

Fresh Start
Week 7: Unique Identity

Has anyone come into this fall wanting or needing a fresh start? It begins with your view of God. Is he looking for you to slip up so he can whack you? Or is he one who gives grace and wants you to become the best version of yourself. If we are going to get a fresh start, we have to answer the basic questions, like why am I here and why are we here?

It's a great time to start fresh **as a church**. We have two campuses and we are **learning how to be one church in two locations**. We are also a way different group of people than we were 18 months ago. **COVID caused a scattering** of God's people. Many new people have joined what God is doing here and some others have left.

What we are looking at anew is **what it means to have a calling**. One of the really helpful resources that we use in helping people find their calling is a book called **More**, by **Todd Wilson**. This diagram comes from *More*.

Diagram page 214

Your calling is bound up in three words, Be, Do, and Go. Last week we went over your **core calling**, that part of the why we are here that is the same for every Christ follower.

Calling is not what you think it is. It's not typically something **dramatic**, even though it can be. It's definitely not just for **special** or super-spiritual people.

Today we want to look a little closer at the idea of identity, the **Be** part. In other words...**Understanding your unique identity**.

There is a lot being said about knowing who you are, or your true identity. There is **pressure in our culture** to find that in our **political affiliation**, our **sexual attractions**, our **wealth**, or **lack of**, our **skin color**, our **address/where we are from**.

Do those get to the heart of who I am or better describe who I was created to be? **Do I decide this, or does finding my identity come from something outside of me? Is it revealed to me from the one who designed me**, or do I take in all of the evidence about myself and then say, **"This is me, deal with it people."**

Here's a key part of finding my identity in the one who designed us.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to **steal and kill and destroy**; I have come that they may have life, and **have it to the full**. (Abundant, fulfilling) John 10:7-10 NIV

The question is do I want this full, satisfying, abundant life that God promised to those who listen to his voice and follow? Or do I want to define myself and set my own target or goal that is self-fulfillment.

I can choose some good things to pursue without consulting my designer or referring to how he has designed me. **It's pursuing best over good.**
142-3

Let's take a look at that last verse again. "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." That is in the active, not passive, or rather can be translated, "Taking hold of."

In order to get this full, satisfying, abundant life we have to take hold of it. Yes, it is all grace from God, but it is something that is offered that we have to take hold of. This is something that **takes effort or going after that life** that is based upon whom the designer has designed me to live.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.¹⁴ I praise you because I am **fearfully and wonderfully made**; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was **woven together** in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Psalm 139:13-16

We have to start with Psalm 139. It is the definitive verse where God describes our uniqueness and his design. The idea of **knitting or weaving** me together in my mother's womb speaks of purposeful design. **When you knit something, you are working with a design.** You make a scarf that is not like any other scarf and it is perfectly designed to keep your neck warm in cold weather.

This is the point where we have to **confront the lies** that we have heard, and spoken about ourselves. **This is the truth that confronts the lie.** And where does the lie come from, the enemy, Satan? What does the enemy **want to accomplish with this lie?** He wants to steal, kill, and destroy. He wants to **steal that abundant life** that is based upon how God has designed you. He wants to **kill what good God could do through you** as you operate

according to your unique design. And finally, he wants to **destroy you by separating you from the kingdom of God as it is coming on earth and for eternity**, as it will be in heaven.

Here's what we have to do to take hold. **It begins with embracing your uniqueness.**

Much like we have to take hold of the life God has for us, we also have to embrace our uniqueness. This is holding it close, looking at it, and understanding it. It's a lifelong journey. To embrace something means you **accept it; you aren't keeping it at arms length.** You can't **social distance** your uniqueness. You have to lean into it.

The biggest lie of Satan is that I'm not uniquely designed.

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 ESV

In another translation, the word, workmanship, is translated, **masterpiece.** This speaks of something that has been skillfully made or created.

Here's an example of a masterpiece. **(Picture of Blue Boy)** Blue Boy is a masterpiece by **18th Century British painter Thomas Gainsborough.** I've seen Blue Boy in person at the Huntington Library near Pasadena, California, where I was going to seminary. There's a reason it is called a masterpiece and one of the most recognized paintings of its era. It is estimated to be worth **9.29 million.** Not only is there **amazing skill needed to create a masterpiece, but also a masterpiece is one of a kind.** **Gainsborough didn't just keep cranking out Blue Boy paintings.** He did one, and it was perfect.

Again, to embrace is active, not passive, as something simply offered to us. I have to embrace this idea that I am wonderfully made and there is no other like me. If not, I will not be able to discover this full abundant life. And if I can do that, then I can **walk into those good works** that have been prepared for me to do because I was designed for them.

Todd Wilson, in his book, "More," explains our problem with embracing our unique identity. **"In our heads we know the truth, but in our hearts we struggle to fully embrace it. Our uniqueness is a special gift from the one who envisioned us before we were ever conceived in the womb. Somewhere between the head and the heart, we become confused about who we were created to be, resulting in our hands never engaging what we were created to do." More 143**

I can logically see, based on DNA and just observation, that there is no one else exactly like me. My fingerprint is unique from every other person. That's easy to think, but it's harder to embrace in my heart. If I embrace it, then I have to live like someone who believes that God has designed me uniquely for his good purposes in this world. That's the rub.

It's not the "you're special, you get a trophy" that our culture has created. My trophy is the full, abundant, overflowing, life that God gives me when I live it out of my unique identity.

**"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations."
Jeremiah 1:5 NLT**

Can you picture him saying that to you, leaving out the prophet part and filling something else in?

