

A Biblical View of Self
Presented by Mary Lowman
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Day One

It is very common to hear people say they're trying to "find themselves," to discover their identity. As I've attempted to understand exactly what that means, it seems to be a result of the self-focus, which is indicative of today's humanistic, post-modern society.

And it also seems to be a way of expressing our innermost need to know our individual lives do have some meaning, that we have a purpose in being here. We're not some gigantic coincidence of nature. That the joy and pain and happiness and suffering and peace and turmoil we experience are all part of some understandable plan.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 1 that every person is born with a God-consciousness:

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse (Romans 1:20).

Everyone knows instinctively there has to be a Master Planner, and our existence has to have more meaning than a haphazard coincidence. However, until we know God through Jesus Christ, that master plan remains a mystery. What else is there for a person who doesn't know Christ except to try anything they can to discover who they are, why they are, and what their existence means.

The great news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is we all belong here. No Christ-follower needs to go around looking for an identity. God's Word gives us clear answers. Once you've been born from above, you know you are a child of God, created by him in an orderly, planned process. He knows and cares for you individually. You are important to him; therefore, your life has meaning.

As you go out into the world each day, be aware of the people around you who are trying to find who they are because they don't know Jesus. Be ready to share with them this great and glorious truth, that our lives have meaning when we are rightly related to God through Jesus.

Day Two

It has almost become a cliché to hear people say they're seeking to know "who they are." This lack of identity and purpose is real when we do not have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. If you don't know God has created you, you are important to him, and your life has significance in his sight, then it's easy to see why you would be searching for a meaningful identity.

However, I see that same search in the lives of many Christians. Indeed, there were some years in my life that were consumed with a desire to find myself and know myself. If it is true that our union with Christ brings meaning and purpose into our lives, why are so many Christians still looking for meaning?

Here are my thoughts. I believe the humanistic philosophy of self-focus has penetrated our Christian teaching and caused us to look at ourselves and to ourselves for answers; caused us to leave biblical

principles and follow human psychological theories to find this meaning and purpose; caused us to place far too much emphasis on the self-issues of the day.

You can see how this could happen, because certainly the gospel is the good news that each individual is important to God; therefore, teachings which magnify the individual can easily be mistaken to have some biblical basis. There is a distinct line between the value of individuals and the magnification of self.

The "self" issues of today's philosophy are very alluring. But when we are consumed with self, camouflaged as it might be by words which sound good to our ears, we are trapped into a self-focus, which can be very confusing as well as damaging. Friends, you won't find a self-focus taught in Scripture. The only hyphenated self-word I've found in any Bible translation is self-control, which is quite different from self-love, self-confidence, self-actualization, etc.

Our identity is not found in making ourselves feel better about ourselves. The knowledge and esteem we need for ourselves come as by-products of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives. There is abundant evidence all around us that self-magnification hasn't worked.

Day Three

Stop and think: Where in Scripture do you find the term self-esteem? How about self-love? I'll save you some trouble; you won't find those terms in Scripture. They, along with self-actualization and a few others, are buzzwords of our contemporary society.

Of course, there are many words and phrases we use today which are not used in Scripture, and vice-versa, so the issue is the meaning and philosophy that has grown up around those terms. Scripture gives a different perspective of these self issues.

The only mention of self-love in the Bible is that we should love our neighbor as ourselves, which simply assumes we will naturally love ourselves. It is not a directive to love ourselves. There aren't too many people who don't truly love themselves quite well.

Self-esteem is the idea of having a high regard for one's self. While we should know clearly that we are important to God, we are valuable, and we are special and worthwhile because God has declared that to be true, we cannot lose sight of the truth that our value is not found in ourselves.

I think we tend to attribute too much to poor self-esteem, and thereby believe if we can think better of ourselves, our problems will go away. Trying to feel good about something that by nature is not good, is a losing battle. That's a different mindset than having respect for who we are in Christ and therefore appreciating your "self." Maybe self-appreciation is a better term for us than self-esteem. The subtleties between the two are important.

