

WHO I AM

helping our kids discover their true identity

Hershey Free Church | February 28, 2026



Identity Crisis

the challenges to finding true identity



Identity Crisis

The First Identity Crisis

- **Genesis 3:1–7**



¹ Now the serpent was shrewder than any of the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Is it really true that God said, ‘You must not eat from any tree of the orchard’?” ² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit from the trees of the orchard; ³ but concerning the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the orchard God said, ‘You must not eat from it, and you must not touch it, or else you will die.’” ⁴ The serpent said to the woman, “Surely you will not die, ⁵ for God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will open and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

⁶ When the woman saw that the tree produced fruit that was good for food, was attractive to the eye, and was desirable for making one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some of it to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Identity Crisis

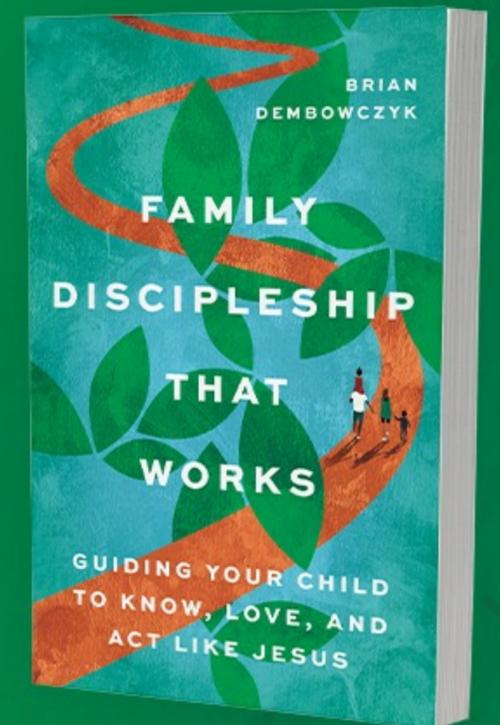
The First Identity Crisis

- Satan enticed Adam and Eve to:
 - (1) **Devalue God's identity**
 - God was being unfair
 - God was withholding good from them
 - (2) **Inflate their own identity**
 - They deserved more



When it comes down to it, an identity crisis promoted the fall; Satan has not abandoned this effective strategy. Identity challenges have continued to plague us. The seeds of confusion Satan planted in Adam and Eve have sprouted and multiplied many times over.

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Identity Crisis

The Modern State of Identity

- People today **cannot not think about themselves.**
- **Narcissism** rules the day.
 - e.g., social media and selfies



“The dreadful irony is that even though the proud spend a lot of time thinking about themselves, they don’t know who they are.”

BRIAN ROSNER

“It is not unfair to affirm that modern culture, that is, our culture since the Renaissance, is to be credited with the greatest advances in the understanding of nature and with the greatest confusion in the understanding of man.”

REINHOLD NIEBUHR

Identity Crisis

The Modern State of Identity

- It's **not wrong** to think about yourself.
- The issue concerning identity isn't found in the **quantity** of thinking of oneself, but rather the **quality** of one's thinking.
- Proper thinking of oneself (and God) is essential to develop a **correct understanding of identity**, which, in turn, shapes what a **person believes** and **how a person lives**.



Identity Crisis

The Modern State of Identity

- The world looks for identity in **many places**:
 - Family
 - Ethnicity
 - Nationality
 - Gender and sexuality
 - Profession
 - Political affiliation



Identity Crisis

3 Common Challenges to Identity

- (1) **Choice**

- Before the Renaissance, a person was born into his identity more than he chose one. Most markers of identity were established for a person while he was still in the womb: his **family, residence, socio-economic class, future profession,** and to a large extent, his **beliefs**. Identity was, for the most part, fixed. A person simply was whom he was born to be.
- Now, a person can choose most of these things, and so much more



Identity Crisis

3 Common Challenges to Identity

- (1) **Choice**

- The result is often **identity churning**

- Having different identities in different settings
- Wearing “masks”

- The result is often also loss of a **core self** (executive self)

- This is the self that centers the other selves



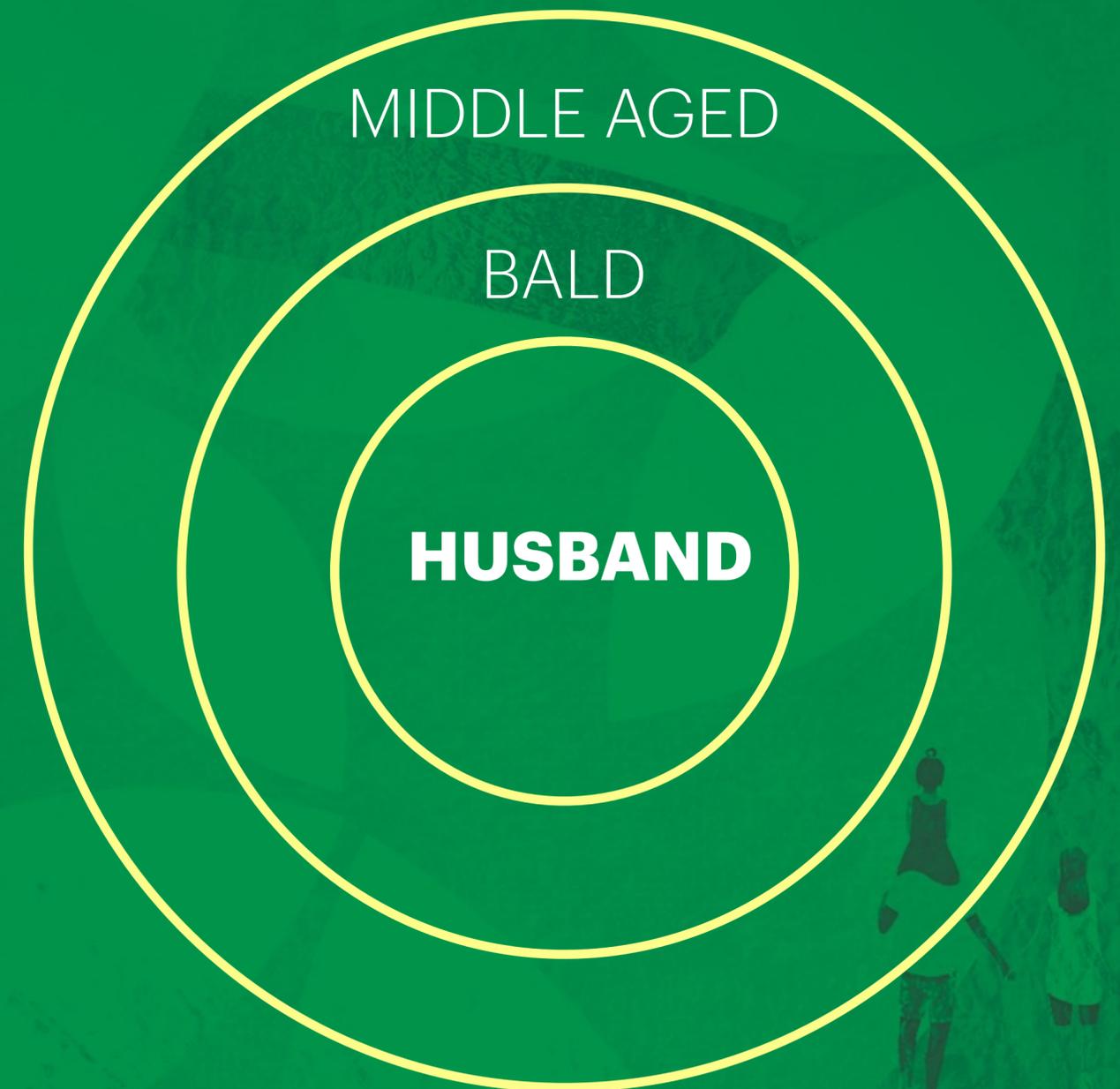
“At some level an executive self is formed to decide how we will navigate the conflicts, tensions, and difficulties of life. Even if we say we have no coherence in our being, there is an executive self making the judgment.”

KLYNE SNODGRASS

Identity Crisis

3 Common Challenges to Identity

- What is the **noun?** I'm a...
 - Middle aged, bald **husband**?
 - Middle aged, married **bald man**?
 - Bald, married **middle-aged man**?
 - Republican, American **Christian**?
 - American, Christian **Republican**?
 - Christian, Republican **American**?



Identity Crisis

3 Common Challenges to Identity

- (2) **Consumerism**
 - Consumeristic identity
 - You are what you own, wear, drive, etc.
 - Commodification
 - My value is based on my usefulness



Identity Crisis

3 Common Challenges to Identity

- (3) **Social Media**
 - Draws focus to oneself in an unhealthy way
 - Is often “plastic”
 - Heightens comparisons with others
 - Increases identity churning (create a new profile/persona)



Identity Crisis

Our Response

- **Our kids are not immune** to these challenges
- We need to help them **forge a true, biblically-sound identity** for themselves
- This is at the core of **family discipleship**



The Image of God

the foundation of identity



The Image of God

Our Foundation of Identity

- The image of God is mentioned explicitly only **seven times** in the Bible
 - Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6
 - 1 Corinthians 11:7
 - 2 Corinthians 4:4 (in reference to Jesus)
 - Colossians 1:15 (in reference to Jesus)
 - James 3:9



²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth.”

²⁷ God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God created them, male and female he created them.

The Image of God

What the Image of God Is

- The **Structural View**: What an Image Bearer Is
 - Our **intellectual** or **rational** capabilities, **moral** sensitivity, **conscience**, the capacity to **worship**, **responsibility**, **volition**, **decision-making**, possessing an **aesthetic** sense, or the capacity of **speech** and **song**
- The **Functional View**: What an Image Bearer Does
 - Living in **knowledge**, **righteousness**, and **holiness**; **living in love** toward God and others; **exercising dominion** over creation; **representing God** to others; **maintaining relationships** with God and others

“The image of God is not something accidental to man, which he can lose without ceasing to be man, but is essential to his existence.”

Anthony Hoekema

The Image of God

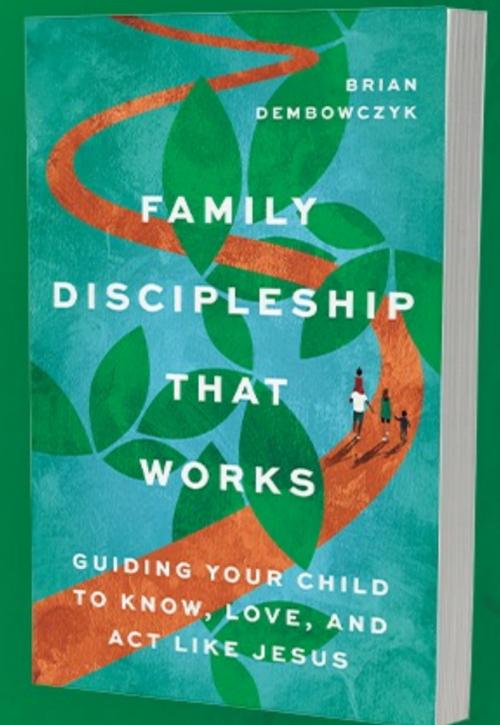
The Importance of the Image of God

- The image of God is part of every person's **core identity**
- The image of God gives every person—unbeliever and believer—exceeding **worth**
- Because of the **image of God** and God's **common grace**, even unbelievers can do **some good**
 - Although their **motivation** is not to glorify God



Image bearing crushes any prejudices our kids might be tempted to embrace. Racism, sexism, nationalism, classism, and all other “-isms” are laid bare for what they truly are: sinful rejections of this doctrine.

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The Image of God

Sin's Effect on the Image of God

- Sin has **not destroyed** the image of God
- Sin has **severely damaged** the image of God

The image of God is “not utterly effaced and destroyed in [humans], it was, however, so corrupted, that any thing which remains is fearful deformity... nothing remains but a ruin, confused, mutilated, and tainted with impurity.” — John Calvin

The image of God is “tarnished through man’s fall into sin.”
— Anthony Hoekema

In Christ

the recovery of identity



In Christ

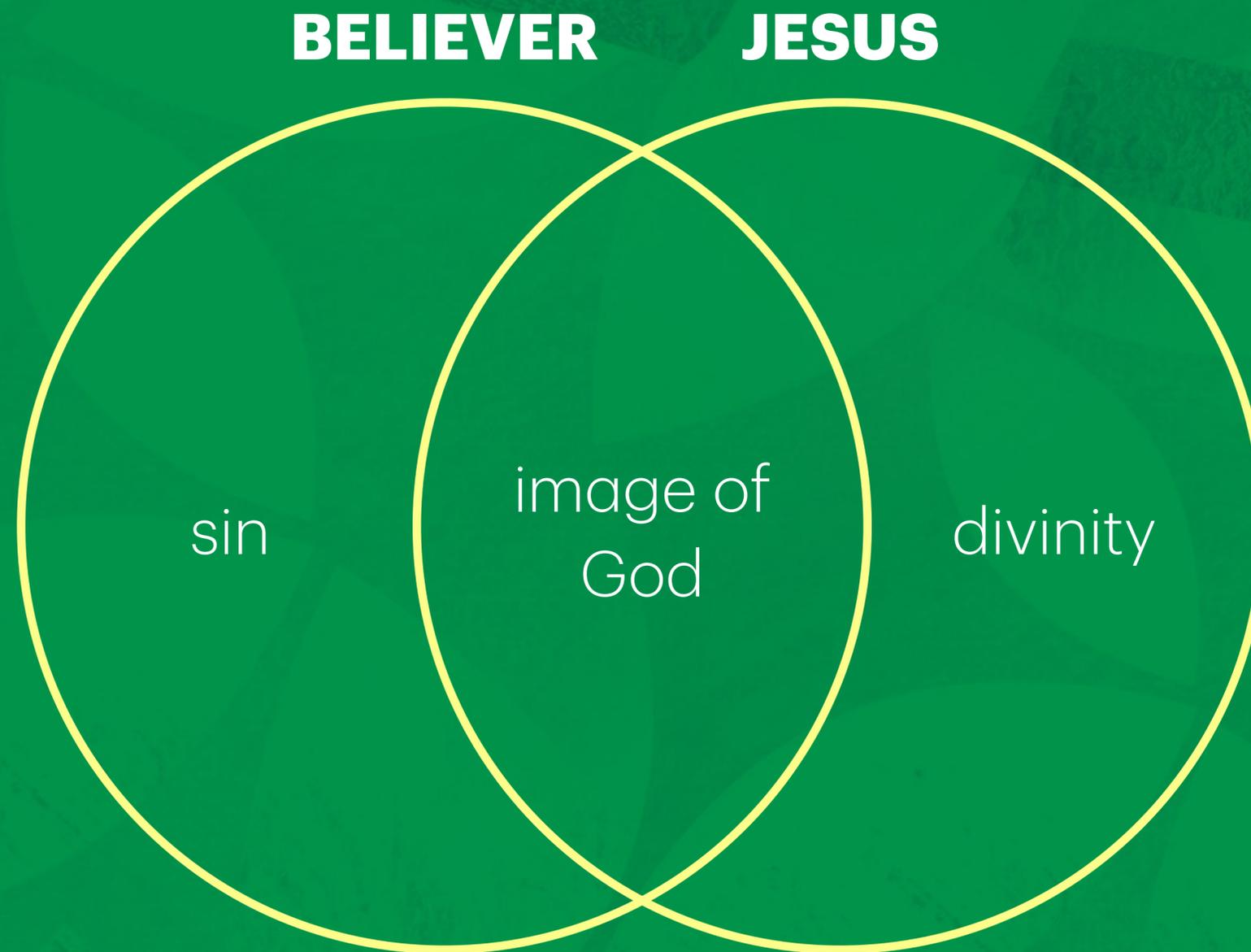
The Recovery of Identity

- A **fundamental change** of identity occurs at salvation.
- The **old man** is gone; a **new man** now resides in his place (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20).
- This new man is made in the **image of Christ**, who in turn is the **perfect image of God** (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).
- Jesus came to reveal the **character of God** to humanity, “just as much he reveals to us the **character of being human.**” (Klyne Snodgrass)



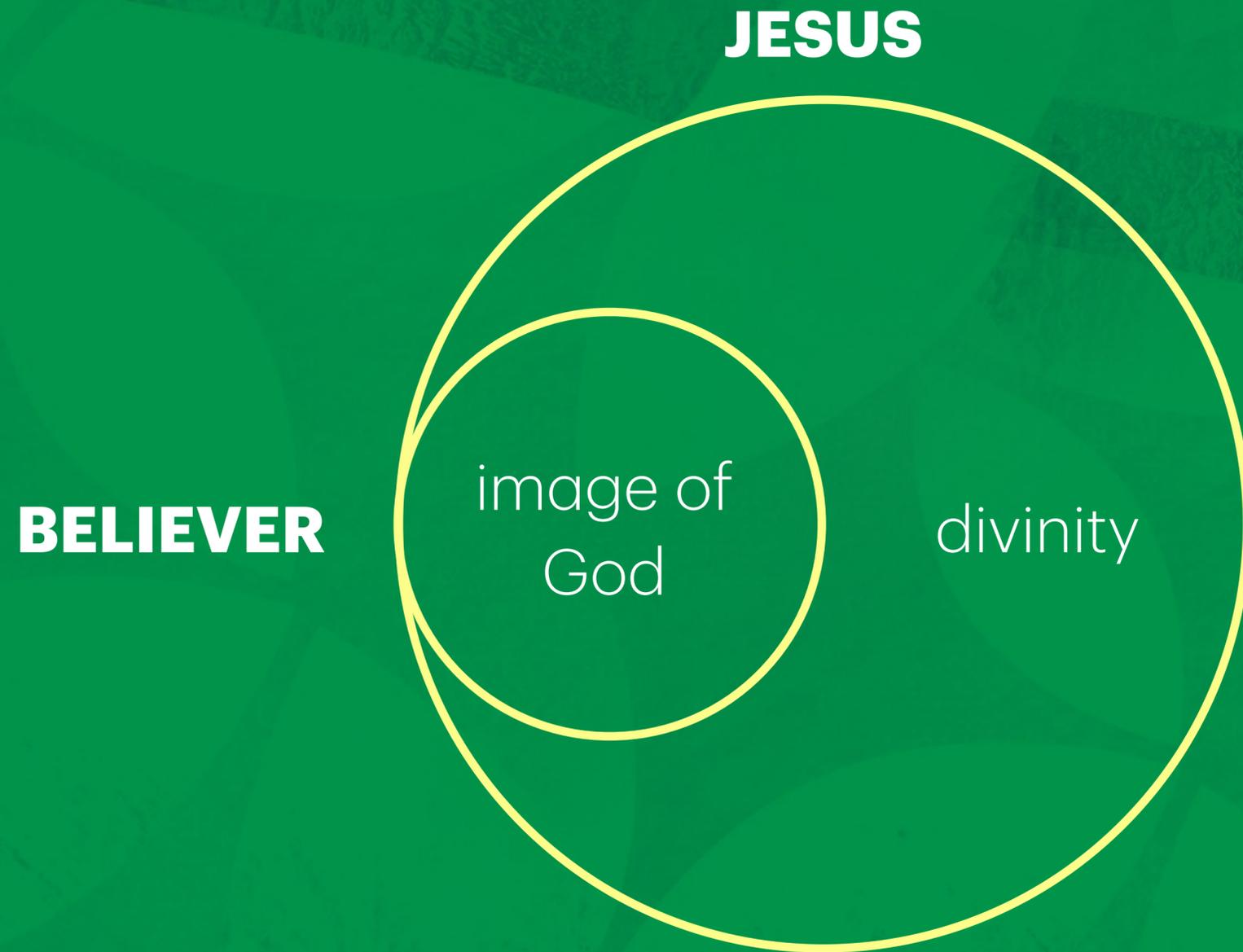
In Christ

The Recovery of Identity



In Christ

The Goal of Identity



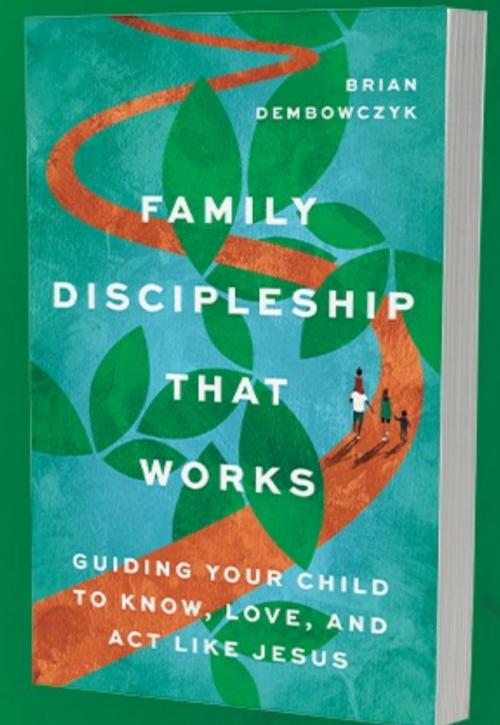
Discipling Our Kids Toward True Identity

helping our kids live out their identity



When you think about it, the gospel is really about identity. It's a process of coming to recognize Jesus' identity and trusting in who he is and what he did. Simultaneously, he changes our identity so we can live as we were truly meant to live.

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Disciplining our Kids Toward True Identity

Challenge False Identities

- Identities based on **cultural confusion**
 - e.g., gender, sexuality, socio-economic class
- Identities based on **negative self-talk**
 - e.g., “I’m a failure,” “I’m not smart”
- Identities based on **wearing masks**
 - e.g., having different personas at school, church, and home
- Identities based on the **“old man”** (for believers)



Disciplining our Kids Toward True Identity

Focus on True Identity

- An **image bearer**
 - All people, giving everyone infinite worth
- **In Christ**
 - All believers
- Other **identity markers**
 - e.g., gender, ethnicity, nationality, athlete, student, musician, artist, son/daughter

Disciplining our Kids Toward True Identity

Help them Rightly Prioritize Identities

- (1) The **core self**
 - (1a) An image bearer (all)
 - (1b) In Christ (believer)
- The **in group prototype**
 - Represents the ideal of what holds a group together as one
 - For all people, this is being an image bearer
 - For all Christians, this is being in Christ



“Christianity is seen as a minor attachment to their well-guarded identities rather than the ground-shaking transformation of identity it really is.”

