



Identity and Influence

Spiritual Exercise

The purposes we pursue are either from God or they are distractions to the ones He has prepared for us. There really are no gray areas. The key is surrendering to His will.

Prayer does not mean that I am to bring God down to my thoughts and my purposes, and bend his government according to my foolish, silly, and sometimes sinful notions. Prayer means that I am to be raised up into feeling, into union and design with him; that I am to enter into his counsel and carry out his purpose fully. D. L. Moody

God does not exist to answer our prayers, but by our prayers we come to discern the mind of God. Oswald Chambers

If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself. John 7:17 (NASB)

Knowing the will of God is a challenge for most Christians. God has given us the keys to hearing: Trust, humility, fear (both terror and awe), surrender, and a heart turned toward obedience. It is not His intention that we “work up” any of these. They have been given as expressions of His grace. Our part is choosing to take hold of them – like a child receiving a gift.

Prayer

Introduction

In the Old Testament, there were kings, priests and prophets. Under the New Covenant, the leadership identities have changed. Jesus is now the King over many kings; and everyone in His kingdom is a royal priest. Prophet is now part of a five-fold gift given by the King; along with pastor, teacher, evangelist and apostle. Quite a few new identities have been added (e.g., disciple, bondservant, ambassador, elder and deacon).

Now that we know God has planted a desire in our heart and surrounded us with fellowships for the adventure, we must continue to search out the center of God’s will for our lives in the identity He has given us to fulfill. This may be an identity we have already been given – explicitly or implicitly. It may be one that He is waiting for us to step into. We may know our identity, or we may not. We may be resisting it – out of fear, disobedience, misunderstanding or false-humility.

Sadly, most Christians have allowed the world to define their identity. From well-intentioned parents, teachers and pastors, to mean-spirited oppressors, controllers and bullies, we have heard and accepted an identity that is likely much lower than our Creator intends. Of course, Satan is behind much of this – as he is busily conspiring with our carnal nature, suggesting that we settle for less.

Finding and keeping our identity is one of most challenging and critical battles we will face. Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy had no idea of their importance in the battle for Narnia until they discovered that they were the Kings and Queens. Like them, it is time we discovered who we are – not for ourselves, but for His glory and for His kingdom.

Identity and Influence (continued)

Definition

Influence (noun): The capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behavior of someone or something, or the effect itself. www.google .com

Authority (*exousia*): power of choice, liberty of doing as one pleases; physical and mental power (the ability or strength with which one is endued, which he either possesses or exercises); the power of authority (influence) and of right (privilege). *Blue Letter Bible Outline of Biblical Usage*

Searching Out the Matter

(All Scripture references, but those noted, are NKJV; Thomas Nelson, Inc.; footnotes excluded)

Before we talk directly about identity, we need to cover two related topics. The first is the relationship that exists between God, those in whom He invests identity and influence (aka, Marketplace Leaders), and those that are to be the benefactors of that investment. The second topic is the nature of that investment.

Who is Serving Who?

There is no doubting the fact that God has called and anointed leaders for service – to ministry. But just who are we serving? When I was initially drawn to serve, I made the mistake of seeking to serve God directly. It was for Him, as if He needed anything from me. I believe this is true for many of Christ's followers.

The truth of Scripture is that God's intention is to serve us. That's right!! But don't take my word for it. Let's look a few passages of Scripture.

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars. 2Chronicles 16:9

Notice that God is not looking for those that will show themselves strong on His behalf, but those "to show Himself strong on behalf of".

If I were hungry, I would not tell you;
For the world is Mine, and all its fullness. Psalm 50:12

God does not need us to be His personal servants. He can feed Himself.

For since the beginning of the world
Men have not heard nor perceived by the ear,
Nor has the eye seen any God besides You,
Who acts for the one who waits for Him. Isaiah 64:4

Our God is the only God that "acts for the one who waits on Him." He is not waiting on us to act. He is waiting on us to wait on Him to act.

