

Your REAL ID

*Discovering the Truth of
Your Identity in Christ*



TIM HOWE

YOUR REAL ID

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH OF YOUR IDENTITY
IN CHRIST

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Your REAL ID: Discovering the Truth of Your Identity in Christ

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To you, the reader.

No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, it's my prayer that this book draws you closer to the one true God, who is a loving heavenly Father, and to Jesus Christ, whom He sent.

May you be encouraged in heart, and filled with the full riches of complete understanding, so that you may know the mystery of God, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

“Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.”

— John 17:17

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OPENING PRAYER & CONFESSION

When teaching, I like to begin with this prayer and confession. I invite you to make it yours each time you open this book.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word and that Your Word is truth. Thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. I ask that our love may abound more and more, in knowledge and depth of insight, so that we're able to test and prove what is best and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Amen.

I AM who the Word says that I am,
I choose to DO what the Word says to do,
And I HAVE what the Word says that I have.
I choose to open my heart to receive everything the Lord has for me today.

PROLOGUE: LIES I BELIEVED

I could barely read at ten years old.

I grew up in church, in a family that loved God. I was the second-oldest of what would become ten kids. From a young age, I grew up knowing the Bible, and at one point, I told my mom I wanted to be a pastor when I grew up. I loved church. I soaked up every book my parents read to me, because reading for myself was a battle I usually lost. I grew up with dyslexia. By ten, I could still barely read, and even after that, it was a slow progression that took me years. I never thought I'd be fluent in reading. And reading out loud in front of people? I hated the very thought of it.

You see, I grew up thinking I was stupid. As a young kid, because I had big ears, I got picked on and made fun of. Kids called me Dumbo. They told me I was stupid, and that started shaping an identity in me. I thought that's why reading was such a fight. Here's the thing about being a child: nobody hands you an identity when you're eight. You piece one together yourself. Kids said I was stupid, so that's what I believed: *I'm stupid*.

Growing up, our family carried real griefs. Early on, when it was just my older sister, me, and my baby brother, we were traveling to Florida one winter, and my dad lost control of the car. This was before seatbelts were mandatory. My mom was nursing my brother at the time, so neither of them had a seatbelt on, and they both went through the windshield. My baby brother didn't survive.

I don't remember the crash myself, but it affected my childhood because it affected my parents. They walked through that grieving, and I remember some of the fighting and the difficulty that came with it growing up. I may not have the order exactly right, but at one point my dad went through some major health issues, lost the business, went bankrupt, and we moved to a new town, away from everything I knew.

The Tent and the Dam

We started going to a new church, and I remember feeling out of place there. One service, I'm trying to sing and I can't even find my place in the hymnal, and a teenage boy in front of me turns around and hands me his, already open to the right page. "Here's the spot." I thought, *oh, that's nice*. He befriended me. He started helping me, being a mentor to me. He was fourteen or fifteen; I was eleven or twelve. And I looked up to him, the way most kids my age looked up to teenagers.

What I didn't know was that him befriending me wasn't innocent. He was grooming me. And at an overnight church campout, sharing a tent with him, he molested me — did things to me that nobody should do to a boy. I hadn't even been through puberty, so I didn't understand it. What I know is that it broke something in me. From that point forward, I felt shame. I felt worthless. I hated myself and my life. And the enemy, the devil, opened a door that night and started pouring lies in at me faster than I knew what to do with them.

I told no one. I just changed. Almost overnight I turned into someone who was angry at life, hated himself, and wanted to make everyone around him miserable. I became cruel and mean. My parents had no idea what to do with me, because I hadn't told them what happened, until finally my dad pressed me. I couldn't bring myself to tell him there at home; I was too ashamed. So we went for a short drive, and parked at the Greenfield Dam Wildlife Area, in Lancaster, Ohio. And sitting in that car with my dad, I finally poured it all out.

Now, before I tell you what happened next, I want to mention: my dad has since apologized for how he handled this, and I only bring it up to help you understand some of the things that shaped my identity for many years. But here's what came back across that car. He asked me: *Did you scream? Did you shout for people to come help you?* I told him no. *Well, then you must have wanted it.* He pulled out an Old Testament scripture about a woman who didn't scream for help when she was assaulted in the city, and therefore she was guilty of the sin. He reasoned that since there were other campers in nearby tents and I didn't scream, then I must have wanted it. *You need to repent to God for this sin.*

I was maybe thirteen years old. I had just handed my father the worst thing that had ever happened to me, and I walked away believing it was my fault, wondering if maybe he was right and I really did want it. His words cut me to the core. The shame and condemnation I carried because of them for years helped send me down an even darker path. Because I didn't just walk away feeling rejected by my earthly father. I walked away believing God was harsh and upset with me, like I was a disappointment to God. And let me tell you: I now know that isn't the heart of God. What my earthly father spoke that night in ignorance didn't represent my heavenly Father.

Living Out the Lie

What did I do with the lies? I lived them out. I've since learned: **you live out of whoever you believe you are.**

Part of what held me was a misunderstanding about God. I had developed a fatalistic view of the sovereignty of God. I thought that because God is sovereign, He controlled everything about my life, right down to making me sin. So when I cried out, *God, take these desires from me, take this sin from me*, and nothing changed, I drew the conclusion the enemy handed me: *He must not want to. He made me this way. He must not care about me.* And then the enemy handed me the biggest lie yet, by twisting the Scriptures. I found the passage in Hebrews 6:4–6 about those who fall away being impossible to restore, and I thought this was *my* verse, that I'd had God and lost Him, that I was going to hell anyway now, so why fight it. I'd probably prayed the sinner's prayer, asking Jesus to save me, a hundred different times, but now I felt hopeless. I believed I was worthless, so I lived like life didn't matter.

Then puberty hit a boy who'd already been sexually broken, and the mess in my head got worse. I started going to pornography. And eventually I followed the lie: *well, if that's who I am, I might as well see what it's like to embrace it.* Then for a season as a teenager, I voluntarily did with another young man things the Bible says no man should do with another man. It warped my understanding of who I was, and the enemy used every bit of it to reinforce the lie that I was worthless. The more I pressed into the depths of sin and depravity, the more worthless I felt, the more shame and condemnation piled on.

I decided to try and numb the pain: I got addicted to nicotine, dipping, and smoking. At some point, I started drinking, stealing alcohol from anywhere I could. Any escape I could find, marijuana, really anything I could get my hands on that could get me high, I

did it. I praise God I'm still alive, as some of the things I did are incredibly dangerous. I knew I could die from it, but I didn't care.

At my lowest, I took a little Superman figurine, set it up on a shelf, and said out loud: *God, I hate You. I'm making this my god now. Superman — you're my god.* And I remember that moment, because it meant something in my heart: I was rejecting God completely.

Here's what was really going on, because it took me years to understand it. I wasn't really rejecting God — I was rejecting my twisted view of God: a God I thought chose to create me just to make me sin, and then removed the option of repentance so He could damn me to hell for eternity, for His twisted pleasure. *Fine — I didn't want Him anyway.* The issue was never God — the issue was the lies I believed about God. And I am so thankful that God is a good God, that He knew what was actually going on deep in my heart, because through it all, He never stopped drawing me to Him. Not for one second.

Looking back on life, I'm so thankful for praying parents who love the Lord. My mom and dad never gave up on me or stopped loving me through those years. As a parent myself now, looking back on it, I can't imagine the pain they walked through seeing me struggle so much, even though they never knew the depth of my sin or what I was really going through. I did my best to make life hard for everyone around me for a season. If you know someone who's walking through a season like I was: never give up on them. Pray for them, and continue loving them through the lies. Don't ever stop pointing them to Jesus, and the grace and truth found only in Him.

The Girl in Math Class

At seventeen, God used a girl in my math class named Heather, who wouldn't stop talking about Him, and who carried a joy and

excitement I wanted in my life. One day I asked about her church.

I started going to that church (Eagle Rock Church in Pickerington, Ohio), a Spirit-filled church with a freedom and a joy in Christ I had never seen growing up. In 1999, I was baptized in the Holy Spirit, filled with His presence and power, the way you read about in the book of Acts. God reminded me of the call He'd put on me as a little boy, and everything began to change.

Now, I'd love to tell you the enemy quit that day. He didn't. A few years down the road, he came back trying to take me out altogether, by bringing up all the old lies once again. I'll show you my actual journal pages from that valley when we get to chapter ten. But a rescue had begun in me that the enemy couldn't stop.

And as far as I was concerned, my past was forgiven. I knew God removed my sins, as far as the east is from the west (see Psalm 103:12), but here's how I handled my own memories of the past. I pictured it like a closet. I shoved all of it in there — the tent, the dam, the sin, all of it — shut the door tight, turned off the light, and chained it shut. *Good. There's my past. It's all locked up. Settled and forgiven by God.* And I went on and lived my life.

But see, what I didn't realize is that I still had the closet. Chained up or not, it was still affecting me. I married Meagan in 2006 — the best decision of my life (outside of making Jesus my Lord) — started a family, built a successful career, and served God. And that closet leaked into all of it. Some of the old struggles followed me, and I was still hiding things, because hiding was what I'd learned to do since I was a boy.

I served God *hard*, wanting to make sure He knew how thankful I was for another chance, working to be a great Christian. And the picture of God I carried was still my dad's voice at that dam: a harsh, demanding Father watching over my shoulder for me to get

it wrong. So you know what I became? A harsh, demanding father, thinking I was modeling proper fatherhood. Turns out that's *not* proper fatherhood. Some nights I'd lie awake for hours, tallying the day's failures, certain God was disappointed in me. I'd been a believer for decades, and I was still living out of lies that got planted in me when I was a wounded thirteen-year-old kid.

Go West

In May of 2019, Meagan looked at me in a restless season and said, "I think you need to go away for a few days. Just go spend time with the Lord. You need to let your heavenly Father wrap His arms around you and love you and remind you who you are." So I did something that will sound strange if you've never lived by the leading of the Holy Spirit: I pulled out of the driveway with no destination, and I asked, "All right, Lord — where am I supposed to go?"

And I just heard: *Go west.*

So I turned west. And as I started driving, I felt like the Lord told me to put on an old worship CD, an album from 2001 that I hadn't listened to in probably eight or nine years. Okay, Lord. I put it on, and it played in the background while I drove and prayed. And the route kept getting more specific: past the area I grew up in. Past my old childhood house. *Lord, why are we in the old neighborhood? What are You doing?* Then, up ahead, the entrance to the Greenfield Dam Wildlife Area. *Turn in there.*

I pulled into, as far as I can recall, the same exact parking spot where my dad parked with me the day I told him. And before I even understood what was happening, I was weeping. And the Lord said, *Turn up the radio.* That CD had been playing for a while now, and it had arrived, in that parking spot, at the exact track where the music quiets down and the singer goes into a

prophetic moment, declaring over and over that I am God's beloved — asking if I could hear the voice of my heavenly Father saying that I'm His beloved. Then he went on to say not to let anything or anyone keep me back from what the Lord was calling me to.

And I felt the tangible love of God wash all over me and sensed His healing balm cleansing away those old wounds. The Holy Spirit gave me a verse that has become one of my life scriptures:

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. (John 3:17)

And then the Lord spoke to my heart, so gently: *I never condemned you for any of that. I was there with you, through all of it.*

Then the Lord reminded me of John chapter eight:

The scribes and Pharisees, however, brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before them and said, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such a woman. So what do You say?"

They said this to test Him, in order to have a basis for accusing Him. But Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with His finger.

When they continued to question Him, He straightened up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her." And again He bent down and wrote on the ground.

When they heard this, they began to go away one by one, beginning with the older ones, until only Jesus was left, with the woman standing there. Then Jesus straightened up

and asked her, “Woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?”

“No one, Lord,” she answered.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Now go and sin no more.” (John 8:3–11)

I realized in that moment it wasn’t just the things that happened to me that God hadn’t condemned me for — it was also the sins I had voluntarily committed throughout my life. In all of it, God was saying, “Then neither do I condemn you. Now go and sin no more.”

And all of a sudden, my whole understanding of God started shifting. He’s not the father watching over my shoulder for every time I get it wrong. For over twenty years I had served God, believing He was frequently disappointed in me — and in one parking spot, He used the truth of His Word to reveal His heart toward me. He never condemned me. Not once. For the first time in my life, I was getting a deep revelation of grace.

Before I left, I walked around the lake and prayed, and I declared that every lie spoken over me in that place was broken and dead in the name of Jesus — and that from that day on, that spot would be a spot of remembrance: a reminder that I am His beloved.

I’m so thankful to serve such a loving God. The place of the wound became the place of the healing. That’s who our heavenly Father is.

Transformed by Truth

That day started a journey I’m still on. In the years that followed, the Lord and I went to that chained closet together. He turned the light on, and we went through it, took those hurts out one by one. Gone. I can talk about all of it today because I’m not that same

person anymore. God has transformed my life, and what used to be my shame is now just part of my testimony.

And that healing touched everything. It changed my picture of God, and when God being harsh turned out to be a lie, the harsh dad started softening too. It changed the way I serve Him, because sons serve differently than slaves (there's a whole chapter on that ahead). Things I couldn't break in years of trying just lost their grip as I came to know His grace. And before that weekend was over, the same weekend that started at the dam, I found myself standing at a hotel window looking out over a city I had no idea God would one day call us to. There He gave me the assignment we now live, but I'm saving that story for chapters seventeen and nineteen.

I spent thirty years living out of lies about who I was, and I've spent years since watching God replace them, one truth at a time, with what His Word actually says about me. I know what the lies do to a life. And I know what the truth does.

INTRODUCTION: ARE YOU REAL ID READY?

For years, the Department of Homeland Security ran an advertising campaign with a memorable tagline: *Be Your REAL ID Self*.

Here's what it was all about. As of May 7, 2025, any adult flying domestically in the United States or entering certain federal facilities needs a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or another federally approved form of identification, like a passport. Before that, any state driver's license would do. You could walk up to airport security with the same everyday license you'd been carrying in your wallet for years and fly anywhere in the country. Not anymore. Without a REAL ID, you can't go where you want to go.

Spiritually speaking, I believe there are many Christians in exactly that position. They are not spiritually REAL ID ready, because they have never taken the time to put together the proper documentation that shows them who they really are. They love God. They believe in Jesus. But they don't know their true identity, and because they don't know it, they can't go where God is calling them to go.

Standing in Line

This whole thing became very real when we moved to Illinois.

When you move to a new state, you have to transfer your vehicle registrations and get new driver's licenses. Meagan and I had done this in other states before, and everywhere we had lived previously, you could just walk in, wait in line, and walk out with your new driver's license. So we didn't do our research. We didn't know that in Lake County, Illinois, getting your driver's license at the Secretary of State facility requires an appointment.

We showed up, and there was a line out the door, down the block — in the rain.

Thankfully, we realized the outdoor line was only for driver's licenses. To transfer our vehicle titles we could go inside and wait in a different line. So we went in, and while we stood there, we began praying for favor: "Okay, God, we need some favor here, because we would really like to get our driver's licenses today and not have to come back and do all this again."

While we were waiting, we struck up a conversation with the security guard standing near the line. We asked some questions. He explained the appointment system. And the more we chatted, the friendlier the conversation got. Before we reached the front of our line, he said, "You know what? I happen to know some people on the driver's license side. Let me see what I can do to get you in as a walk-in."

So we finished transferring our titles, paid our taxes, and when we were done, the security guard came up and said, "Come on — follow me." He walked us right past that line of people and got us in as walk-ins. Thank You, God.

But here's where things turned. When we got to the counter, the lady helping us said, "We can give you a driver's license — but we

cannot give you a *REAL ID* driver's license. You don't have enough documentation."

My license would still work. But after May 7, 2025, I wouldn't be able to use it to board a plane. Then she handed me a two-sided paper, listing all the documentation I would need to bring back in order to get my *REAL ID*.

The Documentation

I looked at that list, and as I read it, I started thinking about it spiritually. Look at what the government requires, and ask the questions with me:

- 1. Proof of identity**, such as a passport or birth certificate. Spiritually speaking: do you have proof of your true identity in Christ? Could you show it if someone asked?
- 2. Proof of your Social Security number.** Spiritually: do you know the chapter and verse numbers that tell you who you are as a born-again believer? Not a vague sense that "the Bible says something about that somewhere" — the actual documentation.
- 3. Proof of residency.** Spiritually: do you know your true citizenship? Do you know where you actually belong?
- 4. Legal name-change documentation and proof of signature.** Spiritually: do you know what you are now called as a born-again believer? Do you know the names God has given you?

Most Christians I know couldn't produce that file. They've heard sermons about identity. They've sung songs about who they are in Christ. But if you asked them to open their Bible and document it — proof of identity, chapter and verse, proof of citizenship, proof of their new name — the folder would be pretty thin.

That's what this book is for. By the time you finish it, my prayer is that you will have the documentation you need to know your REAL ID, your real identity as a born-again believer. Not confidence borrowed from a worship song or somebody else's testimony — your own documentation, chapter and verse. Truth you can stand on when everything around you starts to shake.

How to Use This Book

This book has grown out of a sermon series I preached with the same title, and it keeps the shape of that journey: twenty-one chapters, building your file chapter by chapter. You can read it straight through, take a chapter a day for three weeks, or walk through it weekly with a small group (there's a Leader Guide at the back). The truth in this book first changed my life, and now by the grace of God, I believe if you allow it to, it will also bring transformation to your life.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.
(Romans 12:2)

A few suggestions as you go:

Read with your Bible open. I quote the Scriptures throughout this book because the Word of God is what transforms us. Sometimes I only quote part of a passage, so don't stop at what's on the page: look up the reference, read the whole thing, mark it, and make it yours. Unless noted otherwise, quotations come from the Berean Standard Bible.

Make it your own. This isn't your typical book, one you read once and then set on the shelf. It's a Bible study and reference guide for life. Highlight, underline, or mark the places that speak to you the

most in each chapter, so you can quickly go back and review those spots as you continue studying that truth throughout the Word of God.

Use the Documentation. At the end of each chapter you'll find *Your Documentation*, the key verses that prove that chapter's identity truth. That's your file. By the end of the book, you'll have your spiritual REAL ID paperwork in order, chapter and verse.

Rest at every seventh chapter. The book moves in three sets of seven, and each seventh chapter is built as a Sabbath rest — a place to stop, review your file, and reflect on what you've been learning — and the third rest sends you out. That rhythm is deliberate: we don't change our identity by striving. We change it by resting in the finished work of Christ and receiving by faith what God's grace has already provided.

There remains, then, a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For whoever enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following the same pattern of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:9–11)

Go deeper online. You'll find additional resources for this book at YourREALID.com.

Don't rush past the questions and prayers. Information alone doesn't transform anyone. This book will do you good only to the degree that you believe what God says about you and act on it. And we'll talk about why that is in the first chapter.

Because before we can talk about your true identity, we have to settle a bigger question first: the one a Roman governor asked Jesus two thousand years ago, and the one our whole culture is still asking today.

What is truth?

PART ONE

DOCUMENTS TO BE FILED IN
THIS PART: REAL ID TRUTHS #1-9

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS TRUTH?

“Well, that might be your truth, but it’s not my truth.”

Someone once said that to me in a conversation, and you’ve probably heard it too, because we live in a world that thinks and teaches that truth is subjective. There’s been a lot of talk in recent years about “my truth” and “your truth.” Now, there is truth, and then there are opinions, thoughts, preferences, and perspectives. But there is only one truth. The dictionary defines truth as that which conforms to fact or actuality; the reality of a situation. Truth is what’s actually real, whether anyone believes it or not.

For years, the world said, “Seeing is believing.” Have you ever heard someone say, “I know it’s true — I saw it with my own two eyes”? People said that for generations. You don’t hear it as much anymore, and I believe there’s a reason: we’ve learned how much fake is out there. Spend a few minutes on social media and you realize that much of what you’re seeing is not reality. People put on fronts. They post pictures and say things that don’t reflect their real life or their real situation. It’s a projection: the image they

want you to believe about them, not the true condition of who they are.

The Bible has been consistent about this all along:

For we walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)

A Rapidly Changing World

Think about how much the world has changed. I'm old enough to remember before the internet was really a thing: dial-up connections that took forever, when email was a big deal as a form of communication. There was no such thing as a smartphone when I grew up. And the pace of change isn't slowing down; it's accelerating far beyond what was predicted.

A while back, artificial intelligence tools started making headlines every single week: new systems that could write, generate photographs, and produce video so convincing you couldn't tell it from a camera recording. Filmmaker Tyler Perry saw an early preview of a text-to-video system called Sora and put an eight-hundred-million-dollar expansion of his Atlanta studios on indefinite hold, because he realized the technology was about to make everything he planned to build obsolete.

And here's what has happened in the short time since: it has all proven the point. Sora didn't even last two years after its public release before it was retired. That's how fast this is moving. By the time you read this, today's most advanced systems will likely be old news too.

Here's why I bring this up in a book about identity. I believe most people are completely unprepared for how rapidly the world will keep changing. Within a short time, the fake online will be indistinguishable from the real as far as our natural senses are concerned. It already takes discernment to know whether a photo

or video actually happened. It's going to take *spiritual* discernment to know whether what we're seeing lines up with truth.

So there has never been a more important time for believers to know our REAL ID: not the one the government talks about, but our real identity in Christ, our true identity as born-again believers called to be change agents in this world. And for that identity to hold, it has to be built on the unshifting, firm foundation of truth. Real truth. Not someone's subjective quote-unquote "truth," which is actually a lie, but unshakable truth that survives the shaking.

Which raises the question a Roman governor asked two thousand years ago.

Jesus on Trial

Come with me to the Gospel of John. Jesus has shared the Last Supper with His disciples. He has been betrayed by Judas, arrested, and now He stands on trial before Pontius Pilate:

Pilate went back into the Praetorium, summoned Jesus, and asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

"Are you saying this on your own," Jesus asked, "or did others tell you about Me?"

"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed You over to me. What have You done?"

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world; if it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jews. But now My kingdom is not of this realm."

"Then You are a king!" Pilate said.

“You say that I am a king,” Jesus answered. “For this reason I was born and have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to My voice.”

“What is truth?” Pilate asked. (John 18:33–38)

Look at what Jesus says about His own purpose: “For this reason I was born and have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to My voice.” That should sound familiar to anyone who knows Jesus’ words from earlier in His ministry: “My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27). Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to His voice.

And Pilate answers with the question people have been asking for centuries: *What is truth?*

Here’s what happens when people don’t know the answer. When people don’t understand what truth is, they make up their own quote-unquote “truths” to answer the questions and solve the problems they have in life. But if you make up a truth, is it truth? It’s a made-up belief. Truth is not subjective.

So let’s see how the Bible answers Pilate’s question.

Grace and Truth Came Through Jesus

Go back to the opening chapter of John’s Gospel:

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is at the Father’s side, has made Him known. (John 1:17–18)

The New American Standard Bible renders that first phrase, “grace and truth were **realized** through Jesus Christ” (NASB). Put the translations side by side and the picture fills out: grace and truth *came* — grace and truth *were realized* — through Jesus. Truth isn’t an abstract idea floating out there for philosophers to argue about. Truth arrived in a Person. Jesus told Pilate He came into the world to testify to the truth, and John tells us that in Jesus, God Himself has been made known to us. Jesus came to be the exact representation of the Father, to reveal God to the world.

Now turn ahead to John 16, where Jesus prepares His disciples for His departure:

However, when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak what He hears, and He will declare to you what is to come. (John 16:13)

Two things here. First, the Holy Spirit is called *the Spirit of truth*. Second, His ministry is to guide you into all truth. So what truth is He guiding us into?

