

THE NEW BOURNE IDENTITY

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For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. Jeremiah 2:13

Do you remember the spy-book thriller *The Bourne Identity* by Robert Ludlum, popularized by the three movies starring Matt Damon? It is the intriguing adventure of how amnesia victim Jason Bourne discovers his true identity.

Working as a counselor and my own personal journey has caused me to see in a fresh and powerful way how those of us who follow Christ often struggle with a type of *spiritual amnesia* that hinders our ability to perceive and experience ourselves as God does.

We live in a highly performance-oriented society where the essence of our identity is determined by a combination of how successful we view ourselves combined with what the significant others in our lives think about us. As Christians we usually spiritualize this formula by determining our worth based upon our spiritual performance. We may evaluate our significance by our fruitfulness in God's work, how well we do in some creative endeavor, or the position we hold.

Since none of us are able to consistently perform to the level of our expectations, we begin to somehow feel less than others, inferior, and inadequate. Even when our performance reaches our expectations, the satisfaction we yearn for somehow escapes us.

In his book, *Abba's Child*, Brennan Manning describes this struggle:

“In my experience, self-hatred is the dominant malaise crippling Christians and stifling their growth in the Holy Spirit. ... Negative voices from our family of origin, ‘*You will never amount to anything*,’ moralizing from the church, and pressure to be successful transform expectant pilgrims en route to the heavenly Jerusalem into a dispirited traveling troupe...”¹

As I counsel full-time laborers who are struggling in some area of life, a universal theme that almost always comes to light is; *I know that God loves me intellectually, but somehow I just don't experience myself that way*. For most of us there is an abysmal gap between what we believe in our heads and that which we experience in our hearts. And so, to compensate for our feelings of unloveableness, we turn to a *broken cistern* like succeeding in something that is important to us in order to shore up our sense of who we are.

“When we have come to believe in the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success, popularity, and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions. The real trap, however, is self-rejection. As soon as someone accuses me or criticizes me, as soon as I am rejected, left alone, or abandoned, I find myself thinking, ‘*Well, that proves once again that I am a nobody*.’”²

1989 was the mid-course of our 14 years in Spain. I remember being extremely discouraged because of the slow growth of the ministry at the University of Murcia – so discouraged that I began to avoid people. Six months later, after seeing the film-series *Inside Out*, I realized that I was seeking to bolster my sense of worth by being fruitful in the ministry. When I encountered a

situation where there was little fruit, I experienced a real identity crisis. As one friend observed, *When who you are is what you're doing, when you stop doing, you aren't*. Since my identity was bound up in being fruitful in ministry, when I stopped producing, it was almost like I ceased to be.

Abba's Child is one of the best books I've read on this subject. The gist of the book is that most of us bend toward man to define who we are. Finding our identity by looking to man is what the author calls the *false-self*. Since we were created in the image of God, we really need to look to God to discover our *true identity*. For me, the most challenging phase in the book is a quotation by John Eagan:

"... The heart of it is this: to make the Lord and His immense love for you constitutive of your personal worth. *Define yourself radically as one beloved by God*. God's love for you and His choice of you constitute your worth. Accept that, and let it become the most important thing in your life."³

And so, I began to move in a more deliberate way toward the discovery of my *new Bourne identity*. At first, it was still more intellectual than real. But as I've gotten away for a many half-days alone with God, He has really spoken to me. In essence He has said, "*you are My beloved son – I am well-pleased with you.*"

The bottom line question in the issue of identity is how to move from a performance-based identity {a human-doer} to a love of God-based identity {a human-being}. Two things seem to stand out as necessary.

Get in touch with what you really believe about yourself. The lies you believe must be exposed before they can be transformed by the renewing power of God's truth. Ask God to reveal to you what you really believe about yourself and your identity.

Plan a half-day alone with God. Ask Him specifically, *what are Your thoughts about who I truly am? How do you identify me?* It is impossible to truly hear God's voice in the agitated life-styles that many of us live. From *Abba's Child*:

"The indispensable condition for developing and maintaining the awareness of our belovedness is time alone with God. In solitude we tune out the nay-saying whispers of our worthlessness and sink down into the mystery of our *true self*. Our longing to know who we really are – which is the source of all our discontent – will never be satisfied until we confront and accept our solitude. There we discover that the truth of our belovedness is really true. Our identity rests in God's relentless tenderness for us revealed in Jesus Christ."⁴

Define yourself radically as one beloved by God!

NOTES:

1. John Eagan, *A Traveler Toward Dawn*.
2. Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*.
3. John Eagan, *A Traveler Toward Dawn*.
4. Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child*.