

# LESSON TWO: *IDENTITY*

## BIG IDEA

Many of us struggle with our spiritual \_\_\_\_\_. The Bible says we are not slaves to God but \_\_\_\_\_. Romans 8:17 says, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ..." Not only are we God's children, but we are the heirs of His kingdom. The invitation to be adopted into God's family is open and available to everyone through Jesus Christ.

## DISCUSSION

Discuss the difference between approaching God as your master versus as your father.

Romans 8:17 states, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ..." What does being an heir of God mean to you?

What, if anything, stands in the way of viewing yourself as an heir? What can you do to remove the barriers?

*Take some time to reflect on these questions in your journal!*

## TEACHING

### Identity \_\_\_\_\_

You know how stressful it is if you have ever had your financial identity stolen. We all know we must protect our identity because \_\_\_\_\_ it once it is stolen is complicated and painful.

We have an \_\_\_\_\_ who wants to steal our identity. (John 10:10). You have to protect your spiritual identity in the same way to protect your personal identity. If it is stolen, the process of regaining it is complicated and painful.

What does \_\_\_\_\_ say our identity is?

*for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. (Gal 3:26)*

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal 4:4-7)*

We are not slaves but beloved sons and daughters, signifying that we have a \_\_\_\_\_ rather than a \_\_\_\_\_, as the Bible verse highlights.

*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (Rom 8:15-16)*

We are \_\_\_\_\_, not mere \_\_\_\_\_. While a slave functions as an employee, a son enjoys the status of an heir, signifying our privileged relationship with God.

and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ... (Rom 8:17)

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

Our obedience is rooted in \_\_\_\_\_ rather than \_\_\_\_\_, distinguishing it from the duty-bound obedience of a slave and aligning it with the heartfelt devotion of a son to his father.

One of the most vivid pictures of the \_\_\_\_\_ and our enjoyment of it is found in Luke 15. You may know the story as the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but that is not what Jesus calls it. He says it is the story of a man who has two sons. The reader is meant to compare and contrast the father's relationship with both of his sons. If you focus on one, you miss the point Jesus is teaching.

The story begins with the younger son asking his father for his share of the inheritance before the father has died. It is hard to imagine a more dishonoring request. In effect, the son says, "I want what you can give me, but I don't want you." Astonishingly, the father agrees and gives the son his inheritance. The father allows himself to be disrespected publicly and gives the son with money the family has accumulated over generations. The young man goes to a far-off country and squanders all his wealth on extravagant living. In time, a famine strikes the land, and the younger son, having spent everything, is forced to work for a citizen of that country, feeding pigs and longing to eat the food given to them. Having bounced off rock bottom, the son "comes to himself" and plans to return home, asking his father for a job. He doesn't plan to ask for forgiveness or to be restored; he intends to ask to work off his debt.

Jesus tells us that the father sees the son from a distance and runs to embrace him, kissing him and ordering his servants to put a robe on him, a ring on his finger, and sandals on his feet. (You have to understand that in this culture, patriarchs didn't run; it was considered a humiliation!) Also, notice that the son isn't even allowed to negotiate a job, and he doesn't have time to ask for forgiveness! He is embraced and restored without asking and at no price to him by a father willing to let his love make him look foolish. The father throws a feast to celebrate his son's return and invites the town to enjoy his reconciliation with his son.

About this time, the older son comes in from working in the fields. Hearing the party, he calls an employee over and hears about the father's reconciliation with his younger brother. While everyone else celebrates, the older son is furious. He refuses to attend the feast, calling the father out from the party to confront him. The older brother rants that he has always obeyed his father's commands and has never been given such a celebration. He has regularly chosen to serve and work for the benefit of this family, and this display of forgiveness is an offense to his excellent record. In return, the father explains to the elder son that all he has belongs to him and that it is good and proper to celebrate the younger son's return because he was lost and is now found. He asks the son to attend the party, but the older son refuses.

At the end of the story, an interesting thing happens. The "bad" son is reunited with and reconciled with the father. He receives the father's grace and ends the account in good standing with the father. Meanwhile, the "good" son is separated from the father, not in

spite of his goodness, but because of his goodness. His goodness keeps him from seeing the father's blessing in his life and enjoying the father's grace to his younger brother.

Both sons are with us today. Jesus does not divide the world into the moral "good" and the immoral "bad." The world isn't divided into religious and irreligious. It is divided by the lost and the found. The older brother was lost even though he was near the father. The younger son has been lost, but at the end of the story he is found in the father's love.