KLYNE SNODGRASS

Disciplining our Kids Toward True Identity

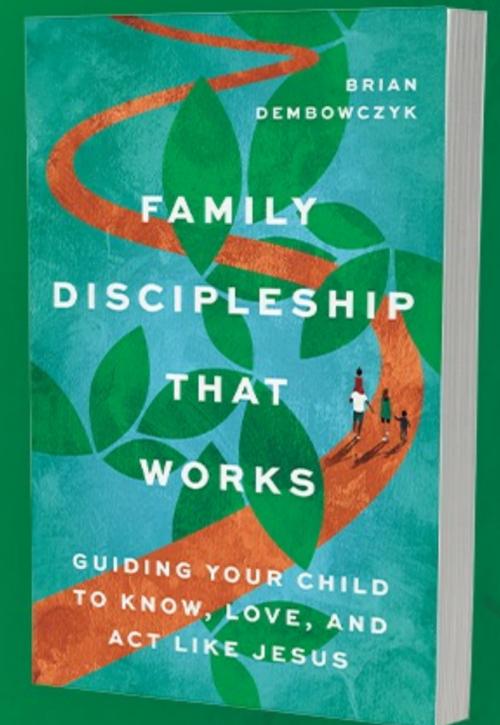
Help them Rightly Prioritize Identities

- (2) All other **true identities**
 - May change in priority depending on the situation
 - student becomes #2 at school
 - friend becomes #2 when someone is in need
 - athlete becomes #2 in a game



Two Christians who share no other identity markers (let's say one is American, the other is Russian; one is male, the other is female; one is wealthy, the other poor) should be more alike than two other people who share everything but Christ. As believers, we share the same fundamental nature with one another—the same spiritual DNA—because that nature is Christ.

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Disciplining Our Kids Toward True Identity

Help Them Imitate Jesus

- Actions spring from **identity**
- Actions are empowered by the **Holy Spirit**
- We will not imitate Jesus perfectly, but, in time, we should **grow closer** to doing that



Discipling Our Kids Toward True Identity

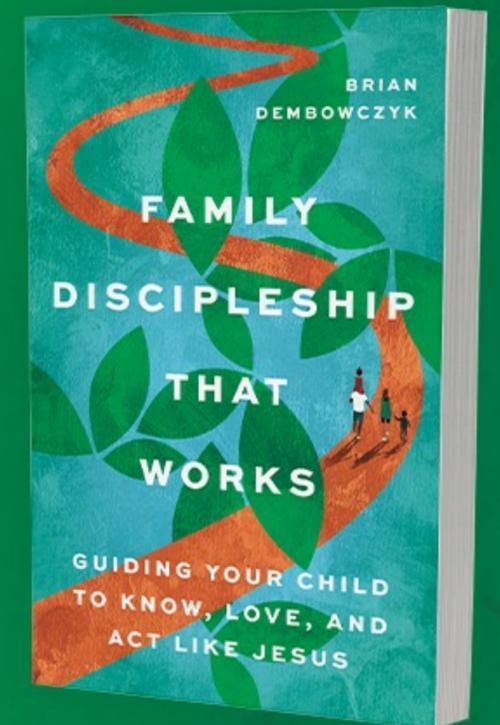
Help Them Imitate Jesus

- Imitate the **perfect human character** of Jesus
 - His love
 - His compassion
 - His friendship
 - His honesty
 - His generosity



If we want to know who we are, we must look to Christ. And, if we want to know how to live, we must look to Christ also. Remember, we *do* what we *are*. That's why we must understand that God has given us a new identity when we become believers—we are now those “in Christ.”

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Disciplining our Kids Toward True Identity

The Example of Onesimus

- Onesimus was an **escaped slave** of Philemon's
- He met Paul and was **led to Christ** by him
- Paul **sent Onesimus back** to Philemon



¹⁵ For perhaps it was for this reason that he was separated from you for a little while, so that you would have him back eternally, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, as a dear brother. He is especially so to me, and even more so to you now, both humanly speaking and in the Lord. ¹⁷ Therefore if you regard me as a partner, accept him as you would me.

The reason Paul gives is simple: the Onesimus who is returning is not the Onesimus who had fled. He is a new person. He is a brother in Christ. As such, their relationship is fundamentally changed. No longer are Onesimus and Philemon master and slave; now they are two brothers.

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