Scripture teaches us our best self-efforts are like filthy rags to God. I think of Philippians 2, which says we should esteem or consider others more important than ourselves. Paul wrote to the Romans that our old self was crucified with Christ. Jesus taught us to deny ourselves and take up our cross.

That's the biblical view of self we've somehow lost in our humanistic society where self has been elevated to the highest place of importance. As Christians, we need to have our minds re-shaped into biblical molds. The Christian's identity search should end forever with the incredible realization that we are, through his grace, now called the children of God. Amazing, absolutely overwhelming. That self-identity will carry us until we see him face to face.

Day Four

I want to talk about Ichabod. How would you like to be named Ichabod? It's not a lovely name, is it, but what it means is even worse. Ichabod means "The glory is departed." In 1 Samuel 4 we read Phinehas' wife named their son Ichabod, because the glory of God had departed from Israel.

As I thought about that, I wondered if my name is ever Ichabod. In our vernacular today, we might say, "Are you a has-been?" Could it ever be said of me that the glory God has given to me through Jesus Christ is no longer present in my life?

When Phinehas' wife named her son Ichabod, it was because of the sin of Israel. They had disobeyed the Lord, and the ark of God had been captured. The ark was where God met them, where they talked to him, and where they received guidance. And their enemies had captured it because of their sin and disobedience.

We can be spiritual "has-beens" when our lives are full of disobedience. I can think of so many Christians I know who used to be mightily used of God. It could be said of them that they have been this or that for God, but now the glory has departed. Through sin and disobedience, Ichabod is now their name.

Could it ever be said of us that we have been in the past a person of love and compassion, but it's no longer true? Have we lost the zeal we once had for Jesus? As I thought about this, I stopped and asked God if any of his glory has departed from me because of my lack of love or zeal? Have I become a "has-been," an Ichabod?

In Christ we are given the right to be called the sons of God. That is glorious. We become the righteousness of Christ and are partakers of his holiness. That's really incredible. And yet, we can lose the glory of all we have received from God if our lives are not continually in close contact with the Lord.

It takes a daily commitment, a disciplined life of time in God's Word, an absolute set of our will to obey God and live by his principles, regardless. Without that, we can expect the glory to depart.

No, for sure none of us would want to be called Ichabod—the glory has departed. Is God's glory still evident in your life to all who know you? If not, you can be restored to that original glory. Don't let your name be Ichabod.

Day Five

Extravagance is generally considered an undesirable trait. It's defined as excessive, wasteful, exorbitant. Yet, when I look at God, I see extravagance as one of his attributes. I ask you to consider with me how excessive God is in his dealings with you.

Think about his mercy, which keeps you from having to pay the due penalty for your sins. The Bible tells us his mercies are new every day, and they last forever. He is just piling up mercy upon mercy each day, extravagant mercy, given to you without charge.

Then there's his grace, which goes beyond mercy to give you undeserved blessings, and Scripture tells us he makes all grace abound to us in all things at all times, giving us all we need, so that we will abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8). Abundant, rich, extravagant grace.

As for God's forgiveness, he goes beyond forgiving and separates your sins from you as far as the east is from the west, then proceeds to forget. Can you forgive and forget? No, that's God's kind of forgiveness—excessive, extravagant.

And think of this, not only do we have a God who allows us to come to him, we have a God who seeks for us. Can you imagine that?

Then there's the extravagance of his creation. The unending blend of colors, the profuse variety and quantity of flowers, the breathtaking sunsets, the fragrant and delicious smells, the lush beauty of nature. God is absolutely lavish in his creation.

And then, not only are we allowed to worship him, we can call him Abba Father and come boldly to his throne. Not only can we accept him as our Savior, but he also comes to abide in us. The abundance of God's love toward us is beyond our mental comprehension.

When we consider God's extravagance toward us, as an old song says, how can we do less than live for him completely—after all he's done for us.