Do you know what word is used over and over again in the Bible to describe something unique being set apart for some purpose? The word is holy. I know it seems wrong, prideful, or just plain stupid, to think of yourself that way. But that is what God was saying to a man named Jeremiah, who wasn't anything special before he called him to speak to his people, the nation of Israel. The prophet was literally a "mouthpiece for God". Or we might say around here, an ambassador who speaks on behalf of his master who commissioned and sent him.

I've hit this uniqueness pretty hard, but that's where many of us get stuck. We've listened to the lies for years. The lies come into our minds and out of our mouths when we fall short of our own or someone else's standard. It's that negative self-talk. That stuff is poison. And again, it is meant to steal, kill, and destroy.

If embracing our uniqueness is where it begins, then the next thing we need to understand is that our unique identity is that...It's about overflow.

The concept of being filled to overflow is all through scripture. We talked about the living water early, that it bubbles up like a spring from within God's people. That's a picture of too much being put in one vessel so that it overflows to begin filling other vessels.

See if you can see how these words from Jesus demonstrate this kind of overflow. ³⁷ Jesus replied, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Matthew 22:37-39

It is out of a love for God that encompasses heart, soul, and mind, or as we have said, an allegiance to God that love for neighbor and self comes. Love for God is the water's source or origin. It naturally overflows with living water to self and others. But it starts with God.

Back to John 10:10 "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full". This literally means "more abundantly" the Greek word gives the picture of "more than enough, filled to overflowing." 144

Remember the graph from before? We have a core identity that is the same for all of God's people. Understanding what is true about who I am, that is the same as all of God's people, is where it overflows into my unique identity. Primary or core identity overflows into unique identity. Here's our core identity. Core Identity: Be a disciple of Jesus who seeks to have his fullness maturing in me.

Who we are as God's people overflows into who I am that is unique.

Because of our sin and brokenness, we sometimes have a hard time discovering our unique God designed identity. There's a lot of noise making it hard to hear God's voice. There's a lot of junk in the way of seeing it. But the truth is that it's been there from the beginning and throughout our lives there have been ways that even, in our mess, God's unique design displays itself. It's finding clues in the story.

Your life is a story being written. There are clues in the past that help us see how God has designed us and given us the unique identity.

Pay attention to vivid memories.

Examples:

- Travel and vacations...wanderlust.
- "Billy is usually one of the last to finish, but typically he gets it right."
- "Billy is a daydreamer."
- My desire to be in places where people say, "don't go."
- Mission trips.
- Eastlawn.

Look at all of the things you gravitated toward and love to do. What does that say about your unique identity? That gives you clues about who God designed you to be. It's your unique wiring. It's the way you see the world. It's the way you dive into a project.

Greg Weins...never finished...total attention deficit, mathematics engineer mind.

Hannah had to explain, defended those who were picked on.

Quinten was annoyingly driven...coffee table.

Josiah...charm, making friends, he can move people.

Deitrich...it's all about relationships, and what is fair or just.

What were you like as a kid before someone told you how it was supposed to be or before you had anything to prove? Some of your unique identity was most visible in childhood. I was a daydreamer.

Test what I find within the church.

I tested what I was learning about my unique identity with people within the body of Christ the church. It started first with teaching VBS as a teenager. Also at that time my youth pastor would turn over leadership to me and a few of my friends in our youth group.

One in particular is Tom Planck from Healthy Growing Churches. Tom has been coaching me recently as well as our team that worked on becoming one church with Beaverton. **I did assessments with him and reflected on what those were saying about me,** as well as talking about my life growing up and in ministry. **I was reflecting on the clues in my story as well as what assessments, like Spiritual Gifts Inventory, DISC, Conflict Resolution and Values. Out of that relationship, I let someone reflect with me and speak into my understanding of myself.**

Here's what I learned about my unique identity or Be. **"Think, assess, and visualize;** then **teach and coach** from a place of **brokenness** and weakness within key relationships.

Here's the thing, you can't be objective about yourself. You need someone to bounce things off of you **who will affirm and also tell you when you are way off base.**

Here's the reason we avoid this part. This is about pride and trust. We don't do this and it's about pride. If I don't let people know me, then they cannot speak into my life with clarity. **It's also about not trusting the body of Christ.** We are not trusting that God is speaking to me through other regular people.

Ok, that's all very interesting, but what can I do about it? **Where do I start?** Here are some steps...**Steps to a Fresh Start.**

I'm going to challenge you to **do at least one** of those things, but all three are better.

✓ **Tell a kid what you were like when you were a kid**

Talk about this over dinner with your kids. I understand this could be problematic. **You have the pastor's permission to give them the G rated version** of what you were like as a kid. **If there are any pending legal issues** from what you did when you were young, you can leave those out. **After all, those records have probably been expunged or the statute of limitations as run out.**

In the movie, The Kid, Bruce Willis' character is a heartless powerful lawyer who meets his 10-year-old self. He learns many things, one of which is that because of pain in his life, he got away from his true identity. **What he had become, which was very successful in the world's eyes, but also very lonely, was not really him.** His 10 year old self sees that in the future he has no dog, no wife, no family, and then blurts out, "I'm a loser."

I also heard, maybe from that movie or someplace, that if we were to meet our **10-year-old selves, that kid might punch you right in the face.**

✓ **Talk to a close Christian friend.**

For coffee or in your bridge group. You sharing your story with someone in order to get their feedback, will not only bless you, but it will bless your friend. This is how the Christian life is supposed to work. **Set it up before you leave!**

✓ **Meet with Tammy**

She will begin to help you unpack what has been covered up. She will use assessment, different service experiences, reflecting on your life...

You were designed to be a disciple of Jesus who seeks to have his fullness maturing in you. But there's something unique about you that will unlock your calling or the why am I here, question.