

- We are going to do an exercise to begin today.
 - I want you to describe yourself. How do you see yourself?
 - I am _____ .
 - What words or phrases jump to mind?
 - Now, I want you to do the exact same exercise as if I was asking your friends and family. If I asked them to fill in the blanks for you, what would they say?
 - He/she is _____ .
 - Now we're really going to stretch
 - I want you to picture God talking to one of his angels about you. What would he say?
 - He/she is _____ .
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- How consistent are those answers?
 - How positive are they?
 - Which list is the most positive?
 - The sum total of the answers you have would give us a window into your identity. Or at least, how you see your own identity.
 - If we took time to dig into your answers, we would probably uncover a whole bunch of stuff, both good and bad.
 - How we see ourselves is dictated by what we have experienced. It is set up by what we have been told by others. It is influenced by our personalities and motivations. It changes regularly. Here's why we are talking about this today:
 - 1) Every action you take is driven at some level by your identity. How you work, play, respond to others, your self talk, your commitments, your parenting. Either by the identity we hold on to or the identity we would like to have.
 - 2) Our view of our identity is rarely fully correct.
 - If these are true, the understanding our true identity is critical for life and practice. But in order for this to happen, **YOUR IDENTITY MUST BE GROUNDED IN GOD'S REALITY.**
 - We are continuing in our series that we began last week, looking at key OT characters.
 - The OT is filled with intriguing stories about intriguing people.
 - The reason they are in the bible is because the bible is story about God, his character and his work in the world, and the people that we read about interact with God and his story.
 - In doing so, we learn more about who he is and how to respond to him.
 - Today we are looking at a character named Gideon.
 - A character that will help us take a clear look into this whole concept of identity.
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- Gideon lived in the time of the Judges (that's why it comes from the book of Judges)
 - Key verse is Judges 17:6 and 21:25
- "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit."*
- So a pattern developed. Israel would abandon God. They would start to get conquered by the nations around them. Their suffering would increase. Things would finally get so bad they would turn back to God, cry out to him for help, and God would send them someone to lead them out of their problems.
 - These deliverers were called judges, who would end up leading Israel.
 - Then that leader would die, the people would forget about God, descend back into unbelief and the process would start all over.
 - The deliverance of Gideon ends with 300 warriors surrounding a camp of the enemy that numbered probably around 100,000.

- These 300 were all that was left. Gideon had actually gathered a little over 30,000 warriors but God did not want to have the people think it was anything other than himself who delivered them so Gideon told those who were fearful to leave and about 22,000 left.
- There were still too many in God's eyes so when they were drinking at the river he picked those who drank from their hands instead of those who got right down to the water. He dismissed everyone else and was left with 300.
- He split them into three companies of 100.
- They attacked at night – broke their jars and the Midianites panicked and turned on each other, then broke and ran. The Israelites pursued, others came out, and they destroyed the army and captured and killed the Midianite leaders.
- It's a fascinating story. Gideon is a hero, someone who trusted God and who obeyed him in the face of overwhelming odds.
- But if you had spoken with Gideon before this all started, he would never have described himself that way. Gideon had identity issues that every one of us can identify with and from which we can learn.
- Here's how the story of Gideon begins.

Judges 6:1 The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. 2 Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. 3 Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. 4 They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. 5 They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. 6 Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help.

- God's response is that he has helped them over and over and they keep reverting to idol worship and putting other things before him. God wants them to know he gets their pattern. He is not fooled. They continually come back to him only for what he can do for them, not because it is right or because they want to.

- Yet he answers their cries for help anyway.

11 The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. 12 When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." 13 "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian." 14 The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" 15 "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." 16 The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive."

- There seems to be a big difference between how Gideon saw himself and how God saw him. You see, here is issue #1.

I. My identity is often based on what I see about me.

- Just as it is with us, Gideon drew his identity from a couple of places.

A) In my past.

15 "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

- What can I do? I am a nobody from a family of nobodies.
- He had never accomplished anything great and neither had his family.
- I wonder how often we look at our past to determine who we are.
- I was not a smart person in school. My friends ignored me. I was never good at anything. I was never part of the in crowd.
- I come from a family of angry people. It's just the way we are.
- Gideon saw himself based on what his past was, both for him and his family.

B) By what others think.

- After receiving directions from the angel of the Lord to get rid of the idols and create an altar to the true God, Gideon listened, but here's how.
- 27 So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the townspeople, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.*
- Maybe this was simply smart. Maybe it was fear. Maybe it was both. At some level though, Gideon saw himself as others saw him.
 - I wonder how many of us have an identity set, to some degree, by someone else.
 - My dad called me stupid. I can recall getting laughed at by others at very specific points in my life. They burn.
 - They either cause a person to believe what is said or implied or it drives us to prove them wrong. Either way, who we are is being driven by the words and actions of others.