## Three Signs We Struggle to Enjoy "\_\_\_\_\_?"

First, we see the older brother "\_\_\_\_\_." His words are dripping with resentment, not only about his younger brother but toward the father! Older brothers believe that if they live a good life, they should receive a good life – that God owes them a smooth road as they try to live up to standards. What happens then if something goes wrong in the life of an older brother? Older brothers tend to struggle to handle suffering that arises because their moral observance is results-oriented. The good life is lived not for delight in good deeds but as calculated ways to control their environment. Their effort creates a hierarchy. Because their identity is in effort and earning, they judge others who don't appear to try as hard or achieve as much success.

Next, the older brother is \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. The older son boasts of his obedience to his father, but his underlying motivation and attitude slip out when he says, "All these years, I've been slaving for you." He shows that his obedience to his father is motivated by duty. There is no joy, love, or reward in seeing his father pleased. Relationships based on earning can never be rested in love. There will always be a question of whether you are good enough and have done enough. The love of God, our Father, is unconditional in every way. He is incapable of loving you more or less. He loves you perfectly, completely, and eternally.

Finally, and most importantly, the older brother lacked \_\_\_\_\_ of the father's love. The older son says, "You never threw me a party." He couldn't see all he had from the father, and he couldn't see how the father felt about him, so when the father showed love to his younger brother, he took it as an indictment against himself. If we could have given the older brother truth serum, he would have asked the father, "I see you love my younger brother, but do you still love me?". Incredibly, the love of God our Father is not only unconditional; it is inexhaustible. His love for "them" never takes from his love for you.

## DIG DEEPER

Using the story of the man with two sons in Luke 15, which "son" are you prone to be?

What comes to mind when you think of how to please God?

Are you afraid of God? Describe those fears.

The father in Luke 15 points to his \_\_\_\_\_ as one of the means to help us understand his love. Talk about some things God has provided that you are grateful for.

## COMMON QUESTIONS

### Does God still love us when we mess up?

Yes! Romans 5:8 says, "God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Think about that for a moment. God loves us so much that even while we were doing wrong, He sent His only Son to die on the cross so that we could be forgiven and free. That's how much He still loves us when we mess up. His love is unconditional!

I want to do right, but I keep \_\_\_\_\_. Is being a “good Christian” supposed to be this hard?

There’s no such thing as a “good Christian.” Jesus lived the only perfect life that the world has ever seen. We should always strive to be like Jesus, but it’s a process, and sometimes we will fall short. Every Christian struggles and is faced with temptation and difficulty, but there are practical steps we can take to help us. Find a friend who loves Jesus and will help you with your faith, make spending time in the Word a habit, and pray regularly. As you grow, you’ll find your walk with the Lord feels more and more natural as you move forward on your faith journey. Keep going!

If I’m God’s son, does God \_\_\_\_\_ His children?

No. Jesus took all the punishment for us. Romans 8:1 says, “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The difference now is that God gives purpose to the bad in our lives. He does not cause the disaster but works through it to shape and help us grow. (Genesis 50:20)

What can I do to earn God’s love and approval?

Nothing. You don’t have to earn it and wouldn’t be able to even if you tried. Fortunately, you can simply receive it. Ephesians 2:8 tells us, “by grace, you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” You don’t have to do anything except put your faith in Jesus to receive God’s love and approval.

## NEXT STEPS

In our pursuit of God, we sometimes try to work our way into salvation. Identify one step this week to focus more on Jesus and less on your actions.

## FURTHER RESOURCES:

- Prodigal God (Keller)
- Abba’s Child (Manning)

## MEMORY VERSE

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal 4:4-7)*

# DAILY SCRIPTURE AND JOURNALING

## Day One

*For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. (Gal 3:26)*

Journal: What can you point to that offers assurance that you are truly one of God's children?

## Day Two

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal 4:4-7)*

Journal: Of which privileges that come with being adopted by God are you most appreciative?

## Day Three

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

Journal: What is the difference between "working out" your salvation versus "working for" your salvation?

## Day Four

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)*

Journal: How has the enemy tried to steal from you? What are some areas in which you are trusting God to create more abundant life?

## Day Five

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Rom 8:1)*

Journal: What is condemnation? What is the key to escaping it? How do you know if you have?

# PRAYER FOCUS

*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" (Rom 8:15)*

Pray each day that you will be driven by devotion and not duty. Pray that God will repair those experiences and beliefs in your heart that keep you from feeling enjoyment and security with Him. Pray that you will feel his love for you in a new and fresh way.