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Getting to the Core #3 - Figuring Out Who You Are

- some persons will go to significant lengths to learn about the roots of their identity...
- that principle was on display in our culture again this week in a way that involved one of the most brutal mass murders in our country's history...orchestrated in the late 1960's by Charles Manson...
- Manson was found guilty of conspiracy to commit the Tate/LaBianca murders where he ordered members of his group to carry out the slaying of nine people...
- he was given the death sentence but when the State Supreme Court of CA briefly eliminated that penalty, Manson in turn was given life imprisonment...
- he's come up for parole around a dozen times including a recent hearing where he was denied yet again...and many think that because he's now 78 years old--it's highly likely that he will die in prison before he's even eligible for another parole hearing...
- this story has all sorts of sad, strange twists...many of them involving people connected in some way to Manson's identity...
- did you know that Charles Manson actually had a son – who was in the unfortunate position of having the given name...Charles Manson, Jr...
 - that would have a way of playing with your mind...
 - so much so that he committed suicide in 1993 on a deserted highway in Colorado...
- recently a man spoke out for the first time and admitted that he was Charles Manson's grandson...
- because Charles Jr had changed his name before he took his life...this man grew up as Jason Freeman...but his parents told him who his grandfather was but he was never to tell anyone...
 - Freeman tells the story of being in a social studies class at school when the teacher began talking about the Manson murders and he looked around to see if any of the other students were looking at him...you can change your name, but you can't change your past...
- then an even more bizarre twist occurred with the appearance of this man...
 - this is Matthew Roberts...a LA musician...he was adopted as an infant and in 1998, as an adult began a search for his adoptive parents with the cooperation of the adoption agency...
 - he found his birth mother named Teri living a troubled life in WI...and after they got to know each other...Teri dropped the bombshell on him that his biological father was Charles Manson...she claimed that she attended a party in the 60's where drugs and alcohol and illicit sex were all present and that she had physical relations with Charles Manson...but to make things even more complicated...Manson was the only person she had physical relations with that evening...but she was sure Robert's father was Manson..
 - when you compare the pictures of Roberts and Manson at a similar age, the resemblance is striking...
- so Roberts wrote to Manson in prison...and Manson confirmed Teri's story...
 - they say that Manson has a very distinctive writing style...and so now Roberts is holding a letter from prisoner B33920 saying that yes, he was quite possibly his father...
- how would you like to get that letter in the mail?...do you think that might alter the way you thought about yourself?...

- Roberts tried to have 2 paternity tests done, but apparently Manson's DNA samples had been contaminated...
- but then a scientist pointed out that if Manson's real grandson had surfaced...they could use his DNA...
 - I don't begin to understand how all this works...but CNN paid to have both men tested...
 - and it was just determined that Matthew Roberts is not Charles Manson's biological son...
- it was interesting to listen to Roberts respond to that news...he said that while on the one hand he was relieved...
 - now that meant there was no way he would ever be able to find out who his biological father was...so now who was he?...
 - interesting question – now who was he?...

- with that in mind, let me invite you to open your Bible this morning to Ephesians chapter 1...
 - page 150 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- we're in the middle of a series right now entitled **Getting to the Core -- Six Weeks to Focus on Things That Matter Most...**
 - we started by focusing on - **Figuring Out What You Believe**
 - you have to have an established source of truth before you can ever hope to answer these other questions correctly...
 - and that's what we spent a week talking about epistemology...sources of truth and why we believe God's Word is the place to turn to answer life's ultimate questions
 - last week we worked on ...**Figuring Out Why You're Here**
 - and that can be challenging...because if you put these two ideas together – it is highly likely that what God would say about these subjects is dramatically different than what we might have thought on our own...
 - Scripture tells us that His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts...
 - in **Psalm 50:21**, God says to His people -- **“These things you have done and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state *the case* in order before your eyes...”**
 - see, God says – you thought I was like you – and I'm not – and when you think about it – A God who thought and acted just like us wouldn't be much of a God, now would He....
 - but the upshot of that is – if we're going to use His book as our source of truth to answer the ultimate questions of life, it's highly likely that what He says is going to rub us the wrong way on a fairly regular basis...
 - there's a sense in which God's Word is like sandpaper...grinding away the aspects of us that are unlike His Son...
 - I'm not saying that's the only function and corresponding effect of Scripture...but it's fairly high on the list...
- so regarding the core issues, the things that matter most...you have to figure out what you believe and you have to figure out why you're here... and then...
 - **Figuring Out Who You Are**
 - **Figuring Out Who You Love**
 - **Figuring Out What You Want**
 - **Figuring Out Where You're Going...**

- these verses in the early portion of the book of Ephesians are a literal gold-mine when it comes to the issue of helping us understand who we are...