Sanctified in the Truth

One chapter later, we get to listen in as Jesus prays to the Father for His disciples and all future believers:

I am not asking that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I have also sent them into the world. For them I sanctify Myself, so that they too may be sanctified by the truth. (John 17:15–19)

There is Pilate's answer, one chapter before Pilate asks the question: **"Your word is truth."**

That word *sanctify* means to set apart. Jesus is praying that believers would be set apart from the world, different from the world, because they are set apart in truth. Think about how that works. When you don't follow truth, anything goes. When anything can be called right, people simply do whatever they want. But when you know the truth — when you know there is a right way of acting, a right way of speaking, a right way of thinking — and you choose to follow it, that choice will separate you from those who don't. It is truth that sets us apart.

And look at the assignment inside the prayer: "As You sent Me into the world, I have also sent them into the world." Remember what Jesus told Pilate His mission was? *For this reason I was born and have come into the world, to testify to the truth.* Now He says: as You sent Me, I have sent them. That means you and I are sent to carry on Jesus' mission of bearing witness to the truth. As born-again believers, our lives are to bear witness to the truth of the Word of God: set apart from the world, looking different from the world, because we follow Truth.

Jesus even says, "For them I sanctify Myself." He set Himself apart so that we could be set apart in the truth. And since we are called to be conformed to the image of Christ, we choose the same thing: to be set apart from the world's way of doing things by following the Word of God, which is truth.

Truth Requires Faith

I want to show you something a little different. Turn to Hebrews 11:

Now faith is the assurance of what we hope for and the certainty of what we do not see. This is why the ancients were commended.

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. (Hebrews 11:1–3)

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, by the word of God. The Bible tells us this is truth, but notice: it takes *faith* to understand it. The Bible tells us things we cannot prove with our natural senses. It gives us truth our natural senses cannot receive. Plenty of people say, "I can't prove it, so I won't believe it. Prove to me the existence of God. Prove to me He created the world." You don't have to prove it. It's going to take faith either way. That's why we're called *believers*. Believers choose to have faith, and faith goes beyond what we can see with our natural eyes.

And remember where we started: the more technology advances, the less we can trust our natural eyes anyway. The world's own standard, seeing is believing, is falling apart, because so much of what we see is fake. God's standard has never changed: we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

A few verses later, the writer of Hebrews adds this:

And without faith it is impossible to please God. For anyone who approaches Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Must believe. Faith and belief go hand in hand. By faith we understand something, and then we have to choose to believe it. People can tell you anything; you get to choose what you believe.

Programming and the Renewed Mind

Here's why the choice matters: a lot of people are living their whole lives believing lies about their identity, lies installed by programming they received along the way.

When we're young, especially, the things people say to us stick. We remember them, and they shape our identity. There are people walking around today who think they're stupid because somebody told them they were stupid. A teacher, a parent, their peers, someone important in their life said it, and they took that memory and made it part of their identity. Now they live with a limitation on their learning, because everything runs through a filter that says, *I'm stupid. I'm a slow learner. I can't learn that.*

Does that reflect reality? Not necessarily. It's programming they received, but it's not the truth about them. Yet if a person believes it, they will act in line with that belief. Meanwhile, some of the most brilliant people in history didn't fit the classroom. Einstein hated the way school was taught. Thomas Edison got labeled "addled" and pulled out of school. Many brilliant people were labeled slow simply because they learned and saw things differently.

I got a great picture of this a while back, playing around with Chat-GPT. It had a feature in its personalization settings called memory: turn it on, and the system remembers things from your conversations. The stored memory shapes the output. And I thought: how familiar. That is how people work. We carry stored memories — things said to us, done to us, believed about us — and those memories shape our outlook and our output: how we see ourselves, what we say, what we attempt, how we treat people. And much of what's stored in there is not based on truth. It's just subjective information sitting in the memory, changing the way we function.

So the question becomes: who is doing your programming?

Think about the Super Bowl for a moment. Even people who aren't into football watch the Super Bowl, people like me. Because of this, advertisers spend a massive amount of money for one thirty-second slot. Why? Because they know that when they put that information into you, it changes your behavior. People buy things because of the programming they've received. It works. That's why they pay for it.

Now apply that beyond commercials. The music we listen to. The feeds we scroll. The voices we let speak into us. Many people are programming their minds full of content that, if they stopped and asked, "Is this what I want my life to be transformed into? Do I want this to become *me*?" — they would turn it off. "Oh, it's just music." No, it's programming. You're listening, you're memorizing, you're learning, and it is shaping the way you see life. Most people never pay attention to this; they just go through life letting someone else program them.

The Bible tells us to take the programming seriously:

Therefore I urge you, brothers, on account of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.
(Romans 12:1–2)

Do not be conformed to this world. The world is constantly trying to squeeze us into its mold — through social media, advertising, entertainment, even education — telling us what to be and what to need. But we are not to be conformed; we are to be *transformed*. That word means changed into another form,

transfigured. When we become born again, we begin a process of becoming visibly different, because we *are* different than we once were. And how does the transformation happen? By the renewing of the mind. When our minds are conformed to the truth of the Word of God, the stored programming gets rewritten. And because we see life differently, we act differently, speak differently, respond to people differently. The output changes because the input changed.

The apostle Paul, writing to the believers in Thessalonica, told them where that power comes from:

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you **who believe**. (1 Thessalonians 2:13 NKJV)

The word of God *which also effectively works in you who believe*. Believing is key to receiving truth from the Word of God. When you read the Word of God and don't believe it's true, you won't receive the benefit of it. When you choose to believe it, it goes to work in you, and it transforms your life.

Praying for Discernment

There's a prayer from Paul that I like to open my messages with:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to test and prove what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9–11)

Look at the pieces. Love *abounding* — that word means overflowing, in excess, superabundant — and that overflow of love is what it will take to love people properly in a world that is shifting and growing colder. Abounding *in knowledge and depth of insight*: depth of insight can also be translated as discernment. Knowledge and discernment are what we'll need to navigate what's coming and to know our true identity. *Pure and blameless for the day of Christ*. That is sanctification language: set apart in truth, kept clean by truth, until He comes.

The Boy Who Couldn't Read

I told you in the Prologue that I grew up dyslexic, and that other kids called me Dumbo and told me I was stupid.

I took those words and filed them as identity: *I'm stupid. That's why I can't read*. And that programming did its job. Every struggle confirmed it to me again: *I'm stupid*. Even after I learned to read, the progress was so slow that I figured I'd never be good at it. And reading out loud in front of a group of people? That's the stuff nightmares are made of.

Except it wasn't truth. It was programming.

Here's what the Word of God did with it. As I gave myself to the Scriptures — reading, listening, year after year — the Word went to work in me, the way Paul said it would: it “effectively works in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13 NKJV), and it transforms you “by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). It renewed how I saw God, and then it renewed how I saw *me*.

And now, I want you to see what God has done with that old label: the boy who could barely read at ten now reads the Word of God out loud to God's people. I read it, I study it, I write about it, I preach it. When I stop and think about where I started and where God has brought me, it still boggles my mind.

Answering Pilate

So when Pilate asked, “What is truth?” the Answer was standing right in front of him. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ, and Jesus Himself gave us the answer for every generation: “*Your word is truth.*”

But that truth will not benefit you unless you choose to believe it. As born-again believers, we get to choose. And when we choose to believe the Word, we start putting it inside us, letting it renew our minds, knowing it is at work in us who believe. Whatever you spend the most time focusing on and putting into yourself is what will begin coming out of you. So put in truth.

That is why it is vital for every believer who wants to know their REAL ID, their true identity, to spend time reading, listening to, and meditating on the truth of the Word of God. That’s how we are transformed into the image and likeness of Christ. And that’s the foundation everything else in this book is built on. Every identity document we file in the chapters ahead is only as reliable as the source it comes from. Our source is not opinion, not culture, not the world’s programming: it is the Word of the living God, which is truth.

Now we’re ready to open the file.

Your Documentation

- John 17:17 – “Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.”

Supporting file: 2 Corinthians 5:7 • John 18:33–38 • John 10:27 • John 1:17–18 • John 16:13 • John 17:15–19 • Hebrews 11:1–3, 6 • Romans 12:1–2 • 1 Thessalonians 2:13 • Philipppians 1:9–11

Making It Yours

1. Where have you been trusting “seeing is believing” — building your sense of identity on what you can see, measure, or prove — instead of walking by faith in what God has said?
2. What “programming” have you received from the world that has shaped how you see yourself? Can you trace a specific belief about yourself back to something someone said to you? Does it agree with the Word of God?
3. Jesus said everyone who belongs to the truth listens to His voice. What is your current daily intake of the Word of God compared to your intake of the world’s programming: music, feeds, shows, news, etc.? What is one practical change you could make this week?
4. Read John 17:15–19 reflectively. What would it look like for you to be set apart by the truth in your workplace, home, or school?

A Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word, and thank You that Your Word is truth. Thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to guide me into all truth. I choose to believe Your Word. Transform my life by the renewing of my mind as I spend time reading, studying, and meditating on the truth of Your Word. I thank You that I can stand on the firm foundation of Your truth and stand strong through any shaking that comes. Set me apart by Your truth, and let my life bear witness to it. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

For Your Group

- **This week:** meditate on John 17:17 — “Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.” If you didn’t already, make it yours: go to the spots that spoke to you the most in this chapter, and highlight or mark them so you can quickly reference them later.
- **Come ready to share:** the part of this chapter that spoke to you most, and why.

If you’ve never been born again or come to the One who is truth, or aren’t sure, the special invitation at the back of this book was written for you.

CHAPTER 2

ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE

Every message I preach begins with a confession, spoken out loud, before the Word is opened:

I AM who the Word says that I am,

I choose to DO what the Word says to do,

And I HAVE what the Word says that I have.

I choose to open my heart to receive everything the Lord has for me today.

That confession is the heart of this book. In the last chapter we settled the foundation: the Word of God is truth, and it is in the Word that our true identity is revealed to us. Jesus was set apart, sanctified, as He was sent into the world to bear witness to the truth, and He has sent us the same way. Our job is to bear witness to the truth.

So now we start filing documentation. And the first document in your file, the first REAL ID truth, is about what your life is actually rooted in.

A Love You Can't Measure

Our key scripture is a prayer Paul prayed for believers:

...for this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I ask that out of the riches of His glory He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Then you, being **rooted and grounded in love**, will have power, together with all the saints, to comprehend the length and width and height and depth of the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:14–19)

Paul says we are *rooted and grounded in love*, and he prays that we would comprehend the length and the width and the height and the depth of that love. And see this — length, width, height, depth: those are the words you'd use to measure a volume. I don't think Paul's talking about geometry, but he *is* stretching our minds in every direction at once. So let's take the picture and run with it.

If the love of Christ is measured like a volume, what is the largest thing human beings have ever tried to comprehend? The largest thing I could think of is the universe. And when I looked into it, here's what I found: humans can't even fully comprehend the size of the universe. Modern science tells us the *observable* universe, just the portion we can see from Earth, is about ninety-three billion light-years across, and a single light-year is roughly 5.88 trillion miles. And beyond what we can observe? The best measurements can only set a minimum — the whole universe is at least several times larger than everything we can see, and nobody knows where it ends. It may even be infinite.

That is beyond our full comprehension. And Paul says the love of Christ is like that: it *surpasses knowledge*. But look at what else he prays: that we would *know* this love that surpasses knowledge. How can you know something that surpasses knowledge? Because love can be known intimately. I don't have to understand the full dimensions of God's love to know that He loves me, and to experience His love. Just like I don't need to comprehend how big the universe is to live in it.

That changes how you handle the lying whispers of the enemy. Whenever the thought comes — *maybe if I do this, He'll stop loving me* — the answer is: His love surpasses knowledge. It is bigger and deeper than my finite mind could ever grasp. I believe one day we will fully know, even as we are fully known (see 1 Corinthians 13:12). But while we live on this earth, we won't fully comprehend the love of God, and we don't need to. What I know is that my identity is rooted and grounded in it. That is what my roots go down into. That is what I build my life upon. And never forget, every lie from the enemy has a counter-truth we can stand on in the Word of God.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39)

The God Kind of Love

The Greek language Paul wrote in had multiple words for love.

In English we have one word doing all the work. I love my wife. I have also been known to say I love pizza. Now, I do not mean the same thing when I say I love Meagan and when I say I love pizza. Those are not on the same playing field. I love driving on a

beautiful day with the windows down and the music on. I love that, but not the way I love pizza, and certainly not the way I love my wife and my kids. One English word, stretched across all of it.

Greek was more precise. There was *eros*, romantic love, and *philia*, brotherly love. But the word in Ephesians 3 is **agape**: a selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love. It is the highest form of love, the love of God for humanity and the love believers are called to have for one another. And watch how the New Testament shows this love in action. “God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). That’s love demonstrated by commitment and choice, acting for the good of another whether or not the feelings cooperate.

Said another way, agape is a love that is a *choice*. And God has chosen to love you with that kind of love: a deliberate, committed, unconditional love beyond your full comprehension. God didn’t accidentally fall in love with you. He chose to love you. Now and forever.

So here is your first identity document. Say it the way we say it in the confession, *I AM who the Word says that I am*:

REAL ID Truth #1 — Ephesians 3:17 – I am Rooted and Grounded in Love!

Roots That Find Living Water

Colossians carries the same picture and adds to it:

Therefore, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in Him, **rooted and built up in Him**, established in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:6–7)

Ephesians says we are rooted and grounded *in love*; Colossians says we are rooted and built up *in Him*, established in the faith. The New American Standard Bible brings out the verb tenses: “having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him” (Colossians 2:7 NASB). The rooting has already happened; the building up is happening now.

That word *rooted* means to cause to take root, to become firmly established: the imagery of being firmly planted like a tree with deep roots. It emphasizes depth, stability, and the nourishment that comes from being deeply anchored. A tree draws life up through its roots; the believer draws life from being firmly connected to Christ and His love.

We learned about how far roots will go to find nourishment at our own house. Our backyard got dug up because our sewer line had roots grow down into it. During a dry summer, the tree roots went looking for nourishment, and found it in the sewage line. We had to have a whole section excavated where the roots had invaded the pipe.

I’m thankful my roots are connected to the love of God and not going down and drawing from sewage somewhere. That’s the picture, though, isn’t it? Roots *will* find something to drink. In a dry season, whatever you’re rooted in is what you’ll draw up into your life. When I go to the Word and draw nourishment out of the truth, it nourishes me and grows me, and I never have to worry about a dry spell, because I’m not dependent on the weather. When we are rooted in the love of God and connected to the truth of the Word, life flows into us through our roots.

The word *grounded* in Ephesians 3:17 means foundation: firmly established on a strong base, emphasizing stability and durability. So the roots give us nourishment, and being grounded in love gives us the solid foundation we build our lives on. Nourishment and stability, both from the same love.

Psalm 1 paints both in a single portrait:

Blessed is the person who does not walk in the counsel of
the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
But his delight is in the Law of the LORD,
And on His Law he meditates day and night.
He will be like a tree planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season,
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1:1–3 NASB)

Planted by streams of water. We don't have to send our roots down into a sewage line. We have a constant flow of living truth available to us through the Word of God.

REAL ID Truth #2 — Colossians 2:7 – I am Rooted in Christ!

Taken Captive

Let's go back to Colossians, because I want you to see what Paul tells us next:

Therefore, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him, established in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, which are based on human tradition

and the spiritual forces of the world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form. And **you have been made complete in Christ**, who is the head over every ruler and authority. (Colossians 2:6–10)

Being rooted in Christ doesn't make us immune to lies. We can be held hostage to a lie in our minds if we don't know our REAL ID. That's why Paul says *see to it*: this is something we watch for.

Shortly before I preached the message behind this chapter, I had a conversation with someone who kept quoting human philosophers and the wisdom they offer, and what was being quoted didn't fully line up with the truth of Scripture. You see this all through the world's success systems. You'll find popular self-help philosophies that borrow some scriptural principles but strip Christ out of them. The principles are then presented as wisdom or laws of the universe, because that makes them appeal to more people, and they may even sound a lot like truth.

No wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14)

The problem is that those principles no longer have roots. When a principle is not rooted and grounded in Christ, it loses the very thing that matters. Even if we gain the whole world but lose our own soul, we've gained nothing (see Mark 8:36). People chasing success or self-improvement the world's way can be taken captive by empty deception and miss what God wants to do in their lives because Christ has been removed from it.

And it isn't only the world's philosophy we have to test: sometimes it's the lyrics we sing, even in Christian songs. There's a line in a popular worship song talking about God tearing down every lie as He pursues us. I don't believe that theology is fully accurate.

God is not tearing down the lies that hold us captive without us doing our part: we have to continue in His Word and take every thought captive. He gave us *the truth*:

As Jesus spoke these things, many believed in Him. So He said to the Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, you are truly My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:30–32)

You are called to continue in His Word and *know* the truth in the Bible. And it’s the truth that you know that sets you free. And here’s the beautiful thing — it’s also through His Word that we get to know Him personally. Look what Jesus said about our relationship with the Father:

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6)

Self-help philosophy may carry fragments of truth, but there is no other way to the Father except through Jesus. And there’s no true freedom in life outside of that relationship with Him.

The Weapons of Our Warfare

So how do we tear the lies down? Paul describes the arsenal:

For though we live in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh. The weapons of our warfare are not the weapons of the flesh. Instead, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every presumption set up against the knowledge of God; and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3–5)

See what happened there? Colossians says philosophy can take *you* captive. Second Corinthians says we take every *thought* captive. Either you take your thoughts captive and make them obey Christ, or those thoughts will take you captive and hold you in bondage to the lie.

So what do we fight with? “Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:16–17). The Word of God is the sword, the weapon we use to battle the lies that come into our minds and try to hold us captive concerning who we are.

And when I read that the Word is our weapon, it made me think: it’s not *only* a weapon. Who is the Word?

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made, and without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. (John 1:1–4)

And a few verses later:

The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

The Bible we hold is the Word of God, and that Word was made flesh in Jesus. We have access to know Jesus through His Word, to understand who we’re rooted in. Rooted in love, rooted in Christ, established in the Word. The Word is the truth, the firm foundation we build our lives on, and that foundation is a Person whose love surpasses knowledge.

Complete in Him

Look once more at Colossians 2:9–10: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form. And you have been made complete in Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.”

There’s another identity document in that verse: in Him, *you have been made complete*. The Greek word means to make full, to fill to the brim, something brought to its intended fullness. When you were born again, your spirit, your real self, was made new and made complete. Completely whole, spiritually complete in Christ.

That doesn’t mean there’s no growth left; we spend our lives submitting to the truth so our minds can be renewed, as we saw in chapter one. But your spirit is not under construction. It is complete. And knowing that is a weapon in itself, because so many of the enemy’s lies begin the same way: *you’re not enough, you’re missing something, you have to do this before you’ll ever be that*. No. In Christ, I am complete. In Christ, I am enough. In my spirit, I have been made complete, filled to the brim.

REAL ID Truth #3 — Colossians 2:10 – I am Complete in Christ!

Rooted in Love, Rooted in Christ — How Both?

Maybe you noticed that Scripture says we’re rooted and grounded *in love* and also rooted and built up *in Christ*. How are we rooted in both? First John answers it:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because

God is love. This is how God's love was revealed among us: God sent His one and only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. And love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. **Beloved, if God so loved us,** we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God remains in us, and His love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:7–12)

Christ is God, and God is love. That's the short of it. To be rooted in Christ is to be rooted in love. Scripture says it multiple ways to help us understand one reality.

But look at something else in that passage, the word John keeps calling his readers: *Beloved*. "Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us." Being rooted and grounded in love is one thing; understanding that you are personally *loved by God*, that you are *His beloved*, is another key to your identity. Paul uses the same language:

Be imitators of God, therefore, as beloved children, and walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant sacrificial offering to God. (Ephesians 5:1–2)

REAL ID Truth #4 — 1 John 4:11 – I am Loved by God as His Beloved!

Why This Matters in the Last Days

Now let me show you why I put this chapter so early in the book. Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives when His disciples asked Him privately about the sign of His coming and the end of the age:

See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. **And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.** But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:4–14 ESV)

Are we hearing of wars and rumors of wars throughout the world? We certainly are. Famines and earthquakes in various places? Yes. And in many countries right now, Christians are being persecuted and martyred for their faith. Jesus said this must take place, and He said, *see that you are not alarmed*.

But I want to slow down on one line: "And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12 ESV). The Greek word here is *anomia*, a compound word meaning "without law." Lawlessness. It conveys not just an absence of law but active rebellion against God's moral law, a moral and spiritual rebellion that leads to corruption and chaos. Are we seeing active rebellion against God's moral law in the world? Absolutely.

And what does the multiplied lawlessness do? It cools love. The word for love here is *agape* again, the God kind of love, and the

Greek word for “grow cold” means to cool by blowing, the way you cool something hot with moving air.

I made my son Titus an omelet one time. He cut into it and took a bite right away, while it was steaming hot, and then just held it in his mouth, wide-eyed, waiting for it to cool down. The next bite, I watched him lift the fork and *blow* on it, and you could see the steam roll off across the room. Why do we blow on hot food? Because cool air moving across something hot cools it down.

That’s the picture that helps me feel Jesus’ words. The love of many will be chilled by the prevailing winds of lawlessness blowing across it. It’s gradual: most people never even catch it happening. When our focus settles on everything going on in the world instead of the truth of who we are, the agape love in us begins to wane, one degree at a time.

This is why I believe it matters so much where believers put their attention. I don’t mind being aware of what’s happening in the world. But when we constantly fill our minds with the negative — the harm people do to each other, the evil people are capable of — it becomes easy to stop wanting to love those people. And that’s wrong. We are called to love even our enemies and to desire that even our enemies come to know the Lord. When our focus is our identity — rooted and grounded in love, rooted and established in Christ, complete in Christ, loved as His beloved — our roots keep going down into living water, and the cold wind can blow all it wants. “The one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13 ESV). We endure by staying connected to the truth of who we are.

A Testimony to All Nations

And then comes the verse that gets me excited:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14 ESV)

Instead of worrying over everything happening out there, believers who know their identity get to be part of *this*. *Gospel* means good news, and the good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed to every nation. That word *testimony* means a witness, a proof, a declaration that makes something known. Jesus came to testify to the truth; when we proclaim the gospel, we are testifying to the truth before all nations, carrying on His mission, just as He prayed in John 17.

Here's something that's serious, and at the same time it stirs my heart: the Greek root behind "testimony" in that verse, *martyrion*, is the same root that gives us our word *martyr*. One of the early church fathers famously said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. When believers in other countries are willing to lay down their lives rather than give up the truth, that itself is a testimony to the world of how real the truth is.

I believe every believer should know their true identity so deeply that if it ever came to that, we would not trade away the truth. I don't know that it will be required of most of us, and this isn't a fear to carry. Look at early church history: those who gave their lives did it willingly, even joyfully, because they had a grace on their lives to handle it. And I know that if it ever came to that point for believers today, there would be a grace that accompanies it: people graciously choosing, *I will lay down my life for the truth so that others can come into the kingdom*.

And here is the reason that gets me excited: when the gospel is proclaimed, we have the opportunity to share the love of God with people, and what God has done for them. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for

salvation to everyone who believes... For the gospel reveals the righteousness of God that comes by faith from start to finish, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’” (Romans 1:16–17).

Our focus is not martyrdom or the darkness of the days. Our focus is understanding how loved we are. I don’t believe a believer who truly understands the love of God can go on living in fear: not of persecution, not of shaking, not of whatever comes. Perfect love drives out fear (see 1 John 4:18), and that love is the environment we’re planted in. Let your roots grow deep into His perfect love.

Your Documentation

Your first four REAL ID entries in the file:

1. Ephesians 3:17 – I am Rooted and Grounded in Love!
2. Colossians 2:7 – I am Rooted in Christ!
3. Colossians 2:10 – I am Complete in Christ!
4. 1 John 4:11 – I am Loved by God as His Beloved!

Supporting file: Ephesians 3:14–19 • 1 Corinthians 13:12 • Romans 8:38–39 • Romans 5:8 • Colossians 2:6–10 • Psalm 1:1–3 • 2 Corinthians 11:14 • Mark 8:36 • John 8:30–32 • John 14:6 • 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 • Ephesians 6:16–17 • John 1:1–4, 14 • 1 John 4:7–12 • Ephesians 5:1–2 • Matthew 24:4–14 • Romans 1:16–17 • 1 John 4:18

Making It Yours

1. Paul prays that you would *know* a love that *surpasses knowledge*. What’s the difference between knowing facts about God’s love and knowing His love? Which describes your experience lately?

2. Roots go looking for nourishment in dry seasons. When your last dry season came, where did your roots go: the Word, or a “sewage line”? What did you draw up into your life?
3. Agape is a love based on choice and commitment, not feelings. How does it change your sense of security to know God’s love for you is His deliberate choice?
4. Jesus said multiplied lawlessness blows like cold wind across love. Where do you notice your love cooling toward people — a person, a group, a category of people? What would it look like to take that thought captive this week?

A Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You that I am rooted and grounded in Your love. Thank You that I live these REAL ID truths. I combat every lie of the enemy with the truth of Your Word. Thank You that Your love for me surpasses knowledge, and that I get to know it at a deeper level every single day. Help me choose to believe Your love and recognize it in my life, and to love people with Your love, even those who have been difficult to love. Lead me into opportunities to share Your love and the truths of Your kingdom with others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

For Your Group

- **This week:** pick one or more of this chapter’s four truths and meditate on them every day.
- **Come ready to share:** which truth you picked, and the verse that made it real to you.

If you’ve never put your roots down into this love, or aren’t sure, the special invitation at the back of this book was written for you.

CHAPTER 3

A NEW CREATION

Understanding and knowing our REAL ID, our true identity as believers, is incredibly important, because we miss out when we live in ignorance. And the sad reality is that most of us don't know what we don't know. When you don't know what you don't know, you don't even know what questions you're supposed to ask to learn what you need to learn. That's the downside of ignorance in any area of life: the longer we live in it, the more it costs us.

Eighteen Years of Rinsing Dishes

I had a situation come up while I was preparing the message behind this chapter, where I realized I had been living in ignorance for most of my life, and it had cost us a lot of money and hundreds of hours. The area of ignorance I'm speaking of is how to use our dishwasher.

All our married life, Meagan and I or our kids have rinsed every dish before putting it in the dishwasher. Basically a full pre-wash: everything scraped, cleaned, and rinsed until you couldn't see a

speck on it, loaded properly, and then washed. The dishwasher was really just there to sanitize dishes we had already cleaned by hand.

Then about a year ago our dishwasher broke, and the repair technician, seeing that we used detergent pods, told us, “Oh, you shouldn’t put the pods in the little door. Just throw them in the bottom of the dishwasher. It does the same thing, and you’ll never break the door.” That’s not what we’d called him about, but he was a dishwasher repair technician, so I assumed he knew how dishwashers should operate. For a year, we threw the pod in the bottom.

Then I came across a YouTube video that highlighted my errors. I learned that when you throw the pod in the bottom, the soap dissolves during the first rinse cycle, and after ten or fifteen minutes, it’s gone. The rest of the cycle runs with no soap at all. I learned we could use a much less expensive detergent and get much better results. And I learned we never needed to rinse the dishes in the first place.

The week we changed, we had tacos, and just to see what would happen, we put the taco holders with baked-on cheese straight into the dishwasher, crust and all. They came out spotless. It was a moment of realization: eighteen years of wasted effort. All the time we spent scrubbing. All of it unnecessary, because we didn’t know what we didn’t know.

Why am I telling you about my dishwasher in a book about identity? Because ignorance always costs something. In that case, it cost time and money. But when we are ignorant about our true identity in Christ, the cost is measured in something far more precious: years of living below the life God created us to live.

So here’s a challenge: ask God to show you your blind spots. “God, what are the areas I’m ignorant in? What do I need to learn? What

questions should I even be asking You?” It’s okay to pray that. In our own strength we usually don’t know what questions to ask. And as you spend time in the Word, the Holy Spirit will begin highlighting the truths you need in order to live out of who you truly are. That’s the choice in front of every believer: to learn who we truly are through prayer and time in the Word — or to keep ourselves entertained by videos, shows, and social media while ignoring our true identity.

The Key Passage

Here is one of the richest identity passages in the Bible. We’ll be drawing on it again before the book is done:

So from now on we regard no one according to the flesh. Although we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. **Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.** The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come!

All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men’s trespasses against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ: Be reconciled to God. **God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.** (2 Corinthians 5:16–21)

That passage holds multiple REAL ID truths. In this chapter we’re filing two.

REAL ID Truth #5 — 2 Corinthians 5:17 – I am a New Creation in Christ!

The Greek behind “new creation” is two words. The word for *new* doesn’t merely mean recent; it means fresh, unprecedented: qualitatively different, entirely transformed in nature. You can be born again for decades and still have a *new* spirit inside you, because the newness isn’t about how long ago it happened. It’s about what you’re made of now. And the word for *creation* refers to something brought into being: divine creative action. Put them together: a new creation is a person transformed into something entirely new by God’s creative power through union with Christ.

This is not a renovation of the old. It’s not a fresh coat of paint on your spirit. It is a tear-down: remove and replace. A complete new build. When you were born again, you received a completely new spirit. Passed away. That’s funeral language. The old you didn’t get remodeled. The old you died and got buried.

What Exactly Was Made New?

That raises a question. When you got born again, did your looks change? No. Did your thoughts all change overnight? No. So what changed? Paul gives us the anatomy:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your entire spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24)

Spirit, soul, and body: in the Greek, three distinct words with three distinct meanings.

Spirit is the Greek word *pneuma*: your eternal being, the immaterial part of you that connects with God.

Soul is the Greek word *psychē*: your mind, emotions, and will; the seat of your individual personality. Our English word *psyche* comes straight from it. Now, the Bible doesn't use our modern term "sub-conscious," but I find it a helpful picture of how deep the soul runs: your thinking has layers underneath the surface, automatic patterns running without you choosing them.

Body is the Greek word *sōma*: your physical body, the outward expression of your inner life. It's what we see when we look at each other.

So which of the three was recreated? The spirit. God announced it centuries in advance:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
(Ezekiel 36:26)

Your spirit, your real self, was made completely new the moment you were born again. Your body didn't change, and your soul still needs renewing, just as we saw in chapter one. But the real you is a new build.

The Power on the Inside

Now let me give you a way to picture what's living in that new spirit. The terminology I'm about to use falls far short of describing what has really happened inside us, but it serves for illustration: I like to think of the new spirit inside me as a superpower.

When I was a kid, I used to daydream about which superpower I would choose if I got to pick. I believe I was already born again back then, but I didn't fully understand what that meant, and my thoughts were not lined up with truth. I decided I would choose

invisibility, and one of my first thoughts was that if I were invisible, I could waltz into banks and have all the money I needed. I'll spare you the rest of my plans; let's just say my thinking needed some renewing.

But here's what I couldn't have imagined back then: the believer already carries something far beyond any superpower a kid could dream up.

And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you. (Romans 8:11)

When your spirit was created new, you didn't get a new spirit that's merely *you*. The Spirit of God Himself came to dwell in you: literally the power that raised Jesus from the dead. God puts dreams and desires inside every one of us, and it is His Spirit within us that gives us the ability to walk out His plans and purposes.

But here's the catch — and it's a big one. Being born again does not automatically fix everything in your life. If you have difficult relationships when you get born again, they don't instantly heal. If you're struggling financially, the finances don't automatically turn around. There are processes to walk through, and if we never learn to draw on the power inside us, we leave dormant the greatest gift available to us on this earth. I had to learn this the hard way, and I've found that I'm not the only one. Many believers don't understand how to benefit from that power in the here and now. These are born-again, Jesus-loving believers, yet still struggling.

The Woman Who Died Poor — and Rich

Let me tell you a true story, first reported by Portland's KGW News. It's sad, but it illustrates how many believers live.

Cathy Boone lived on the streets of Astoria, Oregon, for years. "She was a special person as far as I'm concerned," said Donny Holder, a friend who often shared cigarettes and coffee with Cathy at McDonald's, a man who carried photographs of her wrapped in a tattered Ziploc bag in his coat pocket. "She was a sweetheart. I fell in love with her." Cathy struggled with mental health issues and drug abuse through her homeless years. On January 13, 2020, at just forty-nine years old, she had breathing problems while staying at the Astoria Warming Shelter. An ambulance rushed her to a Portland hospital, where she died.

What makes the story even harder is this: it didn't have to be that way. When Cathy's mother died in 2016, she left an inheritance. The attorney and personal representative handling her mother's estate tried everything to find her: advertisements in the local newspaper, messages on Facebook, emails and phone calls to family, even a hired private investigator. All of it came up empty. So in July 2019, a judge ordered \$884,407 of the estate's assets sent to the Oregon Department of State Lands, the agency that holds unclaimed money until the person entitled to it comes forward. The money sat there, waiting for Cathy. She just needed to claim it. It's not clear she ever knew it was hers. And only after her death was it finally paid out, to her estate.

Cathy Boone had more than \$884,000 waiting for her — enough for a home, for the best care available for her mental health and her addiction — and she slept in shelters and died without ever touching it. She didn't know what she didn't know.

I believe that is a picture of how many believers live. They carry the most powerful force in the universe, the Spirit of God, inside

them, and they live far below what's available to them, because no one ever told them about the inheritance. They ask God to change things, instead of tapping into what's already theirs. We have wealth inside us far greater than any dollar figure. So how do we tap in? Let's see what Peter has to say:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through the **knowledge of Him** who called us by His own glory and excellence. Through these **He has given us His precious and magnificent promises**, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, now that you have escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Peter 1:3–4)

Think about your hobbies, interests, or maybe your career. What subjects are you knowledgeable in? I've talked to people who are wildly knowledgeable when it comes to their favorite sports teams, the shows they follow, cooking and baking, health and nutrition, or what's growing in their garden. They could share for hours the knowledge they've obtained. How did they gain that knowledge? They spent time studying and learning it by applying consistent effort over time. It's this type of dedication believers need to have when it comes to learning how the kingdom of God operates. And as you tap into the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit on the inside of you, through the **knowledge of Him and His precious and magnificent promises**, I believe you'll begin to see visible change in many areas of your life, as you learn to apply His promises.

How the Power Flows: The Soul Gate

So how does it work? If the spirit is made new, why doesn't every area of life look different? Because of what stands in between.

Scripture connects our outward life to the health of our soul:

Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, **just as your soul prospers**. (3 John 1:2 NASB)

Our physical and mental health, as well as our true prosperity in life, reflect our soul health. Keep in mind, though, our outward life isn't always an immediate verdict on our soul health; rather, our soul health is the gate that life flows through. There are many people who look like they have everything together on the outside, yet they are falling apart on the inside because of their soul health. Likewise, some people's outward life looks to be a mess at first glance, yet they are sustained by a peace the world can't make sense of. Look at what the Word says a prospering soul rests on.

You will keep him in perfect peace,

Whose mind is stayed on You,

Because he trusts in You. (Isaiah 26:3 NKJV)

Our mind should stay focused on who we are in Christ. When our eyes are on problems, on lack in any area, it's easy to live in anxiety. When we keep our minds focused on the Lord and trust in the Lord, we can live in perfect peace.

Here's an illustration I like to use to help you understand this. Stretch out your right hand as far as you can to the right. That's your spirit: made new, filled with the Spirit of God, complete. Stretch out your left hand as far as you can to the left. That's your body: your physical life, your natural world. You should now look like you're on a cross — you, in the middle, are the soul: mind, will, and emotions.

Your spirit does not directly connect to your body. It connects through your soul, the part of you that is capable of believing and receiving the precious and magnificent promises of God. The power that flows from your spirit into your natural life flows through your soul.

Thinking about this illustration, let me ask you: which direction is your thinking facing most of the time? What is your focus on? Most of the time, we fix our attention on the left hand: the body, the natural. Our natural needs, our natural wants, what we can taste, touch, smell, see, and hear in the world around us. And when we stare at the natural, most of the time we see lack of some kind. So we go looking for counterfeits and substitutes in the world to fill an emptiness we feel in our flesh, while the whole time, an inheritance sits untouched in the other direction.

But turn and face the right hand, fix your gaze on your spirit and who you are in Christ, and the picture changes. The life-giving power of the Spirit flows into your soul: it transforms your thinking, even your subconscious thinking, and then it flows on out into your body and your natural world. When we focus on the life the Spirit gives, we discover we have no lack in Christ — that we are blessed, healthy, whole, and rich — and the fruit of the Spirit starts showing up in daily life (see Galatians 5:22). It all comes down to which direction you're facing.

Watch how Paul says it in the book of Romans:

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. (Romans 8:5–6 ESV)

If you want to tap into the power of God living inside you, you have to set your mind on the things of the Spirit. Set the mind on the flesh, your natural self apart from God, and the result is death: discouragement, frustration, fear, lack. Set the mind on the Spirit, and the result is life and peace. When the mind is set on the wrong things, you can live your whole life without accessing the full benefits that God has already made available to you.

You Are Not What You Do

I grew up in church, and I lived in a constant state of spiritual and emotional defeat, frustrated that I didn't see more change in my life, especially in my teenage years. Here was my problem: I thought my identity was based on what I did. So when I sinned, when I chose to tell a lie, I built my identity around it. *I told a lie, so I'm a liar.* I grew up thinking: I'm the black sheep of the family. I'm naughty. I'm sinful. I'm bad. I can remember going to church and praying the sinner's prayer over and over, because I just kept wanting to be free from sin, guilt, and condemnation.

And here's what actually happened. Every time I concluded *I'm a liar*, I programmed my subconscious with that identity. And what does a liar do? A liar lies. So I got good at it. When I took something, I concluded *I'm a thief*. And a thief's job is to get better at stealing. I look back and see how it worked: I kept living in line with what I understood my identity to be, and my understanding was built on the enemy's lies instead of on the truth of who I was in Christ.

Here is the truth that took me years to learn, and if you get it, whatever age you are, it will change your life: **your identity doesn't change based on what you do; you do what you do based on who you believe you are.**

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”
(Romans 1:17 ESV)

The ESV adds a footnote with another way to translate the ending of this verse: “The one who by faith is righteous shall live.” That’s believing you are righteous “by faith,” no matter how you feel, no matter how things look in the natural realm!

Remember what faith is:

Now faith is the assurance of what we hope for and the certainty of what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1)

Let me say it one more time: your identity doesn’t change based on what you do; you do what you do based on who you believe you are.

Think about how this works with your natural identity. I have an Illinois driver’s license with my name on it. Not once have I woken up in the morning and thought, *I wonder if I’m still Tim today, because yesterday I did something that wasn’t in line with who I am.* My natural identity doesn’t change based on my actions, and neither does my identity in Christ. But so many of us pull our identity from our behavior instead of pulling our behavior from our identity.

That’s why 2 Corinthians 5:16 is such a weapon: “From now on we regard no one according to the flesh.” *No one* includes yourself. You are not permitted to define yourself by your flesh: its failures or its track record. And when you stop regarding yourself according to the flesh, look what happens to the enemy’s whole strategy. Every attack he’s ever brought against you points at your flesh: *look how you screwed up; you’ll never change; what a loser.* He has never once come to me and said, *Christ in you, the hope of glory* (Colossians 1:27).

The enemy doesn't preach the truth of the Word to us; he points at our flesh, and if he does use the Scriptures, he twists them and brings them in a deceptive or condemning way. Jesus said of him, "the prince of this world is coming, and he has no claim on Me" (John 14:30). The devil came to Jesus and found nothing in Him. And when you've settled that your life is defined by "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20), then when the devil comes to you, you point to Jesus, you point to your REAL ID, your identity in Christ, and he's got nothing in you either.

Put Off, Put On

So how do we practically live out of the new identity, day by day? Paul lays it out in Ephesians:

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, **alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them**, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as **the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self**, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, **and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.** (Ephesians 4:17–24 ESV)

Look at the diagnosis: alienated from the life of God *because of ignorance*. And look at the prescription: put off the old self, be renewed in the spirit of your minds, put on the new self. Your mind is part

of your soul realm, so renewing the mind is the soul-work we've been describing: turning your focus from the flesh to the new self, which is your spirit, created after the likeness of God.

Romans says it with a wardrobe word:

Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh. (Romans 13:14)

This is why time in the Word first thing in the morning is so powerful: meditating on who you are in Christ is like getting dressed in Christ. Your spirit already *has* the new self; putting it on means clothing your *mind* in it: seeing yourself spirit, soul, and body wrapped in your new identity, and choosing to line your day up with who you really are.

The Righteousness of God

So if the old identity is gone, what does the new creation actually look like? Go back to the last verse of our key passage:

God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

REAL ID Truth #6 — 2 Corinthians 5:21 – I am the Righteousness of God through Christ!

The Greek word for righteousness broadly means right standing with God: conformity to God's character, moral uprightness. But biblically, righteousness is not external rule-keeping; it's internal alignment with God's nature. And the phrase *righteousness of God* means this is not human righteousness at all. It is the very righteousness that belongs to God, credited to believers. Theologians call 2 Corinthians 5:21 the great exchange: the sinless One bore

the consequences of our sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God — Christ's perfect righteousness credited to us through faith. "For the gospel reveals the righteousness of God that comes by faith from start to finish, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Romans 1:17).

Righteousness by faith means my righteous status never came from my performance, and it doesn't fall with my performance either. When I lied as a young man, my lie did not change my righteous standing. I didn't know that, so I let the enemy hand me an identity: *you lied, so you're a liar*. The lies I believed cost me far more than eighteen years of dishwasher ignorance ever did.

Let me show you two benefits of this righteousness, because they will change how you live.

It is a legal standing. In the judicial sense, righteousness means being declared not guilty before God. That's the essence of justification.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:23–24)

And it goes further than acquittal:

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! (Romans 5:17)

Just as everyone was born into sin through Adam, every born-again believer receives the abundance of grace and the *free gift* of righteousness, and reigns in life through Jesus.

It restores relationship. Righteousness makes us acceptable in God's sight, so that when God looks at us, He sees us through the lens of Christ. I used to read a verse like "For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face" (Psalm 11:7 ESV) as the reason I *couldn't* come to God. I'd think: *Lord, I know I sinned today — I had a bad thought, a lustful thought, a negative attitude — so You don't want to be with me.* And I would run away from God, wallowing in what a loser I was, avoiding the Word, avoiding prayer. That was a lie. My righteousness comes through Christ, that's my identity, so my relationship with God was never hanging on my performance. Now when I miss it, I'm quick to run *to* God instead of away from Him, quick to repent and move on.

Let me be clear: none of this is a license to sin. If you're doing something wrong, change it. That's what a healthy conscience is for. But there is a world of difference between conviction that says "That's wrong. Stop, repent, and move on" and condemnation that says "You already blew it, so you might as well blow it again; go ahead and wallow in the misery, you deserve it." I don't know if you've dealt with those lies, but I have, and they are no fun. And they are not from God. God relates to you, His child, based on the righteousness of Christ.

And here's what surprised me most: understanding my identity as righteous turned out to be the very power I needed to overcome sin. When I know who I am, when it's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me, then the moment I act out of line with that identity, I recognize it fast: *that's not who I am.* And I realign with the truth.

Reprogramming the Depths

One more piece, and it ties everything in this chapter together. Paul writes:

Do not lie to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being **renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator**. (Colossians 3:9–10)

Renewed *in knowledge*. So when you spend time in the Word of God, don't read it just to check a box. Read it to see who you are. When you understand who Christ is, and that He is your identity, the Word stops being a list of do's and don'ts and becomes living and active, showing you your true position and what you have in Christ.

And remember what we said about the soul including the subconscious. Most of us spent years programming our subconscious with flesh-focus: fearful thoughts, failure replays, the enemy's labels. How does new truth reach that deep? By believing it. And belief comes by meditating on it, focusing on it, reading it, studying it, listening to it, until you really believe it. When you believe it, it settles into the subconscious, and *that* is what roots out the lies of the enemy. That's why we take every thought captive to obey Christ, just as we saw in the last chapter: one captured thought at a time, the programming changes.

Children, Not Slaves

I want to close this chapter with an extended reading from Romans 8, because it gathers up everything we've seen: the new creation, the Spirit within, the mind's focus, righteousness, and where it's all heading.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set you free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1–2)

Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh; but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. The mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind of the flesh is hostile to God: It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the flesh cannot please God.

You, however, are controlled not by the flesh, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you. (Romans 8:5–11)

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery that returns you to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption to sonship, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. And if we are children, then we are heirs: heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ — if indeed we suffer with Him, so that we may also be glorified with Him. (Romans 8:14–17)

Your Documentation

Two more REAL ID entries in the file:

5. 2 Corinthians 5:17 – I am a New Creation in Christ!

6. 2 Corinthians 5:21 – I am the Righteousness of God through Christ!

Supporting file: 2 Corinthians 5:16–21 • 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 • Ezekiel 36:26 • Romans 8:11 • 2 Peter 1:3–4 • 3 John 1:2 • Isaiah 26:3 • Galatians 5:22 • Romans 8:5–6 • Romans 1:17 • Hebrews 11:1 • Colossians 1:27 • John 14:30 • Galatians 2:20 • Ephesians 4:17–24 • Romans 13:14 • Romans 3:23–24 • Romans 5:17 • Psalm 11:7 • Colossians 3:9–10 • Romans 8:1–2, 5–11, 14–17

Making It Yours

1. “We don’t know what we don’t know.” Ask God the dishwasher question this week: *What am I doing the hard way because I’m ignorant of what You’ve already provided?* Write down what comes to mind.
2. Spirit, soul, body: which hand has your gaze been fixed on: your spirit and who you are in Christ, or your flesh and its lack? What does your daily attention (first thoughts, screen time, worry patterns, etc.) say about your answer?
3. Where have you pulled identity from behavior: “I did that, so I am that”? Name the label. Now find it in this chapter’s verses: does God’s documentation agree with it?
4. When you sin, is your reflex to run *from* God or *to* Him? How does the gift of righteousness (Romans 5:17) change that reflex?

A Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You that I am a new creation, and that the very power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in me. Thank You that I am the righteousness of God through Christ, not based on what I’ve done but based on what Jesus did. I choose to set my mind on the things of the Spirit. Transform my thinking as I focus on who I am in my spirit, so that Your life flows through my soul into my body and my world, and so I can share this message with

others. I refuse every label the enemy has handed me. I am who Your Word says I am. In Jesus' name, Amen.

For Your Group

- **This week:** pick the truth you most need to grow in — *new creation* or *the righteousness of God* — and meditate on it all week.
- **Come ready to share:** the verse the Holy Spirit kept bringing back to you, and what He showed you in it.

If you've never been made a new creation, or aren't sure, the special invitation at the back of this book was written for you.

