

## Helping Abuse Survivors Find Identity in Christ

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- I. Introduction
- II. What is identity?
  - A. Identity refers to how I view myself
  - B. History of identity:
    - 1. Rooted and founded in creation as image-bearer (Gen. 1)
    - 2. Distorted and perverted by the fall (Gen. 3, Rom. 1)
    - 3. Restored and transforming in redemption (2 Cor. 3:18, Col. 3:10)
  - C. What is a proper, biblical identity for a believer? (Gal. 2:20, John 15, Rom. 6)
- III. The experience of abuse is significant for identity issues. Identity can be influenced by abuse in many ways:
  - A. Forgetting what you were like before abuse
  - B. Feeling like everything is your fault
  - C. Constantly questioning your motives
  - D. Identity is solely based on the relationship with the abuser (I have no identity apart from him)
  - E. Feeling like you aren't okay and need to change
  - F. Rejecting your own self-perception, you think you must rely on abuser for what is true
  - G. Feeling like you're losing touch with reality
  - H. Feeling like you can't trust yourself
  - I. Feeling guilty or full of shame
  - J. Feeling dirty or constantly bad
  - K. Feeling like you have to be perfect to stop the abuse
  - L. Feeling worthless or unlovable
  - M. Feeling like you are \_\_\_\_\_ (insert lie created by abuser)
  - N. Feeling alone
  - O. Feeling afraid, fearful, terror
  - P. Feeling like people know what you're really like
  - Q. Feeling like no one understands or cares
  - R. Feeling like you have no control
  - S. Feeling like a victim
  - T. Feeling like you have to earn love
  - U. Feeling apart from yourself (depersonalization, derealization or dissociation)
  - V. Denying what has happened
  - W. Others?
- IV. How you know what kind of identity problems exist?
  - A. Build a trusting relationship (Prov. 27:9)
    - 1. The challenge

2. The solution: God must work in the heart. What can the counselor do?  
Demonstrate a prayerful, patient, persistent love of neighbor by a few brothers and sisters in Christ (community is essential)
  - B. Patiently gathering data (Prov. 18:13)
- V. Biblical anthropology
- A. Sufferers and sinners
  - B. Active responders versus passive victims (Luke 6, Mark 7). Abuse doesn't *create* identity problems, but it does significantly *influence* how a fallen (or even a redeemed-fallen) person will think of herself who is already prone to misjudgments about herself (Jer. 17:9)
  - C. Inner and outer man (2 Cor. 4:16)
    1. Identity issues are largely cognitive perceptions of oneself (thinking) based upon evaluations. These thoughts influenced by beliefs, desires, expectations, and experiences
    2. Traumatic experiences often connect inner man perceptions with outer man experiences (see Gen. 8:21). Thus a person struggling with identity issues many have physical elements to her struggle
- VI. Recognize counterfeit christs and turn away from them (Prov. 28:26)
- A. Self-solutions that make me feel in control but ultimately do not transform the heart (assertiveness/boundaries, self-protective means, manipulation, etc)
  - B. False refuges that make me feel better for a moment but are destructive (addictions, shopping, food, entertainment, drugs/meds, cutting, sexual sin, over-indulging relationships, etc.)
- VII. Identity in Christ
- A. The Scriptures (Ps. 119, 2 Tim. 3:15-17)
  - B. God (Ex. 34, Psalms). Key points:
    1. The goodness of God
    2. The faithfulness of God
    3. The sovereignty of God
    4. The love and mercy of God
  - C. Self
    1. Created by God as His image bearer
    2. Fallen, sinner, guilty, deserving of God's judgment
    3. Redeemed: forgiven, adopted, transformed, free
  - D. Jesus and the gospel (see Identity and Union with Christ chart)
  - E. Hope of redemption and transformation

F. Danger: don't settle for the counterfeit "psychological gospel"<sup>1</sup>

**Psychology Gospel (man-centered)**

Hope is found in esteeming myself  
Hope is found in valuing myself  
Hope is found in loving myself  
Hope is found in "finding" myself

Hope is found in God making much of me  
Jesus died to demonstrate my worth  
Hope is found in a positive self identity

The chief end of God is glorify man

**Biblical Gospel (God-centered)**

Hope is found in esteeming Jesus  
Hope is found in valuing Jesus  
Hope is found in loving Jesus  
Hope is found in "losing" myself to follow Jesus

Hope is found in me making much of Jesus  
Jesus died to demonstrate His own worth  
Hope is found through my identity in Jesus

The chief end of man is to glorify God

VIII. Biblical means of transformation

- A. Renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:1-2, Eph. 4:23)
- B. Taking thoughts captive (2 Cor. 10:5)
- C. Dwelling on what is true (Phil. 4:8)
- D. Confession and Forgiveness (Matt. 18:15, 1 John 1:9, Eph. 4:32)
- E. Belonging in the family (Rom. 12:4-15)

