

Finding your Identity

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[0 : 00] What am I doing and what is the point? This is a question asked by many people, including in an article in the Sydney Morning Herald last Sunday.

Author Lisa Leong told a story about a musician friend of hers who, in the first lockdown, had lost her job. She was a musician and her job wasn't considered essential.

It made her feel devalued when she lost her job. And the author reflected that our sense of self is often wrapped up in our identity.

And so when we lose a job, we can feel devalued. And she suggested that the biggest blow to losing a job is not just dollars, but the hit our identity can take.

She suggested that it's because our identity gives us meaning and purpose in life. And I think she's hit onto something there. She's come from outside Christianity, but I think she's hit onto something quite interesting there.

[1 : 04] Our identity gives us meaning and purpose. Have you ever felt devalued? Have you ever questioned, what am I doing? What is the point?

What is the purpose of my life? Maybe you felt like that musician who looked at the things that she did, the fact that she could no longer do what she thought gave her purpose, and she felt like she had no purpose.

Have you ever felt like, you're just questioning, what am I doing? Because when we have these things taken away, we can feel like a leaf adrift in a river.

I'm sure that there's at least one person here in the building or watching at home online who maybe has lied awake late at night thinking, what is the point?

What am I doing? God, what is my purpose? What do you want me to be doing with my life? And that is the challenge set before us today. Just a small question to dive into some of life's deepest questions.

[2 : 08] Who am I? And what am I here for? We are in our vision series as a church, a time where we refocus as a church about the direction we're going in.

And we've been looking over the last three weeks to see who we as a church are to be, particularly within a culture that is battling racism amongst other challenges.

And this week we are changing tack slightly from thinking about us as a church to thinking about us as individuals who make up the broader church. And so as we seek to answer those two questions today, who am I and what am I here for?

Let me pray. Heavenly Father, as we come to your word, give us insight, not only into who you are and into your word, but who you have made us to be.

And give me your words to speak today, Lord. Amen. Three points for us this morning. Made, ruined, and remade.

[3 : 14] Let me encourage you to be using the St. Paul's app to be following along as well. First of all, we're starting in Psalm 8 to see how we are made. And as John read for us, this is a wonderful meditation from King David about who he is and about who our God is.

So have a look with me, Psalm 8. That'll come up on the screen as well, starting in verse 1. And it starts off with David praising God.

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory in the heavens. And I wonder where David is as he's saying this.

Is he outside looking up at the sky, staring at the vast sky? Is he in the middle of nature? I think even those who don't believe in God, sometimes when we're confronted by just the vastness of creation, makes us stop and think, wow, there must be something bigger.

There must be something beyond me. And David in this scene is just reflecting on God's awesomeness and his glory. God is so vast and so beyond us that he even uses the unlikely for his own glory.

[4 : 32] Verse 2. Through the praise of infants and children, you have established a stronghold against your enemies to silence the foe and the avenger.

You don't see too many countries assembling armies out of infants and children. But God can silence the strong with the very weak because God is just that powerful.

And David continues considering God in verse 3. When I consider your heavens the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, it makes him consider who he is. But this is actually quite amazing as well. It tells us something about God. David could have said that God made the world with his mighty arm, with an outstretched arm, with a powerful arm. But David said that God made the world with his fingers. God is intimately involved with his creation. It's almost like a picture of God.

[5 : 35] I've painted a lot of little figurines. It's this picture of God intricately making us with his fingers. That the God who is bigger than galaxies beyond time and space works with delicate intricacy, like an artist, a model builder.

Steve, in the last couple of weeks, has looked at Genesis 1 and 2. And that's what David is doing here. He's recalling creation. He's looking at the vastness of creation, the goodness of God, and it brings him to think about himself in verse 4.

What is mankind that you are mindful of them? Human beings that you would care for them. God, what am I? Because in the vastness of all these things you've created, I am an insignificant little dot.

What am I that you would think of me? That God, your mind would be on me. Why would I be in your heart? Why would you care for me?

David answers this in verse 5. You have made them a little lower than the angels, and you've crowned them with glory and honor. This answers the question of who are we?

[6 : 53] We are people intimately made. We are people who are known by God, who God chooses to know and love. God chooses to honor us.

He crowns us with glory and honor. We are a people that God has made and he makes much of. God made a people in his image.

We're recalling Genesis 1 and 2 where God made us in his image. This is primary. This is really central. This is core to us as people, to us as Christians.

We are people made in God's image. So, when someone asks, oh, hi, I'm James. Who are you? You know, we should be saying, before we say, I'm employed in this field or this is some things about me, the answer really should be, oh, I'm a child of God.

Before I knew what to do in my life, God crowned me with his glory and his honor. He made me his child. That might make things a little bit awkward in social settings, but it is true.

[8 : 03] God has made us in his image like him before we knew anything about ourselves. I found it really difficult in the last week to see what's been happening in the Ukraine.

I'm not sure if you've been following what's been happening, but one thing that has been encouraging is seeing the Christians continue to praise God in that season.

There's a video of them, I think they were in a train station, there's this group of Christians just praising God. And one of the things that they have said is even with oppression coming, we will not hide who we are if we need to go underground as the church.

We will do that, we've done that before, and we will do that again if they need. And they're able to say that because they know what is core to who they are as people.

It is their Christian identity. And even with opposition coming, that's not going to make them hide or run away from who they are as people, they're going to go, we will continue as Christians even in the face of opposition.

[9 : 12] David finishes with the same words as he started in verse 9. Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory in the heavens.

So in the midst of David meditating on who he is, made in the image of God, it's all framed in praising God. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

And this is the theme of our series. It's all of life. That we are to be Christians all of life. That we are to bring praise and glory to God all of life.

Not just for an hour or two on a Sunday. Not just for a couple of minutes when we're reading the Bible. But we are to be following God all of life because we are made in his image.

We are to be doing what Paul said in 1 Corinthians said, to be bringing him glory. This is the biblical picture of who we are and what we are to do.

[10:18] We are to be, we are made in God's image and we are to be bringing him glory. Our purpose is to magnify him. To bring him glory.

to show how awesome he really is. To his praise and to enjoy relationship with him. On the one hand, it makes a lot of sense.

The Bible presents a pretty clear picture. We are made in God's image and we are made to glory, to bring him glory and to enjoy him. But on the other hand, it's really hard.

We still have this existential angst that comes from questioning, well, what am I to do? Who am I to be? And this comes because our image has been marred.

It's been damaged. It's been ruined. And that's our second point today. The problem comes from the fall where the image of God was damaged. It was messed up. Our purpose in life got confused.

[11:21] Instead of glorifying God, we pursue ourselves and the other idols of life that we make.

The article talking about identity from last week in the City Morning Herald, it concluded with some fairly depressing words.

It said, everything matters and nothing matters. It's messy and hard to define, but it's like standing on top of a mountain and feeling huge and small all at once.

This is a wonderful paradox to hold within our every experience. What a beautiful perspective to carry through the world. What you do matters, but not as much as who you are.

They both matter, but also not at all. It's so similar to David's experience in Psalm 8. He's standing and beholding the awesomeness of God, but this author suggests that, you know, experiencing how large and how small the reality is that, you know what, it's actually all meaningless.

It's all pointless. You can give yourself meaning if you like, but actually there is no meaning to life.

And if we follow this directionless questioning, we just end up purposeless, hopeless.

[12:43] Nothing matters, but you can pretend it like it does if you like. until your deathbed and you'll think, what's it all been for? But when we take God out of the picture, that's what we're left with.

Self-invented purpose that doesn't satisfy. We can create an identity that can be lost or broken with a pandemic coming through and a job lost. Paul says in Romans 1, for although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him.

But their thinking became futile and foolish, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

We have been made in the image of God to bring Him glory, but the image of God has been marred by our sin, it's been damaged, and so we chase other things.

We choose to give them glory instead. And when we don't know who we are in God, we lose our purpose. And instead, it gets redefined for us.

[13:56] Instead, we get a different identity and we end up with a different purpose. And instead of it being shaped by God, it's shaped by the culture around us.

What my purpose is gets shaped by my culture around me. It gets shaped by aspects of me. It gets shaped by what I do for work, my sexuality, the things I do, my role within my family.

It's going to be influenced differently in different cultures. But every culture, every culture is not based on God. And so every culture is going to make a different idol.

It's going to make our identity, which might be something good, like work, it's going to take something good and make it the ultimate thing and an idol. And it's going to make it the most important thing in our life.

The image of God is marred and so our purpose gets confused. I think in the West, it looks like the personal pursuit of happiness, the pursuit of personal happiness.

[15:04] It's the big dream. It's the goal. It's the vision of personal success. I'm going to have a vision board. Well, there was a book that came out a number of years ago called The Secret.

Not sure if you've heard of The Secret. It was on Oprah at the time. It was all about envisioning what your success looked like. And so you'd think about it. And because you're thinking about it, the universe was going to give it to you.

And this was the thinking. In the West, it really is about personal success. I've seen this impact my own heart. I've seen this impact other people in my line of work as pastors.

In church ministry, we're in a culture which is about growth and success generally. You know, you look at companies, they must always have year-on-year growth.

There can be no staying the same. We must always grow and succeed. And it can be the same in the church because growth is, and bigger numbers is a sign of success.

[16:12] And so, I talk to other ministers and the same comment, the same question comes up. Oh, how big is your church? How is it growing? And I see the challenge in my own heart to be influenced by what our culture defines success as.

But that's not biblical. It's a culturally driven purpose. From an Eastern perspective, identity and purpose might not look like individual success, but it might look like having success to care for a family or having success academically on behalf of other people so that others in the family can boast about how their family is doing.

It doesn't matter the ethnic background that we come from, they are all adrift from God and we are all going to find an identity and purpose away from God.

It's going to make us look successful and desire to have those around us look successful too. A culture that says to be successful you must earn a lot of money, you must be busy, it's no wonder that our identity becomes so closely tied to our jobs, to the things we do.

It shapes our days and so very often it gives us purpose. But it's also true that we want to do valuable things. I know over the last couple of weeks it's been wonderful to hear from people like Soren who's a solicitor about how he does his nine to five to help people, to care for other people and this is good.

[17:52] The challenge is when it becomes ultimate, when it becomes no, no, no, this is who I am, I am the teacher and this is all about my life. But that's not who we are.

If something core to our identity can be so easily taken away by a pandemic or by a job loss, then it isn't really core to who we are.

First, we are Christians and then that shapes our purpose. Otherwise, we'll have a short-term purpose and we can be left feeling like life is meaningless.

I like to think about this as a fast-food identity version of identity and purpose. We can think that having all purpose in my job will satisfy but it can ultimately leave us feeling empty.

I have a cheeseburger here. I don't know if anybody likes cheeseburgers. Does anybody like eating cheeseburgers? This is a Macca's cheeseburger and it's being kept warm in my pocket for about an hour and a half.

[19:04] I'll tell you what, even warm, it's still delicious. Steve's looking at me right now, he's thinking that's going to spike your sugars. That combination of carbs and sugars and fat and protein, it tastes good.

Does anybody want some? No? Okay. It tastes good but soon, let me just finish my mouthful. Excuse me, my mouth is dry.

Should have gotten a Coke. Soon my system is going to go into overdrive from this combination of fats and sugars. And I'm going to crash soon. You'll see me on the floor in the last song.

I'm not sure how you feel after you eat fast food, but often can feel just a little bit sick. It can often leave me feeling just a little bit unsatisfied, like I need a real meal.

food. It leaves me craving a meal with real food and family and friends. That satisfies not just the taste buds, not only does it not make me feel sick, but it feeds my soul.

[20:15] Imagine if I only ever ate Maccas. You'd be concerned for me, yes? My life would not go very well for very long. I might enjoy it to a certain extent.

I think that is a temptation on how we approach the question of who I am and what my purpose is. We seek fulfillment and purpose in things that are only temporary and ultimately things that don't actually satisfy.

But we don't even realize that they won't satisfy. Instead of understanding how God has intricately and lovingly made us in his image, we take something off the shelf of identity and purpose and think, I'll have that.

I'll devote myself to that. I'll devote myself to this career. I'll devote myself to fixing the world in this way. I study law.

I'm a solicitor. I'm going to devote everything to that. I'm a teacher. I'm going to fix a generation of kids. And these are good things. But when they are made the ultimate things, it shapes what we do each day.

[21 : 27] It shapes how we want to get glory for ourselves. It shapes our purpose in life. But like a cheeseburger, they are not ultimate things.

They will just leave us feeling unsatisfied. We can end up with that question before. Is that it? Is that all my life? What happens when my job ends?

What happens when I hit retirement? I'll have an existential crisis. God offers us something far deeper, far more satisfying. One that only comes from him.

Now, don't hear me say we shouldn't pursue work, we shouldn't pursue significant things. Work is a good gift given from God. But one way to figure out whether a good gift from God has become an idol is to question what would happen if we didn't have it.

Tim Keller asked a question to help us identify our idol, which is what do we go to bed thinking about? What is our goal? What is our dream? Before we drift off to sleep, what are we thinking, I really want that?

[22 : 35] What would happen if we couldn't get it? Now, I know there's a number of teachers in the room, so let me use a teacher example. Let's say you're a teacher and your dream is to be the principal.

I hear that's a good thing. And that's your goal and you think, I can lead a school really well, I can change culture, I can shape a generation, and you apply for a job and it's your dream job and you think you would be the best at it, and then you get knocked back.

You don't get it. And there's sadness and pain, but is there anger or righteous indignation? I deserve that.

That should have been my job. If we have those kinds of responses, it indicates that that might actually be an idol, that might actually be the thing we are attaching our purpose and our identity to, because if we don't get it, there is pain.

