

IDENTITY: MY LIFE OF FAITH



Who are you? Start with Christ.

Most of us struggle with our identity at some point in life. Not knowing who you are can really mess up where you are and what you do.

I know that to be true from personal experience. When I was in my early twenties, I was a passenger in life, traveling through my days without a destination. I had grown up in a great environment, but I had made a total mess of my circumstances.

Jesus changed all that. He changed me, and now my identity is wrapped up in Christ.

In these six sessions, we'll see what God says about who we are and who we can be in Christ. Our identity in Christ alters our identity at church, in our homes, at our places of work, and everywhere else. We never lose our uniqueness in our various roles, but those roles are transformed by our life of faith—our true, defining identity.

Let this study help you be sure of who you are in Christ and how you can live out that identity.



MATT BROWN

Matt Brown is the lead pastor of Sandals Church in Southern California. It is Matt's passion to see people become real and honest with themselves, God, and others. Matt has been married to his college sweetheart for over 20 years and they have three amazing kids. You can follow Matt on Twitter: *@pastormattbrown*.

Identity: My Life of Faith

Session 1 **Life in Christ** Luke 9:18-26

Session 2 **Life in the Church** 1 Peter 4:7-11

Session 3 **Life at Home** Ephesians 5:22-28; 6:1-3

Session 4 **Life at Work** Colossians 3:22–4:1

Session 5 **Life in the Community** Matthew 25:34-40

Session 6 **Life on Mission** 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

Find additional tools and resources to support this study, all available online at BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra.



SESSION 1

LIFE IN CHRIST

▶ **The Point**

Jesus' identity is foundational to who I am.

▶ **The Passage**

Luke 9:18-26

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

Who am I? That's not always an easy question to answer in one specific way. For example, I'm a husband, a father, and a friend. All of these relationships help to define me. What's certain is that how I define and see myself—my identity—will affect my thoughts and actions.

The world understands this truth, which is why it tries to shape how we see ourselves. Advertisers want us to see ourselves in a certain way—and then believe their product will enhance that image.

What truly affects our identity is how we see Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" How these men saw Jesus changed their lives because it changed how they saw themselves. The same is true for us. How we see Jesus shapes how we define ourselves. Without correctly understanding who Jesus is, we will never truly understand who we are. Consider, then, life's most important question: *Who is Jesus?*

▶ **The Setting**

Luke 9 records Jesus' commissioning of the Twelve disciples (see vv. 1-6). The disciples traveled from village to village ministering in Jesus' name. Jesus then miraculously fed over 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish (see vv. 12-17). These events brought more and more attention to Jesus as He carried out His public ministry. About midway through His earthly ministry, Jesus gathered His disciples to discuss His identity and its implications for their lives.

What does the Bible say?

God's Messiah (v. 20)—The Hebrew word *Messiah* (Greek *Christos*) means “anointed one.” Kings, priests, and prophets all experienced God’s anointing. Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of this term.

Son of Man (v. 22)—Jesus used this expression to describe Himself. It can describe a human being, but also is connected with a messianic prophecy in Daniel 7:13-14.

Deny themselves (v. 23)—Jesus challenged His followers to lives of self-denial in which they laid aside their personal agendas to submit to His agenda.

Luke 9:18-26

¹⁸ Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?”

¹⁹ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”

²⁰ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.”

²¹ Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone.

²² And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

²³ Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

²⁴ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.

²⁵ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?

²⁶ Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes

Notes



LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 8, "Identity," to introduce the major theme of this study, along with the specific focus for each session.

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 81 of the PSG: **"What's a word or phrase that often comes up when people describe you?"**

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Consider playing a short game as a substitute to

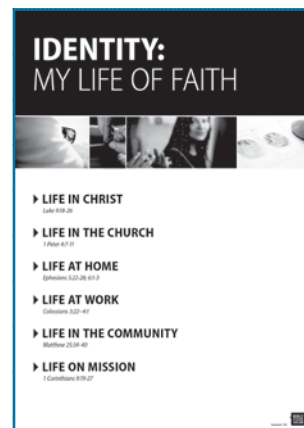
(or supplement for) Question #1, above. Provide group members with a sheet of paper and writing utensil. Encourage each person to write three words they believe describe themselves, along with their names, and then fold up their sheet of paper. Collect all the folded papers in a hat or bowl, and then draw out one sheet at random. Read the three words written on the sheet, and then allow group members to guess which person is connected to those words. Continue the process for as long as time will allow.

Note: If you're worried people will be shy about describing themselves positively, you could ask people to write three words that describe the person sitting on their right, instead.

GUIDE: Direct group members to "The Bible Meets Life" on page 82 of the PSG. Introduce the connection between Jesus' identity and our identities by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to "The Point" on page 82 of the PSG: **"Jesus' identity is foundational to who I am."**

PRAY: Transition into the study by praising God for lovingly designing each person in your group. Ask that each of you will have the courage to explore what it means to ground your identity in Christ.



Want to know about biblical culture, people, archaeology, and history? *Biblical Illustrator* has articles that tie to each session in this study at lifeway.com/BI.

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STUDY THE BIBLE

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ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How would you respond to Jesus' question in verse 20?

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Luke 9:18-20

¹⁸ Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?" ¹⁹ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life." ²⁰ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "God's Messiah."

LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 9, "Caesarea Philippi," to provide some background information on the location for Jesus' conversation with the disciples.

READ: Luke 9:18-20 on page 83 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG). Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

GUIDE: Use the information in the first three paragraphs on page 105 of this Leader Guide to explain the disciples' early answers to Jesus' question.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 83 of the PSG: **"What are some words or phrases people use to describe Jesus today?"**

Note: Encourage group members to think outside of their own beliefs and experiences when answering this question. How would a non-Christian describe Jesus? Someone who was raised in another faith? Someone who is apathetic to spiritual truth?

RECAP: Read aloud the final paragraph on page 83 of the PSG:

Peter identified Jesus as the long-awaited Christ—a revelation that would transform Peter's understanding of himself and change his future. Only when Peter rightly understood who Jesus is could he correctly align his own life and identity.

TRANSITION: Peter's confession was a major turning point in his own life and in Jesus' public ministry. However, Jesus' reaction in verses 21-22 is surprising, to say the least.

Luke 9:18-20 Commentary

Jesus is God's Son, the Messiah.

[Verse 18] Jesus was **praying in private**, as was His custom (see Luke 5:16). The statement that Jesus' **disciples were with him** may mean He rejoined them after His time of prayer and solitude. The question Jesus asked them required no commitment on their part. They merely had to report what they had heard regarding **the crowds** who followed Jesus and listened to His teaching.

[Verse 19] The disciples answered Jesus in accordance with His question. Some of the crowd thought Jesus might be a reappearance of **John the Baptist**. This apparently was the view of Herod Antipas (4 B.C. – A.D. 39) during Jesus' public ministry (see Matt. 14:1-2). By this time, Herod had put John to death (see vv. 6-12).

The disciples offered the name **Elijah** as another opinion they had heard. Elijah was a mighty prophet who served God faithfully in the days of wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (see 1 Kings 17–19). The prophet Malachi predicted that Elijah would appear before the great and terrible day of the Lord (see Mal. 4:5-6). Perhaps some assumed Jesus played the role of Elijah in announcing the day of God's judgment.

The disciples also provided a more vague answer: perhaps Jesus was **one of the prophets of long ago**. Matthew also includes the fact that the disciples suggested Jeremiah (see Matt. 16:14). We should understand Luke's commentary as more of a summary. The disciples had heard well, and were able to report to Jesus a wide range of opinions regarding His identity.

[Verse 20] The words **But what about you** turned Jesus' question in the direction of the disciples. The Lord **asked** them to respond to the question **"Who do you say I am?"** It was the most important question Jesus would ever ask His disciples, and it's still the most important question we can ever answer. Today, many people recognize Jesus as a great moral teacher, as a prophet, or perhaps at least as a significant person of history. But is He more?

The text doesn't reveal whether the other disciples said anything to Jesus' more personal question. However, **Peter answered** clearly and unmistakably; Jesus was **God's Messiah**. By his answer, Peter affirmed that Jesus was the fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose. The Hebrew word *mashiach* from which we get our word "Messiah" literally means "anointed one." Kings of Israel sometimes had this title. The high priest also carried this title, in addition to prophets who received God's anointing (see 1 Kings 19:16).

However, Jesus stands as God's ultimate Messiah in that He provides the fulfillment of all three of these important offices. He fulfilled a prophetic ministry while on earth as He brought God's message to His people (see Matt. 21:10-11). He fulfilled the priestly office by offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin (see Heb. 10:10-14). He intercedes for us now as our great High Priest in heaven (see 7:25). He fulfills the kingly role in that He hails from the line of David (see Luke 1:32) and one day will return as King of kings and Lord of lords (see Rev. 19:11-16).



STUDY THE BIBLE

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Luke 9:21-22

21 Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. **22** And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity "Who You Are" on page 85 of the PSG. As time permits, encourage volunteers to share their responses.

If we are disciples of Jesus, than He is the foundation of our identities. Use the boxes below to record additional words that describe who you are as a person. Examples may include "parent," "plumber," and so on.



JESUS			

Choose one of the words you used to describe yourself above. How does having Jesus at the foundation of your identity influence that portion of your life?

READ: Luke 9:21-22 on page 84 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 84 of the PSG: "How would you have felt if you heard Jesus' instructions as one of His disciples?"

Note: Remind group members that you're not asking how Jesus' disciples might have felt during this conversation. Rather, you're asking how your group members would have felt if they had been present with Jesus and received these instructions.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Play the song "Lead Me to the Cross" to help group members contemplate Jesus' willingness to sacrifice Himself on our behalf.

TRANSