

Your Identity and People

Philippians: Finding Joy in Hard Times

Phil. 1:1-11; September 23, 2018

This week we'll look at eight identity formers that can anchor us in a difficult world.

DAY 1: Identity...

1. Remember your identity: saint!

Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons...

a. As people, we all have identities we create and maintain. For some, being in control makes up much of your identity. For others, it's being in the know. Being "needed" as a mom, teacher, coach, being seen as competent, together, sharp, funny, successful, athletic, or even appearing more spiritual than you are, all have to do with an identity. But all these identities can crack and crumble.

b. Our "identity" is purposeful. Without knowing it, we're usually engaged in very subtly proving something to someone or ourselves. I was amazed at how often I wanted to show my dad that I was competent. I tried to show all my buddies in college that I was a great athlete. I tried to show my fellow grad students that I was a pretty sharp guy. It's easy for moms to show other moms that you're a good mom-- using your kids to feel successful about yourself.

c. Do you recognize one or more past "identities" that "defined" you? Present "identities?"

d. "Saint" has two main meanings.

1. Set apart for God's purposes.

2. Holy. Purity. Moral perfection. The most often used name used to describe God.

e. You may say, "Me? A saint?"

"... to all the saints in Christ Jesus"

f. We are not "saints" as in "perfect Christians." We are considered holy because of what Christ did for us on the cross!

2. Remember your privilege: servants of Christ.

Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons...

a. "Servant" – Bondservant; absolute possession. This is similar to the indentured servant that gave seven years of servitude in exchange for boat passage across the Atlantic Ocean in the 1700's. The indentured servant "belonged" to owner.

b. The identity we try to create for ourselves can change, crack or disintegrate, but when our identity is rooted "in Christ" that identity can never change, crack or disintegrate. It anchors you!

DAY 2: Identity, continued...

3. Remember His power and acceptance: grace.

Philippians 1:2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. “Grace” – we usually think of “grace” as a prayer said before eating dinner. Grace means unmerited favor. It is God’s disposition to be good to us in spite of our disobedience, willfulness, and rebellion.

b. Grace is also the power of God needed to overcome our self-centered hearts.

1 Cor. 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am ...

"Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue." -- Eugene O'Neill

c. Do you feel a pressure as a Christian to “get it right”? That pressure is not from God. That pressure comes from our fallen hearts, our old hearts that still, proudly, want to earn our way, so to speak. You are not on a treadmill with God.

d. To understand grace means:

- You are not on a treadmill with God.
- You cannot put other people on a treadmill with yourself or God.

4. Remember His presence: peace.

Philippians 1:2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. “Peace” – confident in the middle of turmoil.

b. For each of the next verses, write down how one will or won’t experience peace:

Isaiah 26:3 You do keep him in perfect peace whose mind is fixed on You.

Isaiah 48:22 There is no peace for the wicked...

Romans 5:1 Therefore since we have peace with God ...

→ “Grace and peace” was Paul’s favorite opening in his letters to the churches. What do you think he wanted to communicate by that?

DAY 3: Identity, continued...

5. I have you in my mind: gratitude.

Philippians 1:3 I thank my God every time I remember you.

a. When Paul started this church in Philippi, he was arrested and thrown in prison. He was mocked and ridiculed for his faith. He was treated like a common criminal. Yet, when he speaks to these people who subsequently came to faith in Christ, rather than remember what they did to him, he thanks God for them!

b. Anyone can be grateful for someone who does something for you, but when you think you are being unfairly treated by someone, gratitude goes flying right out the window is replaced by gossip.

“He who forgets the language of gratitude can never be on speaking terms with happiness.”

-C. Neil Strait

c. Notice Paul was not only grateful for the Philippians, but he also told them he was grateful for them.

d. Is there someone you have taken for granted? Is there someone you've been gossiping about? Is there someone you need to intentionally appreciate?

6. I have you in my prayers: joy.

Phil. 1:4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy... a.

a. Does your prayer life follow Paul's prayer life? Gratitude? Others? With joy?

b. How would you describe your prayer life? Is it closer to a job or a joy?

c. Pray with gratitude, joy, and specifically:

Phil. 1:9 And this is my prayer: That your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight (10) so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ (11) filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

→Today's devotional: I Have You in My Mind. I Have You in My Prayers.

d. What strikes you, today?

DAY 4: Identity, continued...

7. I have you at my side: partner.

Phil. 1:5 ...because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now ...

- a. The word translated “partnership” is the Greek word “Koinonia.” It is also translated “fellowship”. The idea here is partners, teammates, comrades.
- b. When we think of partners, you usually thinking of people sharing something, like robbers sharing the loot. They are sharing something.
- c. With koinonia, the sharing is more than sharing something. It’s sharing ***in*** something. We share in a cause that is greater than any other cause, greater than the collection of individuals, and share in a future reward that is lasting.
- d. We are partners in the gospel:

*Phil 1:7b ...for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, **all of you share in God’s grace with me.***

e. When you invite your neighbors or friends to church, we are engaged in a partnership. When we have new guests, the most important people in the church are not the pastors. It’s you! When you reach out to someone else’s neighbors or family members, you are engaged in the partnership. When you are warm and friendly to people you have just met, when you care about people, you stand side-by-side with everyone else in our church. Teachers reach out to their kids.

f. What do we share in the gospel?

- We have a common cause.
- We have a common enemy. Sometimes it’s easy to slip into a mindset where a family member or a fellow church member is the enemy. That’s the Enemy’s doing! The Enemy is Satan, the devil.
- We have a common Lord. (James 4:12) We all bow our knees to the same Lord, and need the same mercy and receive his grace with the same passion.

g. Partnerships are not easy. Part of what it means to be a sinner is that we focus more on that which we disagree rather than on that with which we agree.

Paul has an antidote for us.

Phil. 1:6 ...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

h. What strikes you about partnership in a church? How can you enhance our partnership?

DAY 5: Identity, continued.

8. I have you in my heart: love

Philippians 1:7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart;

a. We can do little to “control” how others treat us, but one thing that God can help us control is our *attitude* toward anybody.

b. Instead, think of the kinds of things we think: “I know I’m supposed to love him/her, but do I have to like him/her?”

c. I sometimes marvel at how few of us really have people on their heart beyond their own interest or family. It’s so shocking to me, that when someone does have people on their heart they shine like a light!

Phil 1:7b ...for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me.

d. Paul makes an effort to include them, reminding them that he is thinking about them.

*Phil. 1:8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the **affection** of Christ Jesus.*

e. The word “affection” is the Greek word, “splagnos” which literally means “intestines”. The word meant an affection that is deeply-seated or heart-felt.

f. This kind of intensive love is not something you “work up.”

Romans 5:5 God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God’s gift to us.

The week in review

Place a check mark next to the following identity-formers that you especially need:

- 1. Remember your identity: saint!
- 2. Remember your privilege: servants of Christ.
- 3. Remember His power and acceptance: grace.
- 4. Remember His presence: peace.
- 5. I have you in my mind: gratitude.
- 6. I have you in my prayers: joy.
- 7. I have you at my side: partner.
- 8. I have you in my heart: love

→ Identities are pictures of how we want others see us and how we want to see ourselves. We “create” our “identities” but then we work feverishly to “keep them in place.” They induce stress! That carousel spins around and around.

→ God has a far better idea. The richest identity we can ever have is not how others see us, or how we see ourselves, but how God sees us. Only that identity can remove pressure and stress and give our hearts freedom.