Are you satisfied and able to glorify God where you are? If you were to stay in the same house, in the same job, with the same amount of money, with the same situation in your life, if you didn't get that goal that you have.

[23 : 51] So what do we do? Third point today is that we are remade. If our image of God has been marred by our sin, and we are off pursuing new things that don't ultimately satisfy it, what now?

In Colossians chapter 1, it describes Jesus as the image of the invisible God, firstborn over all creation, and in him we are remade.

Our likeness is given back to, the image of God is remade for us. He has come to restore us to God's image. Jesus perfectly reflects God.

The rest of Psalm 8 that we were looking at before is a picture of what happens after Jesus dies and is raised back to life. David is talking about himself, but he's actually talking about Jesus. From verse 4 of Psalm 8, hopefully it'll be on the screen. What is mankind that you are mindful of them? Human beings or the son of man that you care for them?

[24 : 54] You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands. You put everything under their feet. Jesus is the perfect man.

He is the perfect image bearer of God. He is the one who restores us to God's image. And as Psalm 8 says, he was crowned with glory. Everything has been placed under his feet.

And now, believing in Jesus, by the power of God's Holy Spirit, we are being remade in the image of God. Romans 8 says, for those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

Every day, God is making us to be who we were made to be. In the power of the Holy Spirit, he is conforming us back to the image of who we are.

He has restored our identity as his children, so we can be called Christian, and now he's restoring us to his purpose, to glorify him.

[26 : 00] But it's hard. It's a challenge. It's hard to take off that identity, the goal, that dream that our culture can give us, and the dream to have success, and realign it with God's purpose of giving him

the glory, because he is the one who has all success.

He is the one who is in control of all things. So who are we, brothers and sisters? God has bought our identity, which was marred at the fall with the blood of his son, so that we might be his people. So that whatever role we do, whatever we do in our nine to five, we are his children first, made in his image to glorify him. How then, how can we live our life for the glory of God?

How can we magnify God in all we do? How do we pursue his glory, regardless of what we are doing in life? After that cheeseburger, I need a bit of a drink, so I'm going to help illustrate this with an illustration from John Piper about orange juice, but I don't have orange juice, I have some black currant juice, which we'll do.

Firstly, this black currant juice is just an illustration of what we can do in all of life. John Piper encourages us to glorify God in every moment, as 1 Corinthians calls us to do, and we can do that simply with a moment like drinking juice.

[27 : 38] First, I don't deserve this juice. The reality is that because of my own sin, I deserve punishment, I deserve hell right now.

And so even holding this plastic cup, I can give thanks to God that he has forgiven my sin. And the pleasure of drinking juice is bought for me by Jesus' death on the cross, so that I can enjoy every minute of my day and the minute when I drink some juice.

I don't deserve it. Drinking this juice actually reveals something about the goodness of God. God is a creative God who enjoys pleasurable things.

And God made us to be able to enjoy his world. This tastes good because God has made us in a way to be able to enjoy things that taste good. And that's wonderful that our God has given that to us.

Thirdly, the fact that I can even stand up here and hold this cup means that God has given me health. He's blessed me with health to work, health to earn money so I can afford juice.

[28 : 54] Even when I have fully drunk this cup and all of the value of the vitamin C has gone through my body and I've gotten everything out of it, even after it's finished, God is still good to me and he is still helping me and he is still the great healer.

And lastly, I don't pursue the black currant juice. I don't make it the purpose of my life, I don't worship it, I don't become the black currant juice guy who's always talking to you about it and encouraging you, you really should buy more black currant juice, it is really the best of the juices. I also don't believe that, but I'm thankful for it but I still pursue the one who has given me the gift. Now if I can do that with a cup of black currant juice, how much can we do that with every moment of our day?

The moment we wake up early, the moment I got woken up early this morning because of my kids, I can thank God that I have my kids, that I'm well enough to play with them, I can thank God that I can go to work, I can thank God for coffee and I can thank God multiple times throughout the day for coffee because I drink multiple coffees.

Brothers and sisters, we have a good God who restores us to his image and to his purposes and that purpose of glorifying him and enjoying him.

[30 : 16] He offers us an identity and a purpose that is far better than the unsatisfying ones that we have been, that we've chosen. Let me encourage you, spend a moment to think what is the purpose that you were thinking about as you drift off to sleep?

Because God offers us something far better, made in his image, with the purpose of glorifying him. let me pray. Heavenly Father, I thank you so much that we were made in your image, that even though we sin against you, you have remade us through the death and resurrection of your Son, and you are making us like you each day.

Father, help us to pursue you, to desire to see you glorified, and not our own glory. Help us not to seek our success, but to see your name made known by the people that we know, all for your glory. We pray this in your Son's name. Amen.