



ONE

Who Am I? by Rod Cosgrove, Lead Pastor

Pastor Rod's talks can be viewed online at
<https://www.garlandchurch.org/begin-your-journey>
or by scanning the QR code shown for each unit.

I would like to start today by conveying a simple, but astounding, no, earth-shattering truth. This truth, as it relates to the existence and history of mankind, is the most important factor, the most significant thing you can ever know. It is also the most solid foundation on which any person could ever build your lives. It is more necessary than your health, it is more critical than your finances, it is more impactful than your level of education, the person you marry or your hopes or dreams for your life. I simply cannot underestimate how important this is:

Life Truth: You are loved by God.

Yes, you...and me, too. Every one of us...fully, completely, loved by God. It is the start of the Gospel, the good news of redemption available to anyone who would receive God's loving free gift of salvation offered through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the genesis of every good thing, the nexus of all, the wonder of true wonders.

Unfortunately, however, every one of us has the most difficult time believing this. God seems far away. Shoot, some of us simply wonder if he still exists, and for many others, while he *is* counted to exist, he's thought of as being an angry, capricious deity who's constantly mad at everyone – just ready, just waiting – to damn everyone to hell.

This is terrible beyond measure, for it is the seed of all the brokenness mankind can muster. It is the start of everything wrong...to forget, ignore, disbelieve or otherwise reject this truth is to walk away from the *one thing necessary* that gives us meaning, purpose, belonging.

The great Dutch theologian Henri Nouwen explains in his book, *The Life of the Beloved*, that each of us is susceptible to three lies of our identity, one of which will likely jump to the forefront for us depending on our personality, beliefs and life experiences:

1. I am what I do. At the end of your day, your week, month or year, do you find yourself assessing your value based on what got done on your do-list? As you imagine yourself getting older, when you reach the point of being all decrepit, will you be disappointed by what you can't do, but tell yourself that you mattered because of what you accomplished in the past? Will you point to your legacy of achievements and tell yourself that's why you matter?
2. I am what others say about me. Ask any elite athlete these days why they do what they do, and a common word you'll hear is "respect." To gain someone's respect due to outstanding athletic performance is the holy grail, and don't you even toy with dissing someone – or disrespecting them – when they feel they are better than that. This chasing of adoration by a fickle crowd of onlookers is a slippery-slope way to live, leaving those who pursue it to be empty, bereft of meaning and value, enslaved to what others think.
3. I am what I have. Ever hear that line, "Whoever who dies with the most toys, wins?" That's what the pharaohs of ancient Egypt believed, who were mummified and placed in gorgeous tombs with their gold and spices and other earthly possessions, only to later have grave robbers and archeologists dig up their treasures and place them in museums. Are you really an aggregate of what you have? Some of us live as though everything will utterly fall apart without our precious possessions, whether great or small.

Every one of us buys into this struggle, worrying and contending with these lies of identity. If things are going well, we feel good about ourselves. But if things go poorly, we grow disappointed with ourselves and we struggle. Our lives ebb and flow in peace and security, cycling up and down based on circumstances.

This is all wrong!

In Matthew 4 we see how Jesus was confronted with these lies of identity and how he was able to defeat them. We can also see that the same way that Jesus secured the victory over these lies of identity is available to us.

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.

During that time the devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread."

But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say,

'People do not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say,

'He will order his angels to protect you.
And they will hold you up with their hands
so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'"

Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the Lord your God.'"

Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me."

"Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say,

'You must worship the Lord your God
and serve only him.'"

Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

Do you see what's going on here?

Jesus...turn stones into bread...show you can do something, independently meet your own needs! [Lie: I am what I do.]

Jesus...jump down from the Temple...the angels will catch you and everyone will admire you! [Lie: I am what others say about me.]

Jesus...worship me, and I will give you all these kingdoms, all this stuff, you'll have everything you ever want! [Lie: I am what I have.]

And Jesus showed us by his responses that these are lies! In fact, as it relates to humanity,

These are the greatest lies of all time.

These are the lies that lead people into all sorts of violence and destruction of self and others. Yet Jesus defeated these lies and the one who tells them. He was able to do so because BEFORE he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, he was firmly assured of who he was. You know the story: Jesus had gone from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But John tried to talk him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?" But Jesus said, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires." So, John agreed to baptize him.

Matthew 3:16-17

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."

Jesus knew who he was! "You are my beloved Son. On you my favor rests. You bring me great joy. That's who you are." Jesus heard the voice of the Father and as he was led into a great temptation in the wilderness, he clung to it – and not just in that time of specific testing but also for the rest of his life. "IF you are the Son of God..." It was a direct attack on Jesus' identity...it always is.

Some praised him and others rejected him and some said "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," and others said, "Who does this guy think he is? Didn't he grow up with our children?" And while some poured expensive perfume on his feet and wiped them with their hair, others shouted, "Crucify him!" "Which do you want released?" "Give us Barabbas, the notorious criminal! Release Barabbas and crucify him!" And in all this, Jesus held on to the truth that no matter what happened, whether he was embraced or rejected or however it turned out, "I am the dearly loved Son."

Today and every day, if there's anything you must hear as the foundation of your identity in this world is that...

1. whatever you do or don't do,
2. whatever is said of you – good or bad, or
3. whatever you have or don't have

...you must hear as the foundation of one who has received the gospel of truth, that you are the beloved daughter or son of God. You must KNOW it; you must believe it, because the tests will come: *IF you are truly a Christian, a daughter or son of God, then...* This should not just be a loose fact you wonder about, a tidy little pithy thing you tell yourself when you spill your coffee. You must RECEIVE this truth in your heart, in your soul, in your mind, in your gut, so that your life can be firmly anchored on this truth!

Psalm 36:5

Your unfailing love, O Lord, is as vast as the heavens; your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.

Jeremiah 31:3

I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself.

Isaiah 49:16

See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands.

Psalm 139:17-18

How precious are your thoughts about me, O God.

They cannot be numbered!

I can't even count them;

they outnumber the grains of sand!

And when I wake up,

you are still with me!

John 13:34

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.

John 15:9

I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.

John 16:27

For the Father himself loves you dearly...

Romans 1:7

I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people.

My friends, there is no other foundation! If you can firmly anchor yourself in this truth, you will become more and more the life of the beloved...you will become what you are! And you will discover that all that you do is nurtured from the knowledge that you are loved by God. It will cut its way into your daily life. You will still have rejection, you will still have praise, you will still have losses...but you don't live through those as someone on the search for your identity, you will live as someone dearly loved. You will live your pain and anguish and successes and failures secure as one who knows who you are.

There's one last thing to know: I earlier pointed out that Father God assured Jesus at his baptism that he was His dearly loved Son. This came BEFORE the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. The sequence matters. It's important to realize that the voice that calls you the beloved is the voice of the Father, your FIRST LOVE. The Apostle John writes,

1 John 4:19

We love each other because he loved us first.

We only love each other because God has loved us first. The great struggle is to claim that first love, that you were loved before anyone such as your father or mother or siblings or co-workers or boyfriend or girlfriend or anyone! So often the ones we love the most are the ones who can hurt us the most. How do we live in the reality that love and wounds are so often inseparable? We need to live in the security of our FIRST LOVE.

In sum, God has created you and I with a heart that only God's love can satisfy.

You can accomplish a ton with your life, feeling like you really *were* someone because of what you did, but your accomplishments will fade. But do not believe the lie that are what you do.

You can also gain a lot of attention from people, being the person everyone is talking about, the one they tweet about, or simply someone that people respect, who's thought of as a good guy. But people's appreciation of you can come and go like the wind. You are not what people think of you or say about you.

Finally, you can acquire all kinds of things, having everything you need to keep you happy, whether it be a nice place to live, well-maintained cars, great vacations, a good job and lots of savings for retirement, but it will never be enough and none of it can keep you from worrying if it's enough. You are not what you have.

But what you ARE, is loved by God...and that makes ALL of the difference.

Ephesians 3:17-19

[May] Christ make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

DISCUSSION: Living into Our Christian Identity as Loved Daughters and Sons of God

1. The first core truth about being a Christ follower is that redemption, forgiveness and new life is available to anyone who would receive God's loving, free gift of salvation offered through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Is there a time in your life where you're sure you've made such a decision to know and follow Jesus? Furthermore, everything in the Christ-life, as well as this course, is built on this reality. If you are unsure of where you stand with Jesus, we would like to help you!
2. In this message entitled *Who Am I*, Pastor Rod contends that every one of us is fully, completely, loved by God. He says that it is the start of the Gospel, the genesis of every good thing and the wonder of true wonders. To what level do you believe this to be true? Why or why not?
3. Reflect on the following verses:

Matthew 3:16-17

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."

How do you think these words spoken by God the Father to Jesus the Son affected him? How did it prepare him for the temptation coming his way?

4. The great Dutch theologian Henri Nouwen explains in his book, *The Life of the Beloved*, that each of us is susceptible to three lies of our identity, one of which will likely jump to the forefront for us depending on our personality, beliefs and life experiences:

I am what I do. At the end of your day, your week, month or year, do you find yourself assessing your value based on what got done on your do-list?

I am what others say about me. Do you find yourself constantly seeking to gain someone's respect or approval?

I am what I have. Are you really an aggregate of what you have? Some of us live as though everything will utterly fall apart without our precious possessions, whether great or small.

Have you ever felt these temptations? Which seems best tailored to be difficult for you?

5. Jesus faced these three temptations in the desert and defeated Satan. By what method did he do so?

6. Life has a habit of delivering rejection, praise, losses and successes. How do you think it would change the way you approach life to not constantly be on the search for your identity, but to live as someone dearly loved by God?