IX. Implementation

- A. Memorization (Ps. 119)
- B. Singing (Psalms, Eph. 5)
- C. Specific renewal of mind exercises with specific subjects (self-worth, self-image, intimacy, etc.)
- D. Specific action to apply God's Word in faith (e.g., forgiveness, communication, trust, etc. - James 1:23-25)
- E. Active involvement in the body of Christ, the context of transformation (Eph. 4)

X. Resources

- A. Stuart Scott, "Jackie and Dissociative Identity Disorder" in Heath Lambert and Stuart Scott, eds., *Counseling the Hard Cases* (BH Academic, 2012).
- B. Laura Hendrickson, "Mariana and Surviving Sexual Abuse" in Heath Lambert and Stuart Scott, eds., *Counseling the Hard Cases* (BH Academic, 2012).
- C. Jerry Bridges, *Who Am I?* (Cruciform Press, 2012)
- D. John Street, "Handle with Care: Counseling Victims of Abuse with Love and Wisdom" Association of Certified Biblical Counselors.

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the psychological gospel and a biblical critique, see David Powlison, "The Therapeutic Gospel," 2010, available at <https://www.9marks.org/article/therapeutic-gospel/> See also chapter one in John Piper, *God is the Gospel* (Crossway, 2011). Though Piper does not use this term, he accurately and helpfully describes the psychological gospel in contrast to the biblical gospel.

- E. Jim Newheiser, “Counseling in Cases of Abuse” (Association of Certified Biblical Counselors Annual Conference audio, 2011). Available at [biblicalcounseling.com](http://biblicalcounseling.com)
- F. Laura Hendrickson, “Seeing the Father’s Hand: Hope for the Abused.” Institute for Biblical Counseling and Discipleship, available at [ibcd.org](http://ibcd.org).

Example exercise to renew one’s mind in the truth of Scripture (Eph. 4:22-24)

*Thoughts to Put Off*

I am not worth anything

I am guilty

I can’t trust anyone

I just want to die

*Thoughts to Put On*

Jesus is of ultimate worth and I am in Him

God has declared me “not guilty” because of Jesus’ work for me

Jesus will help me to learn to trust Him because He is truly worthy of my trust. In time, He will give me the grace to demonstrate appropriate trust in others

Jesus has given me a valuable gift of life. Though I am in great pain, my life is still valuable and God will help me to find grace and help in my pain as I look to Him

*Identity and Union with Christ*

<b>SPIRITUAL TRUTH:</b>	<b>MEANING:</b>	<b>DESIGNED TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF:</b>	<b>SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:</b>
<b>I AM IN CHRIST</b>	Union with Jesus, connected to Him	Personhood,	John 15, 1 Cor. 1:30
<b>I AM ACCEPTED</b>	God considers me with favor. He brings me into His family as I am	Rejection	Rom. 15:7
<b>I AM ADOPTED</b>	I am part of God's family	Belonging, relationship	Rom. 8:15, 23
<b>I AM FORGIVEN</b>	God treats me as if I had not sinned	Guilt, memories	Eph. 1:7
<b>I AM JUSTIFIED</b>	God declares me "not guilty, but righteous"	Legal culpability	Rom. 3:24
<b>I AM REDEEMED</b>	Freed from the power of sin	Bondage	Rom. 3:24
<b>I AM RESCUED</b>	I am saved from sin and its consequences	Danger, darkness	Col. 1:13
<b>I AM RECONCILED</b>	My relationship with God has been restored	Separation, alienation	2 Cor. 5:18-20
<b>I AM DEAD TO SIN</b>	My old, sinful self has died with Christ	Old, sinful self/identity	Rom. 6:5-11
<b>I AM RAISED UNTO NEW LIFE</b>	I have been raised with Christ with new spiritual life	Spiritual death, lack of spiritual life	Rom. 6:5-11
<b>I AM A MEMBER OF CHRIST'S BODY</b>	I belong to Christ, I am a member of His body	Belonging, relationship	Eph. 5:30, Rom. 12:4-5
<b>I AM NO LONGER UNDER JUDGMENT</b>	Propitiation (God's wrath for my sin satisfied in Christ's death)	Deserved judgment, punishment	Rom. 3:25, 1 John 2:2
<b>I AM KNOWN BY GOD</b>	God knows me personally	Relationship, belief that God doesn't know or care	Rom.8:29, Ps. 139
<b>I AM CHOSEN</b>	Out of His own wisdom, God picked me to know Him	Rejection	Eph. 1
<b>I AM LOVED</b>	God loves me	Love	Eph. 2:4
<b>I AM A NEW CREATURE</b>	I am new in Christ. I am not who I once was	Brokenness, desire for new beginning	2 Cor. 5:17
<b>I AM HOLY (SANCTIFIED)</b>	God has set me apart for His special purpose	Impurity, purposelessness	1 Cor. 1:2, 6:11
<b>I AM SECURE</b>	I will never lose my relationship with God	Insecurity	Rom. 8:35-39
<b>I AM GOD'S WORKMANSHIP</b>	I am made by God for a purpose to do His good works	Purposelessness	Eph. 2:10

