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Forging Our Identity

But Moses said to God, “Who am I? . . .”

Exodus 3:11

When I visit someone’s home, I love to walk through their family rooms and hallways and look at their pictures. The snapshots that are displayed are usually the moments when the family is captured at their best. I often wonder where they were when the picture was taken and what they were doing. What were they thinking and feeling?

We recently had family photographs taken with my husband’s entire side of the family at a beautiful Arizona resort. It took hundreds of attempts to capture just one single shot when all of us were looking at the camera with at least a somewhat normal expression on our face. Aged four to seventy-four, we came with quite diverse abilities to understanding the purpose of the perfect image.

When my mother-in-law proudly posted some of her favorites on Facebook, many people applauded her beautiful and happy family. We laughed at the comments, thinking of all it took to encapsulate the blissful scene!

While those photos are a wonderful memorial of what our family looked like that year, it is such a small picture of who we actually are. The background of the immaculately landscaped resort is a far cry from the dishes-piled, cluttered kitchen where I spend most of my days. The carefully matching clothes, neatly pressed and all tucked in do not reflect the frumpiness I feel when I slip on my old jeans that seem to get a little tighter every time I don them!

And the wide grins plastered across our faces? They don't give you an inkling of the arguments that went on as we combed our hair and put on our shoes. The worry that floods our minds when our

heads hit the pillow at night didn't make it into the photo. Or the things we long to say to one another and just can't seem to find the right time or the right words. It's a snapshot.

There is so much more behind the scenes when we aren't standing still, looking our best, and posing for the camera. Emotions,

hopes, dreams, and scars. Expectations, desires, and disappointments. While we all stand in the photo individually next to one another, the reality of a family is that we are all so intertwined, we often don't know where we ourselves end and our family begins.

Our family forges our identity. The definition of identity is "the fact of being who or what a person or thing is."²

Moses greatly struggled with his identity. Moses describes himself completely differently in Exodus 4 than the way Stephen does in Acts 7. You'd almost think they were talking about two different people! By piecing together bits of Moses' story, we gather the following about him:

He was physically attractive and others could see there was something unique about him (Ex. 2:2; Acts 7:20). The New International Version says "he was no ordinary child" (Heb. 11:23).

He was well-educated and a great speaker (Acts 7:22).

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He grew up in the Egyptian royal household (Ex. 2:5–10), and was trained in all their ways (Acts 7:22), including the art of war.

Moses was a Hebrew being raised by an Egyptian princess. The Egyptians considered themselves culturally superior to the enslaved Hebrews (Ex. 8:25–27) but feared their growing numbers (Ex. 1:8–14). Yet Moses lived as an adopted Hebrew in Pharaoh's court. Despite the fact that he lived in luxury in the household of Pharaoh, he maintained a fascination toward his heritage and intentionally went out among the Hebrews to learn more about them.

As an adoptive mom, I understand this. While we are “Mom and Dad,” our children are naturally curious about their biological ancestors. Moses wrestled between his Hebrew heritage and Egyptian nurturing. When identity is not clear during childhood, it can easily translate to a fear of inadequacy in adulthood. Our family helps define our place, our purpose, and a sense of meaning to our lives. If our family communicated that we were an accident, unwanted, an extra mouth to feed, a nuisance, or unlovable, those labels become written on our minds and flash the feelings of “not good enough” across our hearts with every beat.

At the age of forty, Moses ventured out among the Hebrew slaves, witnessed their oppression by the Egyptians and, in a rash moment, murdered an Egyptian overseer. When he returns among the Hebrew slaves the next day he asks them, “Why are you fighting with your fellow Hebrew?” Frankly, Moses' question seems a bit naïve, as though the Hebrews were one big, happy family who never quarreled.

Let's imagine what may have gone through the mind of the Hebrew slave. “Well, let's see, Moses, I could answer your question in so many ways. I'll start by reminding you that we're both oppressed slaves. We spend most of our waking hours toiling under the burning Egyptian sun performing excessive manual labor. We both are frequently mocked and abused by our Egyptian overseers as you yourself witnessed yesterday. But yes, I get your point, we should be kind and loving toward one another, because we are both Hebrews.”

Maybe that's why he answers Moses with such sarcasm and disdain saying, "Who made you judge and ruler over us?" which in actuality, as the prince of Egypt, is exactly who Moses was! His answer basically informs Moses, "You obviously have not a clue what it means to be a Hebrew!"

A piece of Moses emotionally identifies with his Hebrew brothers, but they reject him. And deep down he knows he is not, or will ever be, a true Egyptian. He lacks identity. He doesn't know where he fits and wonders where he belongs. Moses sought to forge his own identity by becoming the deliverer of the Hebrew people. But his Operation Deliverance backfired. They neither recognized him as their deliverer nor accepted him as their brother. Moreover, Pharaoh's anger at Moses for committing the murder of an Egyptian forced him to flee to Midian. Moses faced rejection from everyone to whom he looked for his identity. And his failure to deliver the Israelites became his proof that he indeed was inadequate.

Maybe you can relate. The people who were supposed to encourage you laughed at your dreams. You sensed a call of God on your life, a stirring passion to follow God in a certain area or role. Just one strike spoken over you and you counted yourself out. Been there, done that.

Maybe it was a teacher who didn't like your writing.

Maybe it was a coach who always insisted you kept doing things wrong.

Maybe it was a pragmatic parent who told you to put your energy toward a "real" career.

Maybe it was a sibling or friend who seemed to be amazing while you remained only adequate.

Maybe it was a boss you could never satisfy, or a spouse you were unable to make happy.

Maybe it's a child struggling in school or life.

Somewhere along the way the message got through: *I just don't have what it takes.*

But Moses is about to discover the secret to identity, to uncover the fact of being who, or what, a person is. He asks God for the answer. Who am I, God? This is the first step. Even our family members don't know us to the core. Sure, they get more than a snapshot, but there are thoughts, dreams, and emotions within us we may never have expressed to them. We have gifts and abilities they never took the time to unwrap, display, or foster. They never bothered to gaze intently inside of us and discover all that we are.

God, however, knows everything about us as we are shown in Psalm 139:1–4.

*O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.*

God knows every fact about you. In fact, He uniquely created you just as you are on purpose.

*For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. (vv. 13–14)*

And God calls what He created good, better than good!

*Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well. (v. 14b)*

And made for great purpose.

*In your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me. (v. 16)*

God knows you—the real you. He is the only one who can fully forge your identity, because He is the only one who knows you deeply enough to be able to do so . . . even more deeply than you know yourself. So, while your family—biological or otherwise—may have communicated that you're not enough, that your dreams are unattainable or your existence insignificant, the God who created you says otherwise. And while the family in which you were raised may have felt less than ideal or even destructive, God placed you there for a purpose.

As long as we insist that we need to be accepted by people before we can fulfill our purpose, our fear of not being enough will isolate us. No human connection can provide the ultimate validation we crave—only I AM will be enough to fulfill us.

For Moses to accomplish all that God had planned for him, life in Pharaoh's palace proved the perfect training ground for him. He would've been taught how to read and write to record the Law that

would later be entrusted to him, how to conduct battle to fight the enemies of Israel, mathematics and architecture to construct the tabernacle and its furnishings, and government to organize the over two million people that he would need to lead and oversee. Little did he know as he was being raised and educated how

all that information would be used, but God was planting seeds of knowledge that would blossom at His perfect time for His purposes.

Moses' upbringing in Pharaoh's court may not have provided solid emotional attachment to his Egyptian mother. He may have

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longed for acceptance from his Hebrew brothers. But God promised to provide for Moses the connection and identity he so desperately sought, yet failed to receive, from his fellow Israelites. It was Moses' painful experience of rejection that allowed him to marvel over being personally chosen by God.

I would dare bet that, like Moses, some of your familial relationships are messy, confusing, frustrating, and disappointing. Sometimes they can even be heartbreaking or destructive. Moses experienced all those emotions through his human relationships and guess what? He learned to seek the Lord in the midst of the disappointment and devastation, and discovered that his relationship with the Lord was the only one that brought some wholeness to all the other broken ones. If not wholeness, well then, at least, acceptance.

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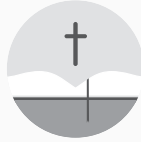
Friendship with I AM forged the path to answer the question, "But, who am I?" Coming to God with this question is the first step in the journey toward the promised land. Rather than continuing to read the flashing labels of "not good enough" and drowning in feelings of self-doubt, we turn to God for a new script. In order to fully embrace God's answer, we need to empty ourselves of the inadequate answers that have previously been spoken over us. Our fear of not being enough comes from a misplaced identity. We may understand pieces of ourselves, but we haven't allowed God to reveal to us all that we are.

Only God can rewrite the reverberating fears of the past into songs of security in the future. Belonging to Him, being His, places us into a new family, a new identity, with sacred callings and inestimable worth. He makes us enough—more than enough—and He thunders through His Word, teaching us to tune our ears toward His truth. And then our feelings begin to follow.

It's a process. Sometimes a longer one than we'd like. But God is faithful to keep speaking truth to us each and every time we turn to Him and ask, "But, who am I, God?" The transformation happens slowly, bit by bit, each time we draw near and allow the Master Composer to play a new song of truth over us. It's a dance just between the two of us—God and me. God and you.

At this point in Moses' life, he holds a lot of knowledge, but lacks wisdom. He continues playing the old tunes of his rejection from the Israelites and past failure in his head. God is going to have to get him alone with Him for a while in order to impart the truth of who He is and who Moses is. And God invites you, dear one, to step into His arms and begin this same dance—just the two of you—listening to His voice of truth and silencing that old script of self-doubt.

Intentional Trekking



Bible Reading Plan:

Exodus 2; Psalm 139



Truths for the Journey

- The definition of identity is “the fact of being who or what a person or thing is.”
- The secret to discovering our identity is to ask God who we are.
- Even our family members don’t know us to the core, but God knows everything about us.
- God is the only one able to fully forge your identity because He is the only one who knows you fully.
- It was Moses’ painful experience of rejection that allowed him to marvel over being personally chosen by God.



Processing the Journey

1. What is something that other people have said you are good at?
2. Who knows you better than anyone else? How did you develop that closeness?
3. Who in your family encouraged your dreams?
4. What are some things you learned growing up in your family that have been useful as an adult?
5. Why is God the only one who can truly help us understand the fact about who we are? Why can't others' perceptions of us be taken as facts?



Passionate Prayer

Dear Jesus, I confess that there are things I don't like about myself. I acknowledge that You made me the way You did on purpose and with a purpose. No one knows me more fully than You. Show me what it means to find my identity in and through You. Help me believe that what others have said are only perceptions. You alone know the facts about who I really am.