- read Eph. 1:1-2:10...

- with the time we have remaining, let's think about **3 steps to having a proper view of self...**

I. Be Honest about Your Past Condition

- let me ask you this – as I was reading these verses, did you feel like you were talking to another human being?
- is this the way other people in your life tend to talk, or tend to think, or tend to analyze their condition or anybody else's?...
- I don't think so – didn't you feel like you were hearing from heaven?...
- and some of what was said about our past condition – past that is, if you have had a definite time in your life where you've admitted your condition and placed your faith and trust in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ...
 - wasn't particularly easy to hear...
 - but it's just like going to the doctor – if there's something wrong with you physically...you don't want to delay hearing the truth – you don't want someone to sugar-coat or beat around the bush...you want the truth head on so you can begin thinking about the best treatment/solution...
 - well, if that's your perspective spiritually – there's no lack of that here...
 - who are you, or who were you, apart from Christ?...

A. Dead in trespasses and sins.

- Paul actually used that phrase twice in this passage...
 - **Ephesians 2:1 - And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,**
 - **Ephesians 2:5 - even when we were dead in our transgressions...**
 - theologians refer to this construction as a locative of sphere...the point being – it's not that we sin and therefore it kills something that was formally alive...
 - it's that we were born in the sphere of spiritual death...and that's why we sin...**The Greek case is the locative of sphere, indicating the sphere, or realm, in which something or someone exists. We were not dead because we had committed sin but because we were in sin. In this context trespasses and sins do not refer simply to acts but first of all to the sphere of existence of the person apart from God. He does not become a liar when he tells a lie; he tells a lie because he already is a liar. He does not become a thief when he steals; he steals because he already is a thief. And so with murder, adultery, covetousness, and every other sin. Committing sinful acts does not make us sinners; we commit sinful acts because we are sinners. Jesus confirmed this when He said, "The evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil" (Matt. 12:35) and "the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders" (Matt. 15:18–19). (John MacArthur, Commentary on Ephesians)**
- add to that...

B. Walking according to the course of the world.

- **Ephesians 2:2 - in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.**
- that's a mouthful for sure – but the point is – we were losing the fight with our three biggest foes...the world, the flesh, and the devil...
- walking according to the course of this world – buying into and acting on the world's way of thinking and living...just "going with the flow", we might say...

- I remember not long after becoming a Christian a friend said to me – you know, you're different...and he wasn't saying that as a compliment...
- but his point was – you're following a different course now – something has happened to your identity...then Paul goes more closely to the core when he adds...

C. Living by our own feelings and desires.

- **Ephesians 2:3 - Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind...**
- so why'd you do that? – I felt like it, I wanted to...
- why didn't you do what you were supposed to do? – I didn't feel like it, I didn't want to...
- although we would have never known it...we were the...

D. Children of wrath by nature.

- **Ephesians 2:3 - ...and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.**
- that's why it so sad to hear people say things like – well, I've always been a Christian...or we're all God's children...
- nothing could be further from the truth...
- if the holiness of God means anything – it means that our sin has separated us from God---that is understanding your identity 101...
- Jesus said it this way...**John 3:18 - He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**

- so what's the overall point?...the first step to figuring out who you are is to be honest about your past condition...
- and sure the way this played itself out is as different as the number of people in the room this morning...
- the doctrine of total depravity does not suggest that we are all as bad as we could possibly be or that we are all equally as bad as one another...
- but the illustration of 20 people who have died on a battlefield fits well at this point of the discussion...
 - they may have all perished in different ways and may now be in different states of decay...but that hardly matters when compared to the possibility of life...
 - being able to say that my mortal wounds aren't as bad as his is not much consolation...
 - learn to be honest about your past condition...
- now, there's a lot more to this story – but there are plenty of take-aways from what we've already discussed...
- please think about that for a moment – how does understanding this part of our identity impact us on an everyday level?...

E. Possible applications?

1. This should make us patient with others who fail.

- **1 Timothy 1:15-16 - It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.**
- see, if we tend to be exacting and impatient with the failures of others, we've not fully grasped the nature of our identity on the past...

2. Motivates us to forgive others quickly because we recognize the former depth of our need.

- Paul would later say in this same book...
- **Ephesians 4:32 - Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**
- a person who refuses to go through life with bitterness—and who won't constantly review the ways others have failed them...either in their own mind or to that other person's face or behind their back...
- there's someone who understands who they are...they've learned to be honest about their past condition...

