Personality takes shape right before your eyes. Children aren't afraid to just "be." This is all they know. Having worked with people on the opposite end of the spectrum in the senior industry, I have seen some of the same attributes among the elderly. I have had conversations with family members and staff

about how certain residents are so sweet and funny, some timid, and others downright ornery. I have heard family members say things like, “Mom used to be mean,” or, “Mom was very quiet and strict all her life.” They see Mom in the assisted living being sweet, considerate of others, and funny, and they can’t fully understand this drastic change in personality. I find that family members are happy to see this side of their parents, but wonder why they never encountered this side previously throughout their younger lives.

I thought about this and the old adage came to mind, “Once a man, twice a child.” Now, we can be technical about the meaning of this saying, but allow me to help you to see it in another light. Children have no need for pretense; what you see is what you get. As we age and come to the last years of life, we realize the diminutive nature of life. The elderly begin to experience a visceral connection to themselves, others, and life. They find that there is no longer any need to be compromising, or disingenuous. For example, what can appear in some seniors as mean-spiritedness, or being sharp and insensitive in speech is in actuality, authenticity. The need for pretense goes out the window and what you see is what you get.

On the contrary, somewhere between the gap of childhood entering adulthood, along life’s continuum, we lose our authentic self. The individuality and uniqueness of our personality is blemished as we become adults. We become conscious of the world around us, its prerequisites, expectations, and limitations. It is between the years of childhood and the time we become advanced in years that many either rise to a forged pedestal and put on airs (superiority), or succumb to the negativity of life (inferiority). Somewhere between these opposing positions of superiority and inferiority lies a balance where we see ourselves for who we are, we understand whose we are, and we know what we are meant for. The *between* is the core, the central focus where we strike the chords of balance and equilibrium within the identity; not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought (Roman 12:3), but thinking with thoughts that are sober and accurate depictions of our true identity.

What Is An Identity Crisis?

An identity crisis is a *personal psychological and social crisis resulting in confusion about one's self value, role in society, and purpose in life*. In an attempt to excavate the identity, we erroneously pinpoint the “self” based on identifiers. “Identifiers” are attributes used to characterize us, but they do not, nor can they indicate who we really are. For example, we think our identity is determined by our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, profession, ethnicity, sexual orientation, successes, failures, socioeconomic standing, and so on, which are identifiers. But who is the *you* that thinks your thoughts? Who is the *you* that feels your emotions? Who is the *you* that is deeper than the color of your skin? Who are you? More often than not, we have oppositions within identifiers. We have conflict in our thoughts and emotions that impact how we think and feel about ourselves. For example, some people have divergences in working a profession they are not happy with, consequently experiencing opposition within identifiers. Opposition within identifiers leads to the deformation of our true identity. Distorted perceptions of self brings into being an unresolved crisis of identity. An unresolved identity crisis will spread into every aspect of your life. It will impede your relational, mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.

When stuck with distorted views of who you are, you are left ignorant about your true self. Deprivation of identity makes it difficult to continue on life's journey effectively. Lacking a true sense of identity will cause you to wander aimlessly, never fully attaining the life God has in store for you. Our adversary is persistent and patient. Satan starts early, from the onset. As children enter the world, he begins to attack the identity. He then works within our identifiers—within our surroundings, using people closest to us, and our environment—society—to thwart the development of our identity. The gap between the purity of childhood and the experiences of the aged is breached, and this causes disruption and instability in personality and purpose in life. In this phase, the distinctiveness, uniqueness, and individuality of personality and purpose for many is nowhere to be found. *Your identity was never meant to be lost but rather to be understood, attained, and evolving*. Knowing

your identity is the most priceless possession you will ever have in life. Your identity is tied to your purpose. *Your identity will carve out a niche for you in this world; it will give you the confidence you need to be uniquely you, while propelling you toward the purposes and plans of God for your life.* Together, we will recover and reclaim the purity and uniqueness of your identity, giving you the freedom to be who you are in the eyes of God in this world.

Journey with Me

I will go so far as to say I guarantee the truths and practical dispositions contained within this book will work for you, if you earnestly and diligently apply them. The transformation inside that you are seeking will not happen overnight; what you get depends upon how much you put into it. The revelatory keys in this book will arm you with powerful tools to live by and weapons to fight with. Be willing to surrender daily any discouragement or frustration that arises and receive God's grace and unconditional love for you on your journey to discovering your identity. Enter into each day with an attitude of expectant anticipation that as you open your heart to freedom and growth, God will meet you there in a powerful way. If you are ready, then make that choice and stick with it . . . I know you can!! Now, let's go!