



## Identity Crisis: Who am I?

A Question We Can't Afford to Ignore.

# Identity Crisis: I am Empowered

Part 3 of a 6-part series on Identity

## I am Empowered.

I once read, "Most people are like 10-speed bicycles: equipped with gears they never use." I don't know who said that, but I agree. We go through most of our life without tapping into all the resources at our disposal.

The key to finding the other gears lies in your identity: Who do you think you are?

Depending on how you answer that question, your identity is either limiting your potential or liberating you to grow and expand.

In this [series on identity](#)—specifically *Christian Identity*—we've said followers of Jesus are [loved by God](#) and [hated by Satan](#).

You also need to know you're empowered.

You're empowered to go farther and stand longer. Chances are, you haven't *experienced* God's presence inside you, so you're breaking when you're able to bend. You're quitting when it's really just time to rest.

Before you give up, please consider how you're spiritually empowered to keep going.

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## Equipped for More

The Apostle Paul wrote these words from a prison cell on death row<sup>1</sup>:

I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

-Ephesians 3:16–19

### Preaching to the Choir

That prayer is directed to a group of Christians. So why is Paul praying for them to “understand God's love,” or “experience the love of Christ,” and “be made complete” with God's power?

Because those are gears they haven't tapped into yet. They may have *heard about* those things, but there's a difference in:

- Hearing vs Listening
- Seeing vs Watching
- Knowing vs Experiencing

He wants believers not just to know—but to experience—the power of a deeply rooted relationship with Jesus.

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*But if we're honest: large seasons of our life have been extremely inauthentic. Should anyone peek beneath the surface, they'd find a hollow phoniness struggling to keep up with the day's circumstances.*

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Though we may have called ourselves “Christian,” that wasn't really our identity. We weren't living as someone empowered from within. Truth be told: we probably weren't thinking about anything “within.”

### Consequences of Identity

This is the power—and danger—of identity. If your understanding of “self” ignores your inner being, then your entire life is confined to what you can touch, see, understand, and solve. You have no place

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<sup>1</sup> The Letter to the Ephesians is considered one of Paul's “prison epistles.” He wrote these letters while awaiting trial (and, ultimately, execution) at the hands of the Roman Emperor Nero. The other prison epistles were addressed to Christians living in the towns of Philippi and Colossae, and to an individual named Philemon. For more information, check out this free course: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/pauls-prison-epistles/>



to retreat to in times of trouble. Completely dependent on the circumstances of your outer life, you easily fall victim to the motives and actions of those around you.

But to have another realm that exists independent of what's around you—a place of retreat that can't be overwhelmed—is a blessed experience reserved for those empowered by God.

Look again at Paul's prayer. Notice what he *doesn't* pray for:

I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit.  
-Ephesians 3:16

There's no mention of protection, food, good moods, or increases in wealth. In other words, he doesn't discuss their circumstances. It's not because these things are not important. It is because these things are not *most* important.

Our attention is naturally pulled toward our circumstances. They are the things jumping up and down in front of us—demanding we give them attention. But, if we only tend to our circumstances—the tangible things we can touch and smell—we're playing a dangerously short-sighted game.

It's dangerous because our outer lives are only part of who we are. Your identity runs much deeper than the circumstances of the day.

You have other gears at your disposal.

### Knowing vs Experiencing

CS Lewis says the *things we believe* about Jesus relate to the Christian life like a map relates to a piece of land.

The map is not the land itself; it's simply a guide to understanding the land. At the end of the day, the map is just a piece of paper with colors and lines on it. It's an important piece of paper, but it should never be confused with the land.

In the same way: the things we believe are so very important. But, they're not the Christian life itself. They simply help us navigate through the life.

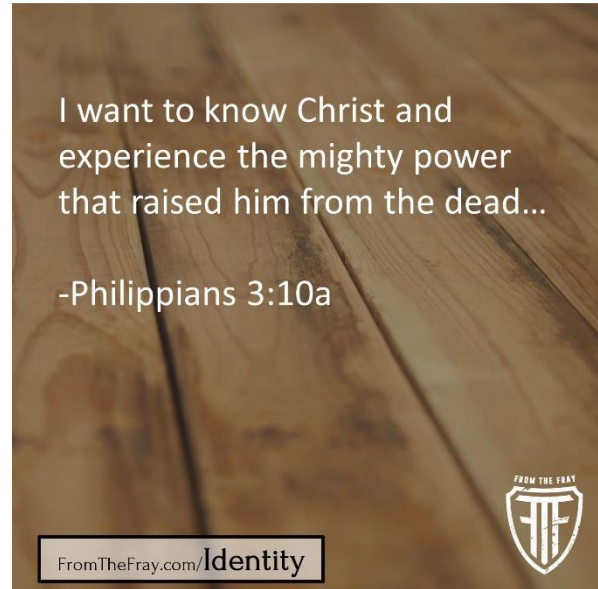


You see: it's one thing for me to give you a book of true things. But—and you already know this—it's altogether different for those true things to actually work themselves out in your life and begin changing you.

I can give you a map of your city, but it's not the same as walking through the city with the map in your hand.

We can have outer affairs (and reputation!) in order with no thought toward the inner man, and still launch into life feeling lonely and helpless and without purpose.

However, if we are empowered from within, circumstances are kept in perspective. Good ones are appreciated, and bad ones are tolerated.



### What's that Mean?

#### Dream with Me

Can we stop for just a moment and think on the power of that possibility? Imagine—dream if you will—of a life that's unshakeable by circumstances.

Of course, bad news hurts—it always will this side of heaven. But, bad news doesn't destroy. Circumstances slow you down, maybe even closing roads that you intended to travel. But, they don't derail you. They don't stop your journey.

This is what happens when God's Spirits coats the inside of you and gives true strength to your inner man:

...Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.

- Ephesians 3:17–18

#### Occupying Your Heart

For clarity, consider this:

Over the course of your life, people will make multiple judgments about you. You've heard countless opinions of your actions and your character. You're smart enough to distinguish the accurate from the fictional. That's usually the easy part.

The hard part is deciding which ones to listen to.



When you survey all those verdicts, which ones occupy the most space in your heart? Whose words penetrate deep inside and become the controlling reality for how you respond to the world and everyone in it?

- Is it the hurtful words of a parent or spouse?
- Inflated praise from an admirer?
- Unsolicited feedback from a mentor?

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*In other words, do others give you an identity? Or, are you stronger than that?*

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### Better Roots

When Paul says “roots,” he’s describing the very foundation of your life: the seat of your thoughts and emotions. This is your inner self.

If the love of Christ empowers you from within, it will change the way you live. You’ll be permanently altered.

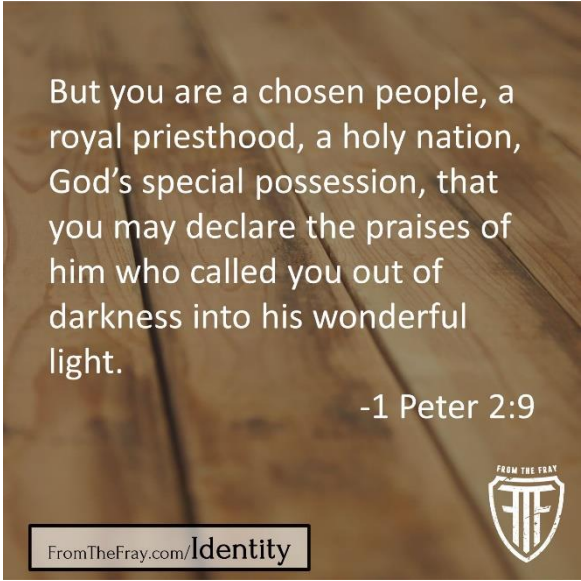
You won’t be so afraid or anxious, which means you won’t be as self-absorbed or insecure. You will not be as proud as before, but you also won’t suffer from self-hate or feelings of inferiority. You’ll be free to love and serve others because you won’t be consumed by their opinion or approval of you.

### I am Empowered

Have you settled for less than what I’ve just described? To be fair, most of us have.

That’s why Paul prays that Christians *would be* empowered by God. We’re each given the capacity, but its fulfillment is not inevitable. Having money in the bank is nice, but you must make a withdrawal to truly enjoy it. In the same way: it’s one thing to have Christ living in your heart; it’s quite another thing to experience it.

Every one of us is on a pursuit for peace and joy. The surest way to find them is to seek God’s empowering presence in our lives.



But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

-1 Peter 2:9

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To that end, I'll close with a paraphrase of the verses above<sup>2</sup>. If you want to know and experience God's love, consider Paul's humble approach:

<sup>14-19</sup> **M**y response is to get down on my knees before the Father, this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth. I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.

<sup>20-21</sup> God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.

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<sup>2</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), Eph 3:14–20.

