

CHAPTER TWO

RICH IN IDENTITY

→ **Strategy:** The rich single life gains identity from recognizing the extent to which God has gone to fill the gap between who we are and what we can be.

When pondering life's deeper mysteries, do you instinctively turn for insight to...your local sportscaster? If not, I guess maybe you don't live in Philadelphia.

The sports radio talk-show hosts in this city are amazing. History, stats, the sports rumor-mill—they know it all. These guys have clearly devoted their lives to gathering every conceivable fact about sports, and their listeners love it. It's during those rare lulls in sports activity, however, that faithful listeners experience the flip side of such exquisite specialization. As the sportscasters are forced to venture into non-sports talk, we quickly learn that these guys don't have the first clue about anything *except* sports!

One desperate time-filler that runs during these lulls is called the "Mystery Question of Life." In this segment, poor, bewildered callers submit their "Mystery Questions" to these philosopher wanna-bes. Do you lie awake at night wondering why there are roughing penalties in full-contact sports? Or why we drive on parkways and park on driveways? These are the kinds of deep issues tackled on slow sports days in my town.

What is your Mystery Question of Life? It's probably something a little more weighty than the ones mentioned above. Maybe it's, "Lord, why did you make me the way I am?", "Why did you allow this to happen to me?", or "Will my life ever amount to anything?" Mystery Questions are the ones that linger at the edge of thought, unanswered and unwanted, ready to move in and rudely rearrange one's emotional furniture at the slightest invitation.

These "Who am I?" and "Where am I going?" questions are universal. At one time or another, we all ask them: when reflecting on the difficulties or failures of our past; when honestly examining the gaps between who we are and who we project ourselves to be; or when pondering the uncertainties of the future and the potential implications of our decisions. They are unsettling questions because they can upset our most comfortable assumptions about ourselves.

I, Me, Mine: Single in the Culture of Self

Few people are paralyzed by these “Who am I?” questions, but all of us live with their influence on a daily basis. Christians are no different in this regard—how we deal with them determines our decisions and our general outlook on life. As a single adult you no doubt have your own take on the “Who am I?” problem.

The current secular solution is to focus on “self-hood,” as if how I feel about myself is the key to identity. Here is the secular mindset: we are fragile, innocent, and fre-

““ As our culture shouts loud messages to us about who we’re supposed to be and what we’re supposed to do to be fulfilled, growing numbers of Christians are becoming confused about their identity and purpose....When we inadequately exalt God and instead exalt ourselves openly or subtly, aware or unaware, then we make ourselves vulnerable to wrong perceptions about ourselves.¹

— Carol Cornish

quently victimized creatures who need to continually cultivate love of self. My self-hood has been shaped by what others did (or didn’t) do to me (or for me) in the past. A pleasant past produces a generally “healthy” sense of self. A difficult past produces “inadequacies.” My goal is to “know myself,” to “make peace with myself,” and to “like myself.” My future selfhood depends on how well I protect myself

from those who would harm me. The ultimate goal of this secular mindset is to love ourselves as fully as possible. Self-love becomes the cornerstone of a “healthy” and “well-adjusted” sense of personhood. It is the proposed secular solution to our Mystery Questions of Life.

A multimillion-dollar industry has grown up around this preoccupation with, as one critic calls it, the “Imperial Self.” Much of the information directed to the Christian single adult demonstrates the impact of this Culture of Self on the church. Consider the following quote from a popular book for Christian singles:

Singlehood is a state of existence, a way of being. It is a condition of encouraging, affirming, and maintaining one’s integrity as a *self*. It is being willing—and learning how—to become increasingly *self-aware, self-preserving, self-affirming, self-fulfilling, and autonomous (self-governing)*.² [italics supplied]

Or consider this advice from a handbook for pastors of single adults:

Meditate on Philippians 2:5-11.

How would Jesus’ approach to his purpose differ from what we are often told about how we should view ourselves?

1 Which of the following terms reflect a biblical understanding of human problems?

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bitterness | <input type="checkbox"/> Insecurity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Laziness | <input type="checkbox"/> Selfishness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frustration | <input type="checkbox"/> Shame |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jealousy | <input type="checkbox"/> Moodiness |

The church has a role in helping the single adult to become aware and accepting of *self*. The goal is to become overcomers of low *self-image*...the church can assist the single in learning how to make a *self-commitment*. Whether individual or group counseling, the result of the work must be found in the principle for *self-esteem*.³ [italics supplied]

The problem with Christians adopting this self-centered approach to identity is that it teaches the exact opposite of Scripture, so it can never please God or lead us to him for help. In contrast to the secular approach, biblical truth on self can be summed up in two points:

1. One thing we *don't* lack is love for ourselves. (Mt 19:19, 2Ti 3:2)
2. Far from being fragile and innocent, our selves are rebellious and willful. (Ro 7:25, 12:3)

For Further Study:
Read 2 Timothy 3:1-5. What kinds of love will people have who possess a form of godliness but deny its power?

God does not portray himself in Scripture as a facilitator of our self-image goals. Rather, he is the one to whom we must give account for every selfish, sinful word and deed. A Christian single who embraces the Culture of Self is missing out. The world has promised you answers that are nothing but worthless counterfeits.

A preoccupation with Self drives us to view everything and everyone crossing our path as having meaning primarily based on the way they affect us right now. Relationships become self-serving. Possessions become our security. Our thanksgiving and worship toward God are driven by our assessment of how well he does what we want him to do (we call it "meeting our needs"). The

Christian immersed in the Culture of Self is preoccupied with the temporal, while the eternal lies unappreciated and unexplored. To be trapped in Self is to lack both the joy of living in the good of God's love, and the only effective means of wrestling with the daily questions of life.

“ It is not the obliteration of personal identity to which the gospel calls us but to the realization that our worth and merit before God come to us from outside, not from within, as a gift, a charitable donation.⁴

”
— Don Matzat

If the search for meaning and order cannot be found in the love of self, where do we look? Why not go back to where your new life began?

2 The particular facts a Christian emphasizes when sharing the gospel message often say a lot about how he or she views God. Which of the following was most prominent in the message you heard when you gave your life to Christ?

- Only God can straighten out your messed-up life
- You are in a free fall toward Hell without a parachute
- God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life
- Jesus is just, like, so totally incredibly awesome
- Christianity is the only true way to know God
- Other:

Living in the Good of the Gospel

I often think back to my salvation experience, the serene peace of the days that followed, and the wonder of having been freed from a rebellious lifestyle. But I also remember my first major post-conversion eruption of selfish pride. I was a Christian now, I wasn't supposed to be prideful! Suddenly I felt I was teetering on the brink of spiritual chaos. Seeing more sin in my life than ever before, I wrote in my journal, "How many times and in how many ways do I willingly turn my eyes from You, Lord. Discouragement is knocking at my door. My eyes have been turned on myself. There are so many needs around and all I see are my own problems." I felt like God's first failure.

About that time someone suggested I memorize Romans Chapter 6. I was desperate—desperate enough to memo-

rize Scripture. As I ran the verses through my mind during the next few weeks, some very helpful truth started to seep in. I began to realize that the gospel is not just about rescue from trouble. It's about taking on a new identity (vv.1-8). I saw that, prior to my conversion, I had not been just an independent person who happened to be a sinner. Like every other non-Christian, I was *enslaved* by sin. Sin had owned me with an ironclad deed. In receiving Christ I was not simply being forgiven, I was being bought by a new

owner. I was now a "slave to God" (v.22). The "free gift" of God (v.23) was actually his ownership of my life.

It was then that I finally began to understand God's grace. Grace wasn't manifested simply in God's mercy for my abundant failures (as

“ Who am I, Lord, to know You?
What have I, oh Lord, to show You?
Just the grateful heart of a sinner
who loves grace.”⁵

”
— Mark Altrogge

Meditate on Romans

6:20-23. Can you think of any real benefits of being free from the control of righteousness? What is the result of this “freedom”?

wonderful as that is), but also in a desire and an ability within me to live in “grateful slavery” to God. I saw that the central issue in the Christian’s life is no longer “Who am I?”, but “Whose I am.” This realization brought a security that has remained with me for more than 15 years.

Yet God’s purchase of us did not come cheaply. It cost the life of his dear, innocent Son, Jesus. The Cross of Christ establishes God’s right of ownership over his people. That ownership has as its goal *relationship*—worshipful and reverent, yes, but intimate and secure as well: relationship to the glory of God. The amazing truth of the Cross is that the God who had supreme rights to punish rebellious sinners, instead chose freely to die for them (us). His death did not merely purchase our freedom from the tyranny of sin, it placed us under God’s care and in God’s family. This is good news. This is the gospel of peace.

As the Apostle Paul tells it:

“ The fellowship of God is delightful beyond all telling. He communes with His redeemed ones in an easy, uninhibited fellowship that is restful and healing to the soul. He is not sensitive nor selfish nor temperamental. What He is today we shall find Him tomorrow and the next day and the next year. He is not hard to please, though He may be hard to satisfy. He expects of us only what He has Himself first supplied. He is quick to mark every simple effort to please Him, and just as quick to overlook imperfections when He knows we meant to do His will. He loves us for ourselves and values our love more than galaxies of new created worlds.⁶

— A.W. Tozer

When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir (Gal 4:4-7).

Let’s look at what this amazingly good news means for us in all seasons—how the Cross answers all

Mystery Questions of Life: past, present, and future.

Your Past in the Shadow of the Cross

One thing the Culture of Self gets right is this: We all have events in our past that shape our lives. It’s in interpreting and dealing with these events that the secular approach goes hopelessly off course.

For Further Study:

Read Colossians 2:13-15. Make a list of all the action verbs used in this passage to describe the power of the Cross.

What event has most shaped who you are? Ask this question in a church small-group study and you are liable to get a universal response: The day I became a Christian. But if you asked the same people in private, or if you were to follow them around and observe their lives (not recommended!) you might well arrive at a very different answer. While every Christian's actual most important event was the day he or she received Christ, for many the *functional* most important event might be altogether different.

Maybe it was the day when those cherished hopes of making the high school football team were smashed, or the day the family dog died. Maybe it was when the sexual molestation began. Or it could be something far less traumatic—one person's most important event might seem trivial to someone else.

“ Every harsh word spoken;
every promise ever broken to me
Total recall, of data in the memory
Every tear that has washed my face;
every moment of disgrace that I have known
Every time I've ever felt alone
Lord of the here and now;
Lord of the come what may
I want to believe somehow
that you can heal these wounds of yesterday
So now I'm asking you,
to do what you want to do
Be the Lord of the past.⁷

”
— Bob Bennett

Before I became a Christian, I was in a run of relationships where I was the “dumpee” (that is, *she* broke up with *me*). After I was married, I counted the occasions. The total was something like 18 dumpings before my high school graduation, compared to only one time when I chose to end a relationship. That's a .056 batting average! Maybe I was overshooting my social limits. Maybe I was just a dweeb. Probably both. In any event, that has to be some kind of record. It sure felt

like one, and over time this abysmal streak of dumpings contributed to suspicious and manipulative tendencies in my relationships with women. Other things have happened to me that you might consider far more devastating, but for years nothing affected me more in my day-to-day life than that pitiful .056.

We all have experiences that have written themselves into our lives. Everybody has a story, and that story has enormous implications for who we are and where we are going. As counselor John Bettler describes it, “Sometimes your story looks like science fiction. Sometimes your story looks like fantasy. Sometimes your story looks like tragedy. Sometimes it's a comedy. But your story is a story, and your story is yours.”⁸

For Further Study:

Read Psalm 107. List the problems the people had that were not their fault. List the problems the people had that they brought on themselves. Is there any difference in God's response to their cries?

Dr. Bettler goes on to note that our memory of events is "active, selective, and creative." When it comes to the stories of our lives, we are not just camera operators, we are directors, scriptwriters, editors, and actors. We determine which scenes to keep and which to cut, how much weight to give to various plot lines, and what emotional score should fill in the background. No one can tell our story like we can! Based on my own experience and that of people I have counseled, here are a few other helpful observations about what gets written into our personal stories.

Your perception of who you are tends to be shaped by things that are negative. If you could list the ten most vivid memories of your life, how many would be positive? How many negative? For me, all the many wonderful moments from my past kind of blend together as "good times." My sharpest memories tend to be of unpleasant things. It's like the movies. If you watch a good comedy, you might recall some funny moments. But a frightening film can leave mental images that echo in your mind with alarming power for days and weeks to come. If left to write your own script, you will tend to write it as a tragedy.

Your perception of who you are tends to be shaped by what happened to you, not by what you did. In college I was on the soccer team. When I began to feel the coach was out to get me, I did the only thing I knew to do. I quit in a huff, a martyr to the cause of Me. As far as I was concerned, that coach had ruined my promising career. When he left before the next school year began, I returned to the team, my righteous stance against unjust persecution vindicated.

Years later it hit me: the coach had only treated me as my behavior deserved. I was a slacker! I didn't deserve even to be on the field. Yet for years I held a bitter attitude toward that man. If not for God graciously showing me how I squandered my soccer opportunity because of pride, I would still be bitter today. There were two sides to that story. Mine was wrong.

For Further Study:

Read the story of Joseph in Genesis 37 and 39-47. What raw deals did Joseph have to endure that could have made him bitter?

A negative view of your past is often based on some perception of a "normal" experience that you were "denied." One of the leading Culture of Self buzzwords is "dysfunctional." The theory of the "dysfunctional" family assumes there is such a thing as a fully functional family, and that every human being possesses some inalienable right to have had one. Have you ever met a normal family? I haven't—and that includes the one I'm raising.

That's because original sin has "dysfunctionalized" every relationship.

While the label "dysfunctional" is gradually receding into the waste bin of overripe fads, we still tend to think along these lines (people always have and always will), because sin drives us continually to feel sorry for ourselves. We tend to include in our personal definition of a "normal" life precisely those things we didn't get. A father who expressed biblical love; parents who stayed together; being accepted for who you are—statistics and experience show that such "normal" expectations are more the exception than the rule. Still, our sin nature insists we have somehow been cheated. In the final analysis, we are blaming God for messing up our lives.

Your outlook on life is often held hostage by decisions you made long ago. Suppose you're sitting in a park one day and a five-year-old comes up to you and says, "The secret to life is to do whatever you can to get what you want." A few minutes later a twelve-year-old comes up and mutters, "The most important thing in life is that everyone likes you." Finally a 16-year-old walks over and proclaims, "Independence and rebellion are the only things that really bring happiness." Would you decide then and there to structure your life around any one of these dubious insights? Not hardly. Yet have you ever stopped to think how much of your life today is shaped by decisions you made and opinions you formed when you were young? You were bitten by a dog and now are fearful of animals. You were called "tubby" in grade school and now the most important discipline you have is physical fitness. These immature pacts we make with ourselves often have great sway over the course of our lives.

3 Are there any views of life that you hold right now, that you suspect may be wrong or exaggerated, and that you probably formed when you were a child? In the space below, write the first such view that comes to mind.

In his second letter to the Corinthian church, the Apostle Paul wrote:

And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2Co 5:15-17)

**Meditate on
1 Corinthians 1:18.**

How have you seen the power of the Cross at work in your life?

The atoning work of Christ on the Cross is the line of demarcation between our limiting past and our future of promise. For all who have received the new birth, the Cross becomes the most important event in our lives. God is “on the set” and he is reworking the drama of our past with a new ending and a new theme. Rather than a tragedy of despair and loss, our past becomes the telling of an adventure—sometimes frightening, sometimes thrilling, often with mystery, but always with purpose.

And the Cross does more. In the forgiveness of God, the Cross provides the remedy for the shame of our sin. Less often noted is the fact that the Cross also speaks to our unjust sufferings. For many, the most profound aspect of our lives is our suffering. The Cross recognizes our unjust suffering, for in his death Jesus endured the most horrible and unjust suffering in history. Of the crucifixion, Isaiah writes with prophetic horror:

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did

““ The Cross proclaims power to the weak, a lifting up for the humbled, a covering for the naked, love for those who have been hated, redemption for those who are slaves, grace for those who are trying to pay for their sins, forgiveness for sinners, and judgement on the enemies of God.⁹

””

— Ed Welch

not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor

was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer (Isa 53:7-10).

Does Jesus say, “My suffering was worse than you’ll ever know, so stop whining!”? No. “The Lord is full of compassion and mercy” (Jas 5:11). His suffering was for our benefit, and he promises he will never leave or forsake us. Through the Cross we come to better understand justice and mercy; we see the possibility of glorifying God in our suffering; we grasp the meaning behind the phrase “entering into the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings” (Php 3:10); we experience his joy and “peace that surpasses all comprehension” (Php 4:7, NAS); life takes on an

Meditate on Psalm

22:1-18. Take a few moments to contemplate the physical anguish Jesus endured because of your sin.

eternal perspective; and we become able to truly forgive all our oppressors. These realities may be as shadows in the mist to you right now, but God is at work bringing them into full view in your life.

A man in our church, whose father was continually in and out of mental institutions, lived for years with bitterness toward God for the difficulties in his life associated with his father's condition. Gradually, he began to see his suffering in light of God's glory. A breakthrough came when God spoke to his heart sovereignly as he listened to a sermon on heaven. As he describes it, "I think the glory of Christ began to break in on my heart. Slowly but surely God revealed my pride and arrogance in thinking that the God of the universe owed me explanations for the circumstances in my life. I wept with appreciation for God's incredible mercy and patience with me. It dawned on me that though my circumstances had produced great personal pain, they also had been hand-selected by a loving and all-knowing God to produce good things in my life that only they could produce. God graciously allowed me to experience several months of fellowship and reconciliation with my father before he passed away. I look forward to experiencing fellowship now with my heavenly Father without me placing demands on him to make sense of my life."

In a Culture of Self where the problems of the past continually invade the present, the Cross of Christ in the gospel of Christ is at work invading our past—overturning lies, redefining events, and extending the light of the glory of God into the darkest memories of our lives.

Your Present: Living in View of the Cross

If the Cross has purchased us from sin and redefined our past, it also has meaning in the present. What are some implications of the Cross in our daily lives?

Living on the altar. In Romans 12:1, Paul writes, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship." Paul is talking here about consecration (setting ourselves apart), not for religion, but for spiritual purpose and growth. Being living sacrifices means establishing personal convictions rooted in biblical truth, and living under them, even when they produce hardship. It means embracing the discipline and conviction of God as good things, not as hindrances to life as I would prefer to live it. Living on the altar

For Further Study:

Read Hebrews 10:19–25. Why can we offer ourselves to God with joyful confidence?

means welcoming the weight of the Cross into your life every day.

The problem with being living sacrifices is that we have this annoying habit of continually crawling down off the altar. If life on the altar doesn't flow with the ordinary current of this world (and it doesn't), why embrace it? Paul's answer is inspiring: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Ro 12:2).

The gospel holds out the promise of a transformed life, a life lived above the ordinary. To experience this life we must dedicate ourselves to the pursuit of it—through grace-motivated obedience to God's good, pleasing, and perfect will. If you desire to experience this transformed life, maybe it's time to crawl up on the altar and get a better view. That is devotion, our spiritual act of worship.

Fleeing me. Before I became a Christian, temptation wasn't a problem—usually it was thrilling! But with salvation comes an awareness that temptation never leads us anywhere good. Suddenly, temptation becomes a battle.

But what exactly do we battle against?

One of the traps Christians can fall into is the avoidance of understanding temptation. Not the avoidance of temptation (which is obviously important), but of *understanding temptation*.

The reasoning goes some-

thing like this: "Why should I think about temptation and just make it worse?" But the biblical approach to temptation is to see it clearly as the serious threat to our growth that it is. Throughout Scripture, the temptations of God's people are displayed in all their ugliness. Even Jesus is described as being tempted (Lk 4:2), which illustrates an important truth: temptation itself is not sin. But where there is temptation, the potential for sin is very near, so an awareness of the nature and remedy for temptation is vital.

Here are some other important realities about temptation. God never tempts us (Jas 1:13). We can, however, be tempted by our own desires (Jas 1:14); by the carnal world (1Jn 2:15-17); and by Satan (1Co 7:5). There are NO temptations so extraordinary or captivating that we cannot

“Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the *reach* of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the *need* of God's grace.”¹⁰

— Jerry Bridges

ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE SINGLE CHRISTIAN

We often talk about the need for accountability in order to grow consistently in the Christian life. What is accountability? Is it having someone I can share my struggles with? Someone who will tell me things I need to do to grow? Do I always have to be in an accountability relationship?

Here are some tips based on my personal perspective on accountability and how it can work in your life.

1. We are, first and last, accountable to God. He is the only one we need to please.
2. Accountability requires trust, but doesn't necessarily require a close personal relationship to be effective.
3. Accountability can be formal, like a group of guys getting together on a weekly basis to share and pray. Or it can be informal, like two friends who know each other well enough to ask the right questions.
4. Accountability may not necessarily require anyone to exercise authority over another person. Accountability is not counseling. It is simply holding up God's standard to someone who has expressed a desire to be reminded of it.
5. Accountability is the responsibility of the person seeking it. In other words, if I come to you and ask you to hold me accountable in an area of my life, you shouldn't have to seek me out to find out how I'm doing. I should be actively pursuing you to keep you up to date on how I'm doing.

Here are some questions, adapted from various sources, that have been proven to help develop good accountability.

1. How consistent have you been in your spiritual disciplines during the past month?
2. Have you related to anyone during the past month in a way that would not reflect respect, biblical love, and sexual and moral purity?
3. Have you expressed any attitudes or actions in your work environment during the past month that would negatively reflect on your testimony for Christ?
4. Are you experiencing any unreconciled relationships?
5. Has your giving or any of your financial dealings lacked integrity or wisdom?
6. Are any of the following sins a particular struggle for you right now: Moral Impurity, Slothfulness, Complaining, Jealousy, or Gossip.
7. Would your friends say that you are open to correction or input right now?
8. (Men) Have you allowed yourself to be involved with any sexually explicit material during the past month?
(Women) Have you expressed any tendency which could indicate too much concern for your appearance during the past month?

“ When Satan tempts me to despair
and tells me of the guilt within
Upward I look and see him there
Who made an end of all my sin
Because the sinless Savior died
my sinful soul is counted free
For God, the Just, is satisfied
to look on him and pardon me¹¹ ”

— Charite Lees Bancroft

resist with God’s ready help (1Co 10:12-13).

Possibly the most important thing to know, however, is this: our struggle with temptation is actually *evidence of God’s grace in our lives*. Back in my old memory passage, Romans 6, Paul explains that when we were slaves to sin we were free from righteousness; that is,

we had no reason to respond to anything but temptation. Now we are slaves of righteousness, and temptation matters to us, because it doesn’t fit into God’s ownership plan for our lives.

So what do we do with temptation? First, in facing it, don’t be surprised at what you see. The doctrine of indwelling sin tells us that, although the *dominion* of sin over our lives has been broken, the *activity* of sin remains. We are by nature lustful, rebellious, and foolish creatures who operate 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week idol factories in our hearts. Nothing should surprise us. Yet the good news is that we have been rescued and are being changed into ever-greater likenesses of our Rescuer, Jesus

Christ. We need not be carried away by temptation, but we must be watchful for its attempts to grab us. And the better we understand temptation, the more watchful we can be.

Second, recognize that the Bible has one principal defense against temptation: FLEE! (1Co 6:18, 10:14; 1Ti 6:11; 2Ti 2:22) What does it mean to flee? Consider...roaches.

As soon as a roach knows trouble is near he starts running. Where he goes doesn’t really matter, he just *goes*. That’s kind of what fleeing should be for us. Next time you chase a roach around the kitchen, stop a moment and take notes on his fleeing tech-

niques. They could come in handy. (OK, I know there are some exceptionally arrogant and/or stupid roaches that flee less readily, but look what happens to them!)

And did you ever notice that God tells us to resist Satan but flee from temptation? *This means that little old you*

Meditate on James 1:12-15. Why is it important not to flirt with temptation?

- 4** Which of the following temptations would you find most enticing?
- A rich, well-made chocolate dessert
 - An undisturbed nap on a Sunday afternoon
 - Command of the remote control, 120 channels to surf, and six hours of free time, alone
 - A Mall-wide 50%-Off sale

Can you imagine circumstances in which yielding to some of these temptations would be sinful for you? Are there other circumstances in which it would not be sin?

For Further Study:

Read Luke 4:1-13. What did Jesus use to resist the temptations of the Devil? Is there anything he did in this encounter that we cannot do?

Meditate on

1 Corinthians 10:13.

How can it be helpful in times of temptation to know that God won't allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear?

For Further Study:

Read John 14:15-31 and 16:5-16. What specific activities did Jesus promise that the Holy Spirit would do when he came?

and me will have a lot more success fighting against the prince of darkness than against our own sinful desires! In fact, James 4:7 says that if we resist (battle) the devil *he* will actually do the roach scamper from *us*.

Finally, remember that Jesus himself is ready to help us out of temptation. "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb 2:18). And if we do sin after being tempted, God provides a way back through confession, repentance, and faith (1Jn 1:9). God's ability to help us in time of need and restore us in time of fall is an essential part of our growth under his loving ownership.

Walking by the Spirit. Puritan pastor/theologian John Owen had a wonderful description of the work of Holy Spirit. He called the Spirit "the beautifier of souls."¹²

In the divine ownership plan, the Holy Spirit is the master craftsman, the foreman of God's renovation work in our lives. He carries out his job in a number of ways. He makes sure God's work goes according to specifications ("guides us into all truth," Jn 16:13-15); shores up weak spots (Ro 8:26); gives us unique features and functions (1Co 12:4-11); and stamps "PROPERTY OF GOD" all over us ("The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children," Ro 8:16).

But we're not just piles of building material waiting for the Craftsman to start hammering away. God's ownership means we can take part in the construction. Gordon Fee writes, "Life in the Spirit is not passive submission to the Spirit to do a supernatural work in one's life; rather, it requires conscious effort, so that the indwelling Spirit may accomplish His ends in one's life."¹³ This cooperative effort is what Paul is talking about when he exhorts those who "belong to Christ" to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:24-25). While the Holy Spirit/Master Craftsman is doing the work of beautification in us, we are the laborers whose effort is somehow important to the project. Jerry Bridges puts it this way: "God's work does not make our effort unnecessary, but rather makes it effective."¹⁴

The Future: Living Today in the Light of Eternity

Thus far in this chapter we have discussed how the Cross provides overcoming power for our past and constructive power in our present. But how does the Cross shape our future? It is this question that will occupy

“ God is at work creating eternal changes at the level of my heart, in my true desires and hopes. He is drawing me away from hope in this present world to hope in Him alone. He is revealing true life to me, life that consists of the all-surpassing power of Christ Jesus living within me. And He will use the things of this present world—often the loss of them—to accomplish this grand redemptive agenda. His goal is not the abundance of earthly things, but the abundance of hope in God.¹⁵ ”

— Paul Tripp

much of the rest of this book.

For the Christian, the future begins at this moment and extends to eternity. We therefore will look at our goals, choices, and opportunities as single adults in light of the Cross. It is here that the words of Jesus provide both marching orders and assurance of victory for the future: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to

save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it” (Lk 9:23-24).

For the Christian, the “Who am I?” questions must be answered both negatively (rejecting the lies of the world) and positively (embracing the truth of Scripture).

Who I am not:

- I am not the sum total of my self-perceptions.
- I am not the accumulated facts of my life history.
- I am not what others believe about me.

Whose I am not:

- I am not my own; I do not belong to myself. (Ro 14:8, 1 Co 6:19-20)

Whose I am:

- I am God’s child, bought with an incalculable price, set apart for noble purposes. (1Jn 3:1, Ac 20:28)
- I am God’s workmanship, and he who began a good work in me will be faithful to complete it. (Eph 2:10, Php 1:6)

May these words, taken from a song written by my friend Chris Wright, reflect your ambitions for the rich single life.

Meditate on Galatians 6:14. How does your life boast of the Cross?

There's a cross on a hill—can you see it?
The price He freely paid
Lifted up for you
Lifted up, it's for you

It's for you He came
It's for you He suffered
And He died, His Father's will to do
If we choose to follow Him
Our lives we must deny...

There's a cross in the road, can you see it?
A choice that must be made
Lift it up...it's for you
Pick it up...it's for you¹⁶ ■

- GROUP DISCUSSION**
1. What types of situations tend to make you think about the deeper questions of life?
 2. How has the secular understanding of self-hood influenced you?
 3. At what point after you were saved did you realize that the battle with temptation and sin was part of the Christian life?
 4. What is the greatest difference between God's fatherhood as revealed in Scripture and your experience with your earthly father?
 5. Describe a time in your childhood when you were aware that God existed and cared for you.
 6. In what ways has your relationship with God helped you understand things from your past?
 7. What methods of fleeing temptation have you found to be most effective?
 8. How have you seen the Holy Spirit at work in your life?
 9. What does it mean to take up your cross at this time in your life?

RECOMMENDED READING *The Discipline of Grace* by Jerry Bridges (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994)

The Cross of Christ by John R.W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986)

Women Helping Women edited by Elyse Fitzpatrick and Carol Cornish (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1997)

NOTES

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3. Ibid., p. 91.
4. Don Matzat, in Michael Scott Horton, ed., *Power Religion* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), p. 258.
5. Mark Altrogge, "A Sinner Who Loves Grace" (1997, People of Destiny International/BMI)
6. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Best of A.W. Tozer* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, Inc. 1978), p. 121
7. Bob Bennett, "Lord of the Past" (1989, Matters of the Heart Music/ASCAP)
8. John Bettler, "Counseling and the Problem of the Past," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. XII, No. 2, Winter 1994, p. 14.
9. Edward T. Welch, "Exalting Pain? Ignoring Pain? What Do We Do with Suffering," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. XII, No. 3, Spring 1994, p. 11.
10. Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress 1994), p. 18
11. Charite Lees Bancroft, "Before the Throne of God Above," public domain.
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13. Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p. 433.
14. Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994), p. 18.
15. Paul Tripp, *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Fall 1994, p. 16.
16. Chris Wright, "It's For You" (1995, Here to There Music/ASCAP)