Even to your old age, I am He,
And even to gray hairs I will carry you!
I have made, and I will bear;
Even I will carry, and will deliver you. Isaiah 46:4

He intends to carry, bear and deliver us. This is contrasted to the idols of man that require man to carry, bear and deliver. He is like no other God.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. Mark 10:45

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And His Son is no different. Jesus Christ could not have said it more clearly. He came to serve; and, as Scripture tells us, He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. He is still looking to serve us.

Now, this does not mean He is not anticipating something in return for His service – it is an investment.

Call upon Me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. Psalm 50:15

And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.
John 14:13

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.
Matthew 5:16

It's clear, isn't it? God is looking for the glory that comes when He, His Son or the Holy Spirit serve us in doing the work that He has created us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10). So then who is to be the benefactor of my service? As you can see from the following verses, our ministering/service is to be done to one another – to Christ's Body, the Church. This is His way of our ministering to Him.

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:10-11

And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.'
Matthew 25:40

His Investment in Your Influence

God has invested much in His children. His expectation is that His investment will have an impact for His glory and kingdom.

¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen.
Matthew 28:18-20

God entrusted authority to His Son, who in turn entrusted it to us.

¹⁸ Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.
2Corinthians 5:18-20

The very ministry that Jesus came to institute – the ministry of reconciliation – has been invested in us as His ambassadors. How does this influence, authority and ministry manifest itself? Much more dramatically than we have been taught to expect.

¹⁴ You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.
Matthew 5:14-16

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¹⁵ For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? 2Corinthians 2:15-16

⁵ Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God, ⁶ who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2Corinthians 3:5-6

The 2Corinthians verses remind us that it is not our sufficiency that accomplishes these things, but God. He is the Grand Orchestrator. There are no coincidences for His children. And that includes those with whom we have been given influence.

This influence occurs most often in parent-child relationships: Boss-employee, official-constituents, teacher-student, etc. However, it also exists where God gives spiritual influence with customers, peers, and partners. Additionally, the most spiritually mature Christians may be the lowest in the hierarchy – and may have the most spiritual influence.

The point is that we must seek God's wisdom and revelation to know where He intends to use the influence we have been given – be it obvious or hidden – to (help) lead a group of people in the direction of the purpose we have been assigned. Once again, we must go to Him humbly – without presumption or pretense – seeking to know who He has called to us for the purpose of this season.

A Different Perspective

As we explore our identity in Christ, our identity for His Kingdom and our identity toward this fallen world, let's lay aside what it means to us (the self-focused view) and consider what it means to Christ. Why has He identified us the way He has – both generally (as a church) and in our specific roles? What are His expectations of us? What can we expect under His anointing?

It will also be helpful to consider our identity in Christ's Kingdom – in relation to His followers within our spheres of influence. The children of God have both understanding and revelation regarding our identity. Understanding is based on our titles (e.g., elder, teacher, pastor) and what others know them to mean. Revelation may come via the gift of discernment, or through someone that just "knows" us well – like the mother who sees her daughter's nurturing gift and senses she will become a nurse. Whether from understanding or revelation, who we are to the Body of Christ says something profound about our identity. What are their expectations of us? And what does Christ desire us to be to them?

Lastly, even the lost are drawn to us by the Holy Spirit. Why are they coming to us? What do they hope to see or find?

Beginning with the Common, Foundational Roles

There are three common roles that all Christians are called to fulfill: Disciple, bondservant, and ambassador.

Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. Matthew 4:19

Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. Matthew 8:23

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. Luke 6:40

Disciples follow their teacher and are made to be like him. As we will learn later, this is much different that "student". By the way, you are not a Christian if you are not a disciple of Jesus Christ.

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For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men — as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.

1Peter 2:15-16

A bondservant is one that has volunteered to serve. It is one eager to know do his master's heart and to do his bidding.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

2Corinthians 5:20

It is important to recognize that an ambassador is responsible to the kingdom of origin, not to the one he or she is sent. Also, an ambassador carries with him or her the rights of the kingdom of origin.

Greater Than...

Now that we have established a few of the foundational identities, let's look as Christ's description of us as His followers.

For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

Luke 7:28

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ And John *tried* to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit *it to be so* now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

Matthew 3:13-15

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do, because I go to My Father.

John 14:12

For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.

