

BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE

SMALL GROUPS

IDENTITY

MY LIFE OF FAITH



MATT BROWN

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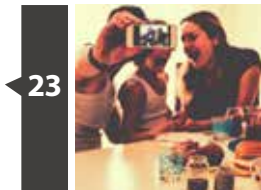
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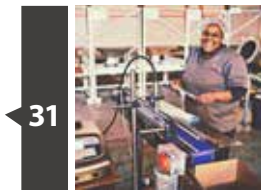
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Who are you? Start with Christ.

Most of us struggle with our identity at some point in life. Not knowing who you are can really mess up where you are and what you do.

I know that to be true from personal experience. When I was in my early twenties, I was a passenger in life, traveling through my days without a destination. I had grown up in a great environment, but I had made a total mess of my circumstances.

Jesus changed all that. He changed me, and now my identity is wrapped up in Christ.

In these six sessions, we'll see what God says about who we are and who we can be in Christ. Our identity in Christ alters our identity at church, in our homes, at our places of work, and everywhere else. We never lose our uniqueness in our various roles, but those roles are transformed by our life of faith—our true, defining identity.

Let this study help you be sure of who you are in Christ and how you can live out that identity.



Matt Brown

Matt Brown is the lead pastor of Sandals Church in Southern California. It is Matt's passion to see people become real and honest with themselves, God, and others. Matt has been married to his college sweetheart for over 20 years and they have three amazing kids. You can follow Matt on Twitter: [@pastormattbrown](https://twitter.com/pastormattbrown).

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LIFE IN CHRIST



What's a word or phrase that often comes up when people describe you?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLidentity

THE POINT

Jesus' identity is foundational to who I am.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Who am I? That's not always an easy question to answer in one specific way. For example, I'm a husband, a father, and a friend. All of these relationships help to define me. What's certain is that how I define and see myself—my identity—will affect my thoughts and actions.

The world understands this truth, which is why it tries to shape how we see ourselves. Advertisers want us to see ourselves in a certain way—and then believe their product will enhance that image.

What truly affects our identity is how we see Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" How these men saw Jesus changed their lives because it changed how they saw themselves.

The same is true for us. How we see Jesus shapes how we define ourselves. Without correctly understanding who Jesus is, we will never truly understand who we are. Consider, then, life's most important question: *Who is Jesus?*

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Luke 9:18-20

¹⁸ While he was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” ¹⁹ They answered, “John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, that one of the ancient prophets has come back.” ²⁰ “But you,” he asked them, “who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.”

During the short period in which the disciples were with Jesus, they saw Him do amazing things—feed the hungry; raise the dead; heal the lame, blind, and diseased; and more. Jesus went from an unknown carpenter in a small town in Galilee to the biggest celebrity in all of Palestine. Many people came to love Him, yet others despised Him. (It seems not much has changed over the last 2,000 years!)

The conversation we’re studying in Luke 9 happened in “the region of Caesarea Philippi” (Matt. 16:13), which had served as a spiritual and cultic center for thousands of years. In that place of spiritual deception and confusion, Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” They responded with the various opinions people had about Jesus’ identity. Their opinions differed, but they all shared one thing in common: Jesus was somebody of importance.

We hear similar responses today. To your Muslim neighbor, Jesus is a prophet. To your Buddhist friend, He’s an enlightened teacher. Even many atheists regard Jesus as a person of inspiration. All of this is interesting, but the real question—the one Jesus would ask each of us—is the one He asked His disciples: “Who do you say that I am?”

Peter identified Jesus as the long-awaited Christ—a revelation that would transform Peter’s understanding of himself and change his future. Only when Peter rightly understood who Jesus is could he correctly align his own life and identity.

What are some words or phrases people use to describe Jesus today?

QUESTION #2

Luke 9:21-22

²¹ But he strictly warned and instructed them to tell this to no one, ²² saying, “It is necessary that the Son of Man suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.”

Peter correctly identified Jesus. Yet, it is surprising what Jesus told Peter and the other disciples to do with that information. He told them not to tell anyone.

What? Aren't we called to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah? Yes, and later Jesus gave these same disciples the commission to be His witnesses—to tell anyone and everyone about Jesus (see Acts 1:8). At this particular moment in time, though, Jesus didn't need the full truth about Himself announced.

