

The Gospel and Culture

Participant Guide

SESSION 1: THE GOSPEL AND IDENTITY - Part 1



Big Idea

Culture shapes our sense of identity.



Warm Up

Imagine you are at a party and you're meeting someone for the first time. If you could only tell that person three things about yourself to introduce yourself, what would they be?

Key Takeway

Session 1 and 2 focus on the relationship between our identity and the gospel. The "Who Are You?" activity is part of this first session, which is designed to open our eyes to just how deeply ideas impact the way our culture thinks about identity also shapes the way we think.



Pray

Before we dive in, pause and pray. Ask God to begin opening your eyes to the way that ideas shape minds, so that you can become very deliberate about allowing His truth to shape your thinking.



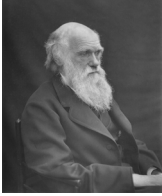
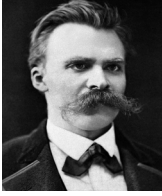
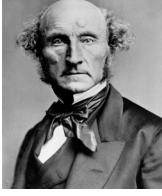

Watch

Historically, a person's sense of identity was grounded in commonly-held objective categories such as

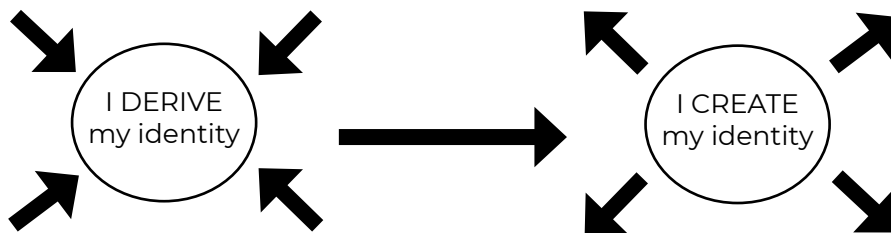
- Gender
- Parents/Family/Lineage
- Nationality/Ethnicity
- Religion

These were primarily objective categories from which a person derived their sense of identity. These things gave a person their identity.

But a shift occurred in our beliefs about where identity comes from.

<p>Charles Darwin</p> 	<p>" _____ is the result of fixed laws."</p>
<p>Friedrich Nietzsche</p> 	<p>"God is dead...we want to be those who give themselves their own law, those who _____ themselves."</p>
<p>John Stuart Mill</p> 	<p>"Over himself, over his own body and mind, the _____ is sovereign."</p>
<p>Michel Foucault</p> 	<p>"From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to _____ as a work of art"</p>

The Identity Paradigm Shift: Over the past 100-150 years, there's been a slow but steady shift in how people think about forming their sense of identity.



Consider This: A recent Barna survey found that 91% of adults and 76% of practicing Christians agreed with this statement: "The best way to find yourself is by looking _____."

[Source: "The State of Discipleship: A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with The Navigators", barna.com, 2015]

*The heart is _____ above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?
Jeremiah 17:9*



Reflect and Apply

1. Where do you see Nietzsche's and Foucault's beliefs about "self-creation" at work in our world today? And how do you think this could be creating problems?
2. What's appealing about the idea of looking within to find our "true self"?
3. What are the dangers to me in trying to create my own identity?
4. Is there ever a time where I can evaluate my own gifts, talents, and abilities as a part of forming my sense of identity?
5. What does Jeremiah 17:9 imply about our search for meaning and true self-understanding? What does the Bible mean by "heart"? Read the passages below to dig deeper.

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?
(Jeremiah 17:9)

1. Deuteronomy 10:12
2. Proverbs 2:1-2
3. Romans 1:21
4. Ephesians 1:18
5. Isaiah 6:9-10
6. Matthew 9:4
7. Matthew 15:19
8. 2 Timothy 2:22
9. 1 Peter 1:22



Renew your Mind

Memorize

*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?
Jeremiah 17:9*

Pray

Commit yourself in prayer this week to asking God for a renewed mind. Ask him to begin the world of exposing any false ideas about identity that you may have unknowingly adopted from the culture. Then ask the Holy Spirit to begin renewing your mind according to God's true word. To help you get started, you can read through the verses that follow.

Meditate

Begin each day this week reflecting on one of the following passages relating to our identity in Christ:

1. *God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:9).*
2. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come (2 Corinthians 5:17).*
3. *For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading you to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15).*
4. *Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory (Colossians 3:1-4).*
5. *But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord (Philippians 3:7-8).*



Connect With Culture

Video: Watch the **Oprah video** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLXvwH8_u0A) this week and think about the questions. Your group will review these together in the next session.

1. How does this woman's description of where she has shifted in her search for finding identity illustrate the cultural shift we observed in searching inside vs. outside ourselves for our sense of identity?
2. What makes sense about this woman's reasons for shifting her focus in identity formation?
3. Why might people find her solution appealing?
4. Why does her solution ultimately fail?