3. Keeps our eyes focused on the mission.

- Paul also spoke these sobering words...
- **2 Corinthians 5:11 - Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.**
- this is one of those many verses that goes against the wrong-headed notion that there is one God for the OT and a different one for the New...
- that would only be said by a person who has not carefully read God's Word...
 - truthfully there is plenty of grace in the OT and plenty of judgment in the New...
 - both emphases meet perfectly at the cross of Jesus Christ...
- but if even a fraction of what we're talking about this morning is true – then our focus on the mission, along with our families that we're trying to direct as well...will be on helping those around us find a way out of this horrible condition...
- the only thing worse than saying that this is part of my past identity is having to acknowledge...and I've never chosen to do anything about it...

- but if there has been a definite time in your life where you've admitted this about your identity and you've come to Christ in repentance and faith...what step can you now take?...

II. Be Amazed by Your Present Identity.

- this passage is loaded with various ways of thinking about who we are in Christ...
- in Him our identity is fundamentally and forever changed...

A. An adopted child.

- **Ephesians 1:5-6 - He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.**
- that was a big part of what Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John chapter 3...
- **John 3:3 - Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."**
- the only way to correct the sin problem that attends our natural birth is to be "born again..."...
- and the beauty of that is – if you have made that decision...the heavenly Father chooses to view you through the lens of the imputed righteousness of His Son...
- that's what the doctrine of justification is all about...
- **Romans 5:1 - Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,**
- **2 Corinthians 5:21 - He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**

- this is a critical element of figuring out who you are...and especially learning to factor it into the way you think about yourself—and the choices you make as a result of that, everyday...
 - see, what trips many of us up is defining ourselves incorrectly...
 - in fact – think about it from this perspective...how would you complete this sentence...
 - I am _____.
 - it is very important to answer that correctly...
 - for some, they define themselves by what they do...
 - I am an engineer – that’s what defines me...that’s the most important thing about me...
 - what happens to a person like that who loses his/her job?...
 - what happens to a person like that when it’s time to retire?...
 - defining yourself by something you could possibly lose is a recipe for failure...
 - or...I’m a mom...
 - might say – what’s wrong with that?...
 - what if one or more of your children goes down the wrong path?...
 - if you organize your identity around the successful choices you hope someone else might make...you are setting yourself up for disappointment...
 - others define themselves by some mistake or failure or imperfection...
 - I’m overweight...
 - I’m divorced...
 - I’m old...
 - I’m in debt...
- how about, I’m an adopted child of God and that’s something about my identity that can never be taken away from me...
- when this isn’t in place – many times the result is living on the performance treadmill...
 - I have to please my spouse...
 - I have to please my kids...
 - I have to please my boss...
 - I have to please my in-laws...
 - I have to please my neighbors...
 - and on and on and on...
 - and we define ourselves based on the ever changing opinions of people...
 - and we run and run and run...
 - and we spend and spend and spend...
 - and we do and do and do...
- and the challenge is – some of you live in situations where the other person in your life is never going to be pleased with you...
 - they’ll never be satisfied...
 - they will never say thank you...
 - and if you define your identity by the approval of others, you very well run yourself right into the ground...
 - in Christ – we have strong reason to be amazed by our present identity...as adopted children of God...

B. A forgiven rebel.

- **Ephesians 1:7 - In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace**
- **C.S. Lewis – Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must put down his arms.**
- that's what we're seeing in this text...it doesn't help us to turn down the volume on the significance of our need...
- because that's positions us to bask in God's amazing grace...

- who am I?...a trophy of God's grace?...
- did you see how many times that was emphasized in this passage?...
 - **Ephesians 1:2 - Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**
 - **Ephesians 1:6 - to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.**
 - **Ephesians 1:7 - In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace**
 - **Ephesians 2:5 - even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),**
 - **Ephesians 2:7 - so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**
 - **Ephesians 2:8 - For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;**

- **PaulTripp** recently sent out a tweet that said, **If you have come to rest in the righteousness of Christ and have quit trying to parade your own, you know grace has visited you.**

- this is why worship is so important...

- this is also why making time for Church Family Nights where we observe the Lord's table is important...

C. An informed participant

- **Ephesians 1:9 - He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him**
- **John 15:15 - No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.**
- who are you? – a person to whom God has chosen to share His will through the truth of His Word, the power of His Spirit, and the Person of His Son...
- we're in the know – because the mystery of His will has been revealed to His children...
 - that's one of the reasons we want to be in ABF's, and to having our children in SS and in our WNKofF programs so they can constantly be under the sound of the gospel...

D. A joint heir

- Ephesians 1:11 – In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

- Matthew 6:19-21 - Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- will develop this much more on our sixth week...

III. Be Encouraged by Your Future Hope.

- Ephesians 1:13-14 - In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.