Jesus had a precise appointment with death, and He would not die a moment too soon. The word *Messiah* had become a term that was full of political significance. Many would-be revolutionaries saw themselves as “messiahs.” While many eagerly awaited the Messiah, others saw the “Christ” title as a threat. So, if the disciples went around declaring this new information about Jesus, the political expectations or fears of people would have limited His ability to travel freely and preach the good news of God (see Mark 1:14).

Although it was not yet time to publicly proclaim Jesus as the Christ, it was important for the disciples to know the truth. Since they acknowledged their full awareness of who Jesus was, He told them, “The Son of Man suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.”

At that point, the disciples probably believed, as most Jews did, that the Messiah would be a political leader who would free them from the oppressive rule of Rome in some type of military victory. The disciples likely were crushed to hear that Jesus would not lead them to military victory, but instead He would suffer and die.

How would you have felt if you heard Jesus' instructions as one of His disciples?

QUESTION #3

WHO YOU ARE

If we are disciples of Jesus, then He is the foundation of our identities. Use the boxes below to record additional words that describe who you are as a person. Examples may include "parent," "plumber," and so on.

JESUS

Choose one of the words you used to describe yourself above. How does having Jesus at the foundation of your identity influence that portion of your life?

--

Any political leader might expect opposition and death, but Jesus didn't expect just to die; He told them He would be *raised again*. He told them before it happened so they would not be surprised, as if the work and ministry of Jesus had all been a mistake and for nothing. It was all part of God's plan that Jesus would die—but He would also rise again! (See Acts 2:23-24.)

As hard as this may have been for the disciples to hear, Jesus was about to add a shocking challenge: He was not the only one that must die!

Luke 9:23-26

²³ Then he said to them all, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it. ²⁵ For what does it benefit someone if he gains the whole world, and yet loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶ For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and that of the Father and the holy angels.

Just as the apostles began to catch their breath after hearing the news of Jesus' divine appointment with death, Jesus told them of their own. Luke 9:23 is one of the most important verses for any follower of Jesus.

We will never understand who we are until we understand what this verse means for our lives.



If we want to call ourselves followers of Christ, we must say yes to Jesus, which means we must also say no to ourselves. We must pick up our cross and die to self—daily. Every day, we must say no to our desires, our wishes, and our dreams, and we must say yes to Christ’s lordship over our lives.

All of this is extremely difficult in our culture. Why? Because we live in a world that caters to self. By the world’s standard, everybody is in it for themselves—and everyone is drowning!

- ▶ Drowning in broken relationships because he demands everything be centered on him.
- ▶ Drowning in debt because she has to have it all.
- ▶ Drowning in illness and disease because they have to eat or experience it all.

How many times have you seen people work at jobs they hate to buy stuff they don’t need so they can impress people they don’t even like? How many times have you been in that cycle yourself?

Jesus calls us to be different.

Jesus calls us to make a decision about Him. But it can’t be a private decision. Nobody can be a Christian and keep his or her faith completely private. Jesus wants His followers to be loyal to Him, to die to self, and to publicly proclaim their faith in Him: “For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and that of the Father and the holy angels.”

We must understand who Jesus is so that we can understand who we are. Our identities are built on the foundation of His identity. Once we’ve made that connection, our decision to follow Jesus—and to follow Him daily—changes everything else.

What does it look like on a practical level to deny ourselves? To daily take up a cross?

QUESTION #4

How can we help one another obey Jesus’ instructions in these verses?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. How will you respond to that truth in the days to come? Consider these suggestions.

- ▶ **Research.** Take some time to read through your church's statement of faith. (You can start with the church website, or with a staff member.) What are some specific truths that statement teaches about Jesus?
- ▶ **Surrender.** Saying yes to Jesus as Lord means saying no to yourself. Do a self-examination and surrender any areas of selfishness to Him.
- ▶ **Share.** We are called to tell everyone who Jesus is. Think of someone you know who needs Jesus. Pray as a group for this person to come to know Jesus, and pray about your part in that process: sharing your testimony, inviting him or her to church, answering questions, and so on.



Who are you? That's an interesting question. An important question. But you'll never find the best answer without understanding that your identity is directly tied to Christ.

My thoughts

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLidentity**