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between what we
believe in our heads
and what we experience
in our hearts.

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we
should be called children of God! And that is what we are!
—1 John 3:1



the new Bourne identity

Rusty Rustenbach, People Resources Team

For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.
—Jeremiah 2:13



Rusty Rustenbach

The spy-thriller *The Bourne Identity*, by Robert Ludlum, is the intriguing adventure of how amnesia victim Jason Bourne discovers his true identity. In my own personal spiritual journey and those of others I find a parallel for Christians, because we often struggle with a *spiritual amnesia* that hinders our ability to perceive and experience ourselves as God does.

We live in a performance-oriented society where the essence of our identity is determined by a combination of how successful we view ourselves and what the significant others in our lives think about us. As Christians we may spiritualize this formula by determining our worth based upon our spiritual performance, measuring our significance by our fruitfulness in God's work, how well we do in some creative endeavor, or the position we hold.

Since none of us is able to consistently perform to the level of our expectations, we begin to feel inadequate and inferior to others. Even when our performance reaches our expectations, the satisfaction we yearn for somehow escapes us.

In his book *Abba's Child*, Brennan Manning describes this struggle: "In my experience, self-hatred is the dominant malaise crippling Christians and stifling their growth in the Holy Spirit. . . . Negative voices from our family of origin, 'You will never amount to anything,' moralizing from the church, and pressure to be successful transform expectant pilgrims en route to the heavenly Jerusalem into a dispirited traveling troupe (John Eagen, *A Traveler Toward Dawn*)."

As I counsel full-time laborers who are struggling in some area of life, a universal theme that comes to light is *I know that God loves me intellectually, but somehow I just don't experience myself that way*. For most of us there is an abysmal gap between what we believe in our heads and what we experience in our hearts. To compensate for our feelings of unloveableness, we turn to a *broken cistern*, like succeeding in something that is important to us. "When we have come to believe in the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success, popularity, and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions. The real trap, however, is self-rejection. As soon as someone accuses or criticizes me, as soon as I am rejected, left alone, or abandoned, I find myself thinking, 'Well, that proves once again that I am a nobody'" (Henri Nowen, *The Wounded Healer*).

The year 1989 was the halfway point of our 14 years in Spain. I remember being extremely discouraged because of the slow growth of the ministry at the University of Murcia—so much so that I began to avoid people.

Six months later, after seeing the film-series *Inside Out*, I realized that I was seeking to bolster my sense of worth by being fruitful in the ministry. When I encountered a situation where there was little fruit, I experienced a real identity crisis. As one friend observed, "*When who you are is what you're doing, when you stop doing, you*

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identity issues

Dave Legg,
People Resources Team Director

One thing that always surprises us in PRT is encountering Navigator staff who have made great sacrifices and maybe even traveled to distant countries to tell others that “God



loves you” when in their own hearts they don’t experience that truth. That’s a common issue and is the focus of this *UpFront*.

I like the title of Kyong A Hayes’ testimony—*Redefined*. She talks about the discrepancy between God’s view of her and her inability to experience God’s love. But she comes to realize, “I know His love is mine.”

Rusty writes about how easy it is for us to lose perspective about those who love us, especially God.

We hope these articles help you recognize any identity issues that may be present in your life. And remember—your People Resources Team stands ready to help. 

UPCOMING EVENTS

October 3–4

Listening and Healing Prayer Seminar
Colorado Springs

October 14–17

Sabbatical Orientation Workshop
Colorado Springs

October 17

Listening and Healing Prayer Seminar
Montebello, California

October 24–25

Relational Healing Seminar
San Antonio, Texas

November 7–8

Relational Healing Seminar
New Jersey/New York City Area

November 12–14

Personal Contribution Assessment Workshop
Colorado Springs

For more information contact (719) 594-2555.



redefined

Kyong A Hayes, U.S.IMG, Japan

I came to Christ at 15 and for the next 18 years, I only *sporadically* felt that God loved me. Though I read books and memorized verses on God’s love, I didn’t know how to convince my heart that God loved me personally. I struggled with self-condemning thoughts, but it never occurred to me to bring those thoughts to Jesus. Psalms 34:8 was my heart’s desire—I longed to “taste and see” the goodness of the Lord, but I accepted that I would always struggle in grasping God’s love for me. Then about three years ago in Tokyo, my relationship with God completely changed.

When I was a year old, my family emigrated from Korea, so I never got to know my dad’s parents. Later, however, I learned that my grandmother had not visited me the first month of my life because she was angry with my mother for having another girl who would not carry on the family name. Just hearing that story, even after my grandmother had passed away, caused me to believe that I had little value because I was female. Looking back, I see that I continued to believe this into adulthood.

About three years ago, I was studying Galatians and saw clearly the theme that our righteousness is based on Christ’s righteousness alone. But I couldn’t see why boasting and seeking the approval of others was repeated so often. As my husband and I discussed this, he brought up verse 1:4, which says that Christ “gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age.” I learned that this “present evil age” includes the human tendency to evaluate ourselves and others and therefore leads to boasting and approval seeking. God highlighted for me the shaky foundation of my own sense of identity—my own opinion of myself. For the first time I learned that He has freed me from the need to define or prove myself.

My belief that God viewed me through His Son’s righteousness began to take root in my heart and began to radically redefine me. He showed me that in Christ, my performance and self-definition add nothing to my real identity, and my failures take nothing away. God’s evaluation of me in Christ began to outweigh my own and others’ opinions. He showed me that He alone defines my identity.

My inability to experience God’s love was largely a perspective problem. It was like I was living inside a transparent heart, looking out towards God, but caked-on dirt splotches kept me from seeing all of Him. When I would look out at God, I could see *some* of God (such as His holiness, His glory) but not His warm love and care for me. As God began to uncover the wrong foundation on which I based my identity, He began gently dipping my heart in cool running water, washing off the dirt. I could finally see and believe His love for me. Freedom and truth in my inward parts first required the removal of falsehood from my heart.

My experience of the Good News went from being a set of truths that I believed into something far fuller. It has awakened my emotions, won my heart, and revealed to me the nearness of God. God has infused *life and joy* into my relationship with Him, now that I know His love is mine. What I used to long for, I am now gratefully tasting and seeing. 



the search for significance

It's all too easy for believers to fall victim to "spiritual amnesia," as Rusty described it in his article. We simply forget who we are. Or, perhaps, we never really understood who we are.

By way of reminder, read what it says in John 1:12,13: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." Brother, sister—we are children of God!

Listen to how it is expressed in *The Message*: "He made [them] to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves. These are the God-begotten, not blood-begotten, not flesh-begotten, not sex-begotten."

In his book *The Search for Significance*, Robert McGee outlines some of the false beliefs that cloud our perception of who we really are. McGee also identifies the fears that come out of our false beliefs. Thankfully, we can clear these misperceptions and conquer our fears by reminding ourselves of God's solution and appropriating the good results.

FALSE BELIEFS	CONSEQUENCES OF FALSE BELIEFS	GOD'S SPECIFIC SOLUTION	RESULTS OF GOD'S SOLUTION
<i>I must meet certain standards in order to feel good about myself.</i>	The fear of failure; perfectionism; being driven to succeed; manipulating others to achieve success; withdrawing from healthy risks.	<i>Because of justification, I am completely forgiven and fully pleasing to God. I no longer have to fear failure.</i>	Increasing freedom from the fear of failure; desire to pursue the right things; Christ and His kingdom; love for Christ.
<i>I must have the approval of certain others to feel good about myself.</i>	The fear of rejection; attempting to please others at any cost; being overly sensitive to criticism; withdrawing from others to avoid disapproval.	<i>Because of reconciliation, I am totally accepted by God. I no longer have to fear rejection.</i>	Increasing freedom from the fear of rejection; willingness to be open and vulnerable; able to relax around others; willingness to take criticism; desire to please God no matter what others think.
<i>Those who fail (including myself) are unworthy of love and deserve to be punished.</i>	The fear of punishment; propensity to punish others; blaming self and others for personal failure; withdrawing from God and fellow believers; being driven to avoid punishment.	<i>Because of propitiation, I am deeply loved by God. I no longer have to fear punishment or punish others.</i>	Increasing freedom from the fear of punishment; patience and kindness toward others; being quick to apply forgiveness; deep love for Christ.
<i>I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless.</i>	Feelings of shame, hopelessness, inferiority; passivity; loss of creativity; isolation, withdrawing from others.	<i>Because of regeneration, I have been made brand new, complete in Christ. I no longer need to experience the pain of shame.</i>	Christ-centered self-confidence; joy, courage, peace; desire to know Christ.

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the new Bourne identity

aren't." Since my identity was bound up in being fruitful in ministry, when I stopped producing, it was like I ceased to be.

Abba's Child is one of the best books I've read on this subject. The gist of the book is that most of us bend toward man to define who we are. Finding our identity by looking to man is what the author calls the *false-self*. Since we were created in the image of God, we really need to look to God to discover our true identity.

For me, the most challenging phase in the book is a quotation by John Eagen: "The heart of it is this: to make the Lord and His immense love for you constitutive of your personal worth. *Define yourself radically as one beloved by God.* God's love for you and His choice of you constitute your worth. Accept that, and let it become the most important thing in your life."

[We need to] move from a performance-based identity (a human-doer) to a love-of-God-based identity (a human-being).

And so, I began to deliberately move toward the discovery of my "new born" identity as a child of God. At first, it was more intellectual than real, but as I've spent many half-days alone with God, He has spoken to me, in essence saying, "You are My beloved son—I am well-pleased with you."

The bottom line question in the issue of identity is how to move from a performance-based identity (a human-doer) to a love-of-God-based identity (a human-being). Two things seem to stand out as essential:

- ⊕ **Get in touch with what you really believe about yourself.** The lies you believe must be exposed before they can be transformed by the renewing power of God's truth. Ask God to reveal to you what you really believe about yourself and your identity.
- ⊕ **Plan a half-day alone with God.** Ask Him specifically, "What are Your thoughts about who I truly am? How do you identify me?" It is impossible to truly hear God's voice in the agitated lifestyles that many of us live.



"The indispensable condition for developing and maintaining the awareness of our belovedness is time alone with God. In solitude we tune out the nay-saying whispers of our worthlessness and sink down into the mystery of our *true self*. Our longing to know who we really are—which is the source of all our discontent—will never be satisfied until we confront and accept our solitude. There we discover that the truth of our belovedness is really true. Our identity rests in God's relentless tenderness for us revealed in Jesus Christ" (*Abba's Child*).

Define yourself radically as one beloved by God!



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on God's love for us

an interview with Brennan Manning

What are some of the most important things you've learned about God's love?

MANNING: I love someone for what I find in him or her. But God is not like that. The God and Father of Jesus loves men and women not for what He finds in them, but for what He finds in them of Himself.

Does God love me because I spend time with AIDS victims and alcoholics, or because I spend an hour in prayer every day? If I believe that, I am a Pharisee who feels entitled to be comfortably close to Christ because of my good works. The Gospel of grace says I am loved for one reason only and that is because God loves me . . . period.

When we experience ourselves as someone deeply loved by God, it comes as such a surprise because the love of God is so radically different from our natural way of loving.

What shortens the gap between our head knowledge of God's love and our heart understanding of His love?

MANNING: Listening. In the evangelical world there's too much talking and not enough listening. Our prayers tend to be so noisy that if God did speak, we wouldn't hear Him. When you come to a deep place of stillness with the Lord, you're not waiting for God to make a move, you are aware of the moves God is already making.

How does fear become a barrier to knowing we are loved?

MANNING: Fear is the enemy of trust. Many of our actions are rooted in needing to live up to the unspoken judgments of others, and trying to live up to who we ought to be. We do this rather than trusting God and relaxing in the brokenness of who we really are.

Excerpt from Living As God's Beloved by Paula Rinehart, Discipleship Journal (July/August 1997). Used with permission.