Mark 11:23

Have you considered what Christ must have imagined for those that would follow Him? What exploits filled His anticipations for us?

And what does this mean, not for us personally, but for those within our spheres of influence? Perhaps something greater than they see now?

Kings and Priests

⁴ John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, ⁶ and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 1:4-6

⁹ But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

1Peter 2:9-10

God and His children – in Heaven and on Earth – that **know** you have been made a king and a priest – together a royal priesthood. What does this mean to them? Are we carrying the demeanor of a king –

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or a pauper? The holy priesthood were the only ones that could enter the Holy of Holies, where God dwelt between the cherubim and seraphim. What did the people think of those that walked worthy of their anointing? What about the ones that did not?

Christ's Gifts to the Church

Expectations are a normal part of life. We are surrounded by them. Our employer expects us to perform at an acceptable level. Our tennis or bridge partner expects us to keep our heads in the game. And our children... well, our children expect more than we ever imagined someone could expect of another human being. Such is life.

Drowned in the expectations of those we know and love are the expectations of the One we love most of all. What do we do with the expectations of the Gift Giver?

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:7,11-16

Have you ever considered that you might be one of Christ's gifts to the church? Have you asked Him which gift He intended you to be for Him and His joint heirs? What do these gifts and roles mean to the church? How are they to operate for the body of Christ?

And what about the "positions" of elder and deacon?

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

James 5:14-15

For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

1Timothy 3:13

What is Christ and His Body looking for out of these individuals? Are we taking full advantage of their anointing for the spiritual and physical needs of the fellowship? Are you one of them?

The Temple of God

Lastly, let us consider our identity in the world – with those lost and wandering outside the Kingdom of God. Have you ever considered what it means to be the temple of God on the Earth?

¹⁹ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God... ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19, 22

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

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*"I will dwell in them
And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people."*

2Corinthians 6:16

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained."
John 20:21-23

This picture is of a temple dedication. Like temples past, the presence and glory of God filled these men and women, and they became the place where God could be seen and experienced, but most important to Jesus here, they would be the place where the rest of humanity would know God works on behalf of everyone to repair all the things we have broken – to know this God forgives and restores.

So, what was the purpose of the Temple? God established it as a holy place of sacrifice, forgiveness, atonement, meeting, and restoration. Those in the world that are drawn by the Holy Spirit, though they may not know it, are looking for this in us.

One More Role to Consider

I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.
Isaiah 62:6-7

How is This Possible?

Let's face it: The expectations are high. Very high! Much depends on our appointments. But like a wise pastor once told me, "He whom God appoints, God anoints." Much depends on our "taking hold of that for which Christ took hold of us." We must, in faith, walk into our anointing. We must pray that God will give us grace to feel the weight of the mantle of influence and authority He has given each of His children.

For those that may be struggling with the enormity of the expectations, let's examine the following verses to understand just how this is possible.

Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.
Acts 2:22

I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.
John 5:19-20

⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.
John 15:4-8

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of *those* whose heart *is* loyal to Him.
2 Chronicles 16:9

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I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Galatians 2:20

The exchanged life empowers us to live as Christ lived – to do nothing by Himself, for it is Christ that does what the Father is doing.

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13

Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Luke 12:32

Assignment

It is important to know who we are in God's plan and who He wants us to be.

1. How would you describe yourself as a member of God's Kingdom (e.g., apostle, evangelist, pastor, teacher, prophet, watchman/intercessor, elder, deacon)?
2. What are your leadership roles in the Body of Christ and your community (e.g., employer, deacon, chair of _____)? Describe your relationship with the fellowships, ministries and groups with whom you are involved. Ask God to clarify His intention for your involvement in each of them.
3. Each day this week, pray the prayer of Psalm 139:23-24. Ask God to reveal any role you may have dismissed out of fear, misunderstanding, false-humility or disobedience.
4. With a will to do His will, search out the matter of the foundational roles, the roles given by Christ as gifts to the church, and any other roles the Spirit leads you to explore.
5. Consider carefully any opportunities you have been offered to lead a group, ministry or fellowship. Let God, through the Holy Spirit, reveal the ones that are His intention (versus the ones that are distractions).