CHAPTER 4

WHO'S YOUR DADDY?

Have you ever heard the saying, “Like father, like son”? Or “Like father, like daughter”?

We’re talking in this book about your REAL ID, your true identity. And sometimes, to understand your true identity, it helps to understand where you’re starting from. Think of your GPS. If I plug in a destination, the first thing it needs is a starting point. It can’t route me to where I’m going without knowing where I am. It works the same way with identity. When you think about God, or about who you are, it’s worth asking: what am I basing that picture on? Where is my thought process starting from?

Here’s why that matters for this chapter. When I say the word *father*, or *daddy*, every person reading this sees a different picture. And when you close your eyes and think about God, you see a picture too. Where did that picture come from? Because in the natural realm, identity is profoundly driven by who your father is. That’s where “Who’s your daddy?” comes from. It gets used as a taunt, and as a joke, which misses the point, but underneath it sits

one of the most important questions a human being can answer: Where did I come from? Whose child am I?

The Power of a Father

Even people who never knew their dad pull identity from him, because the absence shapes you too. I did some research on this, and here's what I found.

About one in four children in America grows up without a father in the home. And the research ties father absence to nearly every hard outcome you can measure. Kids who grow up without a dad are more likely to be poor. More likely to struggle in school. More likely to battle depression, emotional distress, and thoughts of ending their own lives. More likely to end up in prison or in a treatment center. And girls without fathers are several times more likely to become pregnant as teenagers, which too often starts the whole fatherless cycle spinning into the next generation. (The specific figures and their sources are in the Notes at the back of this book.)

Then I looked at what happens when the father is present but *abusive*. Those children often struggle with self-esteem, emotional regulation, and forming healthy relationships. They learn aggression by watching it, and often can't express any emotion except anger. And as adults, they are more likely to enter abusive relationships or become abusers themselves. It's a cycle of harm passed down through generations.

And what about the father who is present but *emotionally* absent: no connection, no communication, no warmth? Those children often struggle with feelings of abandonment and rejection, low self-worth, and a constant search for validation from other sources. Here's the finding that stood out to me: even secular psychologists have found that the way a child relates to their father shapes the

picture of God they carry: whether they experience Him as near and trustworthy, or distant and hard to reach.

But flip it around, and the same power works for good. Children with loving, engaged fathers tend to have higher self-esteem and emotional security, do better in school, form healthier friendships, manage stress better, and go on to more stable relationships and careers. A child doesn't just do better with a father's love. A child needs it. And the fathers themselves grow through it; I can testify to that. Being a dad is a growth process, and a lot of it has been choosing to understand my own identity properly so that I can be a better father.

Let me also mention, if you grew up without your father, or you're raising children without theirs right now, I didn't share these statistics as a prophecy over your life or your house. The same God who adopts believers calls Himself "a father of the fatherless and a defender of widows" (Psalm 68:5). God is a redemptive God. Invite Him into every area of your life, and watch what He does.

Now, I shared all those statistics because a father plays a major role in every child's identity: whether he's present, absent, loving, or harsh. And that means, in this case, the question "Who's your daddy?" is not a joke at all. It's the doorway to the next document in your REAL ID file.

Is Everyone a Child of God?

You've probably heard a sentiment like this: "Everyone should be treated with dignity and respect, because at the end of the day, we're all God's children."

It sounds nice. Half of it is even true. Everyone should absolutely be treated with dignity and respect, because every person is *created* by God. But being created by God does not make every person a

child of God. In fact, the Bible explicitly teaches otherwise. Look at what Jesus had to say to the religious insiders of His day:

“You are doing the works of your father.”

“We are not illegitimate children,” they declared. “Our only Father is God Himself.”

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I have come here from God... You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out his desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, refusing to uphold the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, because he is a liar and **the father of lies**... Whoever belongs to God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.” (John 8:41–44, 47)

Paul says the same thing about all of us, writing to believers, describing what we were before:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you used to walk when you conformed to the ways of this world and of the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit who is now at work in the sons of disobedience. All of us also lived among them at one time, fulfilling the cravings of our flesh and indulging its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature children of wrath. (Ephesians 2:1–3)

Sons of disobedience. Children of wrath. Before we were born again into the family of God, God was not yet our Father.

Now put that together with the research we just walked through, because this is where it hit me. Every single person on earth started out life with an abusive spiritual father. That’s why I looked

up the effects of an abusive father in the first place, because I realized every one of us is familiar with the voice of lies. Before we came to Christ, our spiritual father was the devil, the *father of lies*, and lying is his native language. He spoke lies over us and planted lies in us. And even after we're born again, we still have to walk out the process of evicting those lies: holding every one of them up against the truth of the Word, taking every thought captive, just as we've been learning. If you've ever wondered why the lies feel so familiar — that's why. Lying is his native language, and you grew up in that house, hearing it every day.

But you've been adopted out of that house.

The Spirit of Adoption

Look again at the passage that closed the last chapter, because this whole subject hangs on it:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery that returns you to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption to sonship, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" **The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.** And if we are children, then we are heirs: heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ — if indeed we suffer with Him, so that we may also be glorified with Him. (Romans 8:14–17)

A quick word about the word *sons*. The Greek term Paul uses was a legal term drawn from the adoption and inheritance laws of first-century Rome. An adopted son received the full legal standing and inheritance rights of the family. So when Paul calls believers "sons of God," he's describing the *status* of all Christians, men and women alike, who have been adopted into God's family and now enjoy all the privileges, obligations, and inheritance rights of God's

children. And daughters, “sonship” is your legal standing too. And that word *Abba*? It’s Aramaic, the family word for father.

John tells us when the adoption happened:

But to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God — children born not of blood, nor of the desire or will of man, but born of God. (John 1:12–13)

REAL ID Truth #7 — Romans 8:16 – I am a Child of God!

And here is what I find so beautiful about God choosing the language of *adoption*: it means your file doesn’t start with your family history. It doesn’t matter how your earthly father was. It doesn’t matter how good a family situation you had, or how bad. When you come into the kingdom of God, your identity is now tied to your adoptive Father, your heavenly Father. Even the best earthly father will fall short of your heavenly Father every single time. But when you look at your heavenly Father, you see what a father is supposed to be, and you see who you’re becoming like. Like Father, like son. Like Father, like daughter.

The Picture in Your Head

Now, here’s the problem. Knowing the *fact* “I am a child of God” doesn’t automatically change your life, because “God is my Father” means different things to different people. It’s become almost a cliché in the church. And the meaning you attach to it depends entirely on the picture of *father* you’re carrying.

For a long time, when people told me “God is your Father,” I related to God through the lens of my earthly father. I love and appreciate my dad. He wasn’t absent and he loved me, but he was still growing in areas, as we all are. Looking back as an adult, I can

see places where he didn't properly demonstrate God's heart, where he walked in ignorance, or where he simply passed down what he'd learned from *his* father, who wasn't even a believer. His father shaped him; he shaped me; and the way I raise my children is shaping them. That's how it passes from generation to generation. Like father, like son, for good and for ill.

And let me tell you where God keeps teaching me the Father's heart: through my own children. Many years ago, when my son Titus was five, I finished reading to the kids one night, tucked them in, gave him his goodnight kiss, and he looked up and said, "Dad, can I have another kiss for my treasure box?" I'm like, "Your treasure box?" "Yeah. I have a treasure box on the inside of me. I keep all your kisses in it." Then he asked me, "Dad, do you have a treasure box? Do you remember all the kisses you've given me?" You want to talk about your heart melting? My five-year-old handed me a word picture I've never gotten over, and a question worth answering: do *you* have a treasure box where you store up the good things your heavenly Father has done for you?

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, with whom there is no change or shifting shadow. (James 1:17)

The gifts are coming down all the time. So start filling your treasure box.

Another afternoon I had my two youngest, Emma and Luke, at an old penny arcade: twenty-five-cent rides, games, tickets, the works. Partway through, Emma looks up at me and says, "Dad, this is awesome." And right then Luke, on a ride, pumps both hands in the air and yells, "Dad — best day ever!" And standing in that arcade it hit me: when's the last time you had a *best day ever* moment with your heavenly Father? He wants that with you. For a lot of years I thought I had to relate to God based only on what

God likes. Then I realized He also relates to me based on what *I* like and what I care about. Some of my richest moments with God have been noticing the small things He does to let me know I'm loved, and hearing my heavenly Father say, *that was for you*.

Let me take you back again to before I understood His love, because my picture of God had another layer. Growing up, I mostly built my image of God from Old Testament scenes: the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, the big, booming God of marvelous signs. All true. But I couldn't figure out how to relate to *that* as my father. So when I closed my eyes, here's what I saw: a giant throne, a massive, larger-than-life figure on it, and me — this little guy standing way down below, looking up at something enormous and distant. God is big and I'm small, so that must be the picture, right? It took me a long time to realize I was relating to God wrongly based on that image.

All of us carry some image of God. The question is whether we'll let truth paint the picture. So where do we look?

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is at the Father's side, has made Him known. (John 1:18)

Jesus is the one who has revealed God to us. If you want to know the heart of the Father, look at Jesus. Hebrews opens with the same declaration:

On many past occasions and in many different ways, God spoke to our fathers through the prophets. But in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature, upholding all things by His powerful word. (Hebrews 1:1–3)

The *exact representation* of His nature. When you want to know what your heavenly Father is like and how He relates to you, you look at how Jesus represented the Father to mankind. And this is the Father whose own words to you are: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:5–6 ESV). He’s never absent. He’s never distant. He’s never abusive. He is everything the research says a child needs in a father and so much more, and everything no earthly father could ever fully be.

The Parable of the Loving Father

So let’s look at Jesus showing us the Father. He told a story we usually call the parable of the prodigal son, but I think it’s really the parable of the loving father.

To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: “A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.” (Luke 15:11–12 NLT)

Pause right there. In that culture, asking your father for your inheritance while he was alive was essentially wishing him dead. This son didn’t care about relationship with his father; he just wanted what his father had. And the father gave it to him.

“A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so

hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

“When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.”’” (Luke 15:13–19 NLT)

Look at the speech he rehearses in the pig field. He’s decided his behavior has changed his identity: *I’m no longer worthy of being called your son — please take me on as a hired servant.* Now watch the father:

“So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’

“But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.” (Luke 15:20–24 NLT)

The father saw him *while he was still a long way off*, which tells you he was watching the road. He ran. And when the son launched into his rehearsed speech, the father didn’t even answer his son. No condemnation. No “you’re right, son, you really messed up — let me see if I can find it in my heart to forgive you.”

Instead he called for three things, and each one is a restoration of position. The finest robe: honor restored. The ring, a signet ring, the ancient equivalent of signing authority: power over the estate restored. And sandals for his feet: in the book of Ruth, a man handed over his sandal as the pledge in a property transaction (see Ruth 4:7). I believe the sandals show the son had his place in the estate back: a son wearing sandals is a son who could one day hand one over if he ever chose to sell his portion of the estate.

The son came home asking to be a hired servant, and the father put him right back in his place as a son. He restored him completely, right then, before the son had done one thing to prove himself. That is your Father. That is how He received you, and how He receives everyone who comes to their senses and heads home.

The Older Brother's Picture of the Father

But the story has a second son, and his problem is the same problem, a wrong picture of the father. It just looks religious.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, and he asked one of the servants what was going on. ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’

“The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, ‘All these years **I’ve slaved for you** and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!’

“His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’” (Luke 15:25–32 NLT)

See what the older son said: *all these years I’ve slaved for you*. He saw himself as a slave in his father’s house, grinding away, waiting for wages that in his mind never came. He accused his father of injustice. And the father’s answer exposes the tragedy: “Everything I have is yours.” The older son didn’t understand his position. The estate was already his. He never needed permission to enjoy a young goat with his friends. He could have done that any day he pleased. But because he had a wrong view of who his father was, he never enjoyed the benefits that were his all along.

Both sons had the same problem: they were wrong about their father, and both missed out on what was theirs because of it. Like father, like son works in reverse too: when we have a wrong view of God, we miss the benefits God has for us, whether that’s not recognizing that we share the estate with Him, or not being able to rejoice when a sinner comes home because deep down we think we’re better than they are. It all comes back to one question: how do you view your heavenly Father?

Children Who Serve, Not Slaves Who Grind

The Bible, depending on translation, uses the words *servant*, *bond-servant*, or *slave* for those who serve God, but look at how Jesus reframed the whole thing. He said the greatest among you will be a servant of all (see Matthew 23:11; Mark 9:35), and when He washed His disciples’ feet, He told them: if I, your Master, do this, you go and do likewise (see John 13:14–15).

Here's the truth underneath that: God is not a slave driver demanding that we grind it out as His minions. Paul said He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else (see Acts 17:25). Jesus came to represent the Father, and Jesus served. So when we serve God and serve others, we're not slaves earning our keep; we are children taking after our Father, sharing in His likeness. Jesus represented the Father to us; our job is to represent Jesus to the world and to each other.

What the Father Is Like

One more picture before we close the file on this chapter. John writes: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love comes from God... Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:7–8). We saw in chapter two that God is love: *agape*, the love of choice and commitment. Now watch what happens when you take the Bible's most famous description of love:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no account of wrongs. Love takes no pleasure in evil, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4–7)

And since God is love, read it again with the word *Father*:

My Father is patient, my Father is kind. My Father does not envy, He does not boast, He is not proud. He is not rude, He is not self-seeking, He is not easily angered, He keeps no account of my wrongs. My Father takes no pleasure in evil, but rejoices in the truth. My Father bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

That is the Father who adopted you. He is a good Father. He is a good provider. He is loving, and you can go to Him at any time, with anything. Close your eyes and let *that* be the picture.

Your Documentation

One more REAL ID entry in the file:

7. Romans 8:16 – I am a Child of God!

Supporting file: Psalm 68:5 • John 8:41–44, 47 • Ephesians 2:1–3 • Romans 8:14–17 • John 1:12–13 • James 1:17 • John 1:18 • Hebrews 1:1–3 • Hebrews 13:5–6 • Luke 15:11–32 • Ruth 4:7 • Matthew 23:11 • Mark 9:35 • John 13:14–15 • Acts 17:25 • 1 John 4:7–8 • 1 Corinthians 13:4–7

Making It Yours

1. Close your eyes and picture God. What do you see: a face, a throne, a distance? Once you see the picture, then ask: where did it come from, and does it match Jesus, the exact representation of the Father's nature?
2. How did your earthly father (present, absent, harsh, or loving) shape the way you relate to God? Name one specific way, good or bad.
3. Which son in Luke 15 do you resemble right now: the one who thinks his failures demoted him to hired-servant status, or the one who serves with a wrong mentality because he hasn't understood what was already his? What does the father's response to that son say to you?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 aloud, substituting "my Father" for "love." Which line is hardest for you to believe about God? Meditate on that one this week.

A Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the privilege of calling You Father. Help me fully believe that You are a good and loving Father, that I can come to You with every concern, fear, worry, and insecurity — and that You never cast me out. You're never too busy for me, absent from me, or bored of me. Thank You for sending Jesus as Your exact representation, so I can have a proper picture of You. Help me dismantle every wrong image I've had of You, and help me replace it with the truth. Help me become more and more like You, as I submit to the truth of Your Word daily. In Jesus' name, Amen.

For Your Group

- **This week:** meditate on *I am a Child of God*, and read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 with “my Father” in place of “love” until the picture starts to change.
- **Come ready to share:** the line that was hardest to believe about God, and what happened as you spent time meditating on the truth of who He is.

If you've never been adopted into the Father's family, or aren't sure, the special invitation at the back of this book was written for you.

[The special invitation mentioned at the end of each chapter is just a few pages away.](#)

The rest of your file is waiting.

You've just read the first four chapters of *Your REAL ID: Discovering the Truth of Your Identity in Christ*, and the first seven truths are already in your file. Twenty-two more are still to come, each one documented from the Word of God, chapter and verse.

Here's just part of what's ahead

- What to do when fear and anxiety consume your thinking, and everything around you feels uncertain.
- How the things you couldn't break in your own strength lose their grip as you come to know His grace.
- Why God's love for you doesn't change when you keep failing, and the difference between guilt and shame.
- How to stop living to prove yourself, even on the days you feel like you'll never be good enough.
- What God says when you feel like nobody truly understands you or truly loves you.
- How to serve God as a child, not a slave, and enjoy what the Father has already given you.
- What it means to walk in the blessing of God, and how to receive His blessings by faith.
- How faith really works, and how to live by it every day, so you can receive everything God has for you.
- How God's Word connects your identity in Christ to your healing.
- How to walk out the plans and purposes God created you for, and why they grow out of your relationship with Him.
- How knowing who you are in Christ changes the way you think about money.
- How to recognize the divine appointments in an ordinary day, and what to do when the Holy Spirit prompts you.
- The rest of your file: your proof of residency and your new name, the two documents the Introduction promised.

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As a child of God: You ARE Loved, Guiltless, Chosen, Accepted, and Called!

And if you've never made Jesus Christ the Lord of your life, or aren't sure, [the special invitation on the next page](#) was written for you.

Please pass this free PDF on to others, or send them to YourREALID.com so they can download their own sample and learn more.

A SPECIAL INVITATION

Every truth in this book belongs to the born-again believer. I want to ask you the most important question you'll ever answer. Can you point to a time in your life, or a place, or even the surrounding circumstances, when you asked Jesus Christ to personally become your Lord and Savior? If you can't answer that with certainty, I want to invite you to mark **today** as the day you know for sure.

Here's how Jesus explained being born again to a religious leader named Nicodemus:

Jesus replied, "Truly, truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Can he enter his mother's womb a second time to be born?"

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh is born of flesh, but spirit is born of the Spirit. Do not

be amazed that I said, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes. You hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John 3:3–8)

Hear God's own appeal to you:

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come!

All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's trespasses against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ: Be reconciled to God. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:17–21)

Jesus is the only way.

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

We all need saving.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:23–24)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

God acted in love.

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:16–18)

Christ died and rose again.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once... (1 Corinthians 15:3–6)

Salvation is received, not earned.

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with your heart you believe and are justified, and with your mouth you confess and are saved.

It is just as the Scripture says: "Anyone who believes in Him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Greek: The same Lord is Lord of all, and

gives richly to all who call on Him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Romans 10:9–13)

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8–9)

Jesus said, “Repent and believe in the gospel!” (Mark 1:15): turn from your own way, and put your trust in Him. If you’re ready, you can pray this prayer, or something similar from your heart:

Heavenly Father, I acknowledge that I have sinned against You and I’m in need of Your grace. I ask for Your forgiveness. I confess with my mouth that Jesus Christ is now Lord of my life. I believe in my heart that He died for my sins and that You raised Him from the dead. Thank You, Father, for saving me, for forgiving me, and for giving me eternal life. I receive Your love and gift of salvation today. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

If you prayed that prayer — **welcome to the family of God**. You are now a new creation in Christ; every one of the twenty-nine REAL ID truths in this book is *your* documentation now. Write today’s date somewhere you’ll keep it. Mark it as the day you made Jesus the Lord of your life.

Find a Bible-believing local church, and be part of it. God never designed you to walk this new life alone. If you’ve been through church hurt, I understand. My own story has some in it. But here’s what I came to see: it wasn’t the church that hurt me, and it was never God. It was people who didn’t represent our heavenly Father properly. Don’t let what happened to you keep you from the family God has for you. You can connect with us and others online, but you need a local church. You are now part of the family of God, and family is meant to be lived together: worshiping together, learning

the Word together, praying for one another, and serving alongside other believers:

Let us hold resolutely to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to spur one another on to love and good deeds. **Let us not neglect meeting together**, as some have made a habit, but let us encourage one another, and **all the more as you see the Day approaching**. (Hebrews 10:23–25)

Ask the Lord to lead you to a church family that teaches the truth of His Word — and when He does, plant yourself there. Some of what God has for your new life, He will bring to you through the believers He places around you.

And we would love to celebrate with you. Come tell us at **YourREALID.com**. You'll find free resources there to help you grow in your new life with Christ.

Your new life starts now. Turn back to chapter one, and this time read the whole book as the documentation of who you've just become.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim Howe and his wife, Meagan, are the founders of Elite Life Ministries, in Waukegan, Illinois. Their ministry grew out of a season of profound life change: years in which they experienced firsthand the healing, restoration, and wholeness that come from knowing who you are in Christ. Out of that season came a calling they now share with everyone they can reach: **to know, show, and share the love of God, living an Elite Life.**

Tim's teaching centers on helping believers grow deeper in their faith and trust in the Lord, and on bringing hope and healing to the hurting and broken. Tim and Meagan also share a deep passion to see marriages and families healed and restored.

Tim and Meagan have been married since 2006 and have four children: Kenzie, Titus, Emma, and Luke.

To invite Tim to teach or share at your church or event, email **Tim@EliteLifeMinistries.org**.

Go deeper at **YourREALID.com**. And if this book helped you, a short review wherever you bought it can help others find it in their search for truth.

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ABOUT ELITE LIFE MINISTRIES

Our vision is to help cultivate and connect a loving community of believers with a heart to serve and send; to prepare the Body of Christ for the end-time harvest and the return of Christ.

We accomplish this vision by helping people live healed and whole lives — spiritually, relationally, and physically — as God sanctifies us completely: spirit, soul, and body.

Beginning with knowing, showing, and sharing the love of God, we help each member of the Body understand their identity in Christ and the kingdom of God.

We lead by example, allowing the power of God to work in and through us, equipping the saints for the work of ministry, and serving with humility, vigilance, and faithfulness.

Our mission is the simple, daily heartbeat of this loving community: to know, show, and share the love of God, living an Elite Life.

So what is an Elite Life? An Elite Life is a life being transformed by surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, rooted and grounded

in love. As we know, believe, and obey God's Word, we experience the blessings and fruit of living as citizens of heaven and ambassadors for Christ.

Living an Elite Life is not about superiority. It's about embracing the life we were created to live: loving and obeying God, and loving and serving others.

The word *elite* has multiple meanings. One of them is "of the best or most select." We believe living an Elite Life is the very best life anyone can live, because there is no true life apart from Christ. Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent" (John 17:3).

Another meaning of *elite* is "of high birth." There is no higher birth than being born again or "born from above" as a child of the Most High God. We desire everyone to experience this new life, available by God's grace, received through faith.

For additional resources to help you live an Elite Life, visit EliteLifeMinistries.org.

Living an Elite Life: Word-centered, kingdom-focused, daily surrender.

You can love God, know the Bible, and even serve at church, yet still be held captive by lies you don't realize you believe.

Your REAL ID will show you who God says you are, and out of that identity, the purpose He created you for. You'll learn to replace the lies you've believed about yourself with the truth of what God says about you. Jesus said, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

Inside, you'll find a Bible study built on the truth, chapter and verse, that empowered me to break free from shame, addiction, fear, anxiety, and toxic thinking. Often, **the lies of the enemy sound a lot like your own thoughts**. As you read, you'll be empowered to take those thoughts captive and replace them with the truth of God's Word.

For over twenty years as a believer, I lived in bondage to lies implanted in me as a child. Then, in May 2019, I had a radical encounter with God, and I learned that knowing the Bible isn't enough: **you have to believe that you ARE who HE says you are**. Throughout this journey, you'll discover twenty-nine biblical truths about who you are in Christ and learn to see yourself the way God sees you.

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Tim Howe and his wife, Meagan, are the founders of Elite Life Ministries in Waukegan, Illinois.

Made for small-group study, with a Leader Guide included.
Go deeper at YourREALID.com

CHRISTIAN LIVING / SPIRITUAL GROWTH