C) Connected to how I see God.

- Did you notice his first response to the angel of God?
- 13 "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."*
- It is interesting that the angel said that God was with him (singular) and Gideon's reply is in the plural.
 - With me? You're not even with the nation as a whole. You have abandoned us and certainly do not have a presence with me.
 - We are nothing in your eyes. God, you are absent. You are uninvolved. You have abandoned us to the enemy.
 - The way Gideon saw himself and his people was through the lens of aloneness.
 - When our identity is warped, we begin to feel like it's up to us. My identity is set by what I do.
 - Politics nowadays is actually called identity politics. Where do you belong? Who can you badmouth and who can you not? If you are not part of my group, I will run you down and make you feel something less.
 - The result is to prove to others (or yourself) by setting who you are or trying to convince yourself you don't care.

II. Without God's perspective I will serve my interests.

- I will protect myself

11 The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.

- A winepress was a deep hole lined with stones. You threw the grapes down into the hole. Then someone would jump in and stomp the grapes. Gideon was down inside the

winepress, but he was not trying to make grape juice. He was in the winepress trying to thresh wheat!

- Normally this was done on a threshing floor in an open field where the breeze could blow the chaff away. Gideon was fearful that if he did it out in the open, the bandits would come and steal the wheat from him. So he got down inside the winepress and tried to throw the grain up just high enough to be blown but not seen.

- I will be reluctant to take a risk.

36 Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised – 37 look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." 38 And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew – a bowlful of water. 39 Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew." 40 That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

- This wasn't an issue of not knowing what God was calling him to do.
- It was clear. He wasn't asking God to confirm it.
- What he was doing was doubting God's presence. He did not want to take a risk.

III. My identity needs to be based on how God sees me.

- I notice two key phrases that seem to be contradictory, but in reality are the fullness of identity.

A) God sees me through the lens of his might and power.

12 When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."

- Was he being sarcastic? I don't think so.
- God sees something that Gideon could not. God sees what Gideon could become. God looks at Gideon and sees what could happen if he trusted God. It is not a coincidence that the angel connects God's presence to Gideon's identity as a mighty warrior.

34 Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him.

- Gideon was empowered by the Spirit to become what God saw in him.
- He knew that Gideon was going to need the power of the Holy Spirit. He knew what the result of submitting to the Holy Spirit was going to be.
- Gideon's response is so typical of us. "Who me? I could never do that. What would people think of me? That's just not me."
- God sees us differently from the way we see ourselves.
- God's opinion of you is always greater than your opinion of yourself.

B) God sees me as he designed me to be.

- I don't know if you noticed the other phrase though, in v14.

14 The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

- Go in the strength you have?
- Isn't this opposite of being Spirit-empowered?
- What is God saying?
- You have everything you need for what I am sending you to do.

- “Am I not sending you.” I created you. I know you. I designed you.
 - That is who I am sending. You don’t need to be someone else. You don’t need to do what others do. You don’t need to know what others know.
 - Just go. And when you go, my Spirit will empower you.
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- Friends, each one of us have been created by God for the very purposes that he designed for us. You are exactly who he wants you to be. Not someone else.
 - **YOUR IDENTITY IS GROUNDED IN GOD’S REALITY.**
 - Who you are is not defined by your past, by what happened to you.
 - You are not simply a collection of all of the things others have said about you.
 - You are so much more.
 - When Satan attacks, he almost always goes after your identity.
 - It’s what he did with Adam and Eve. It’s what he did with Jesus. It’s what he does with you.
 - He will try and minimize you. To convince you that you are incapable. Incomplete. Not good enough. He wants you to react with fear, to not take risks.
 - Or he wants to puff you up based on something unsustainable. On your talents. Accomplishments. Paycheck.
 - He wants you to compare yourself to others. Either those ahead of you (to make you feel worse about yourself) or to those behind (so you feel better about yourself).
 - **WHEN YOUR IDENTITY IS GROUNDED IN GOD’S REALITY**, this becomes unnecessary.
 - What do you think of yourself? Pay attention to your self-talk this week?
 - When something happens, what soundtrack plays in your mind.
 - If that track is accusative, it needs to be rejected.
 - Listen to what Jesus is telling you.
 - You are exactly who God wants you to be and you are designed to accomplish.
 - He will go with you. So listen to him instead of all the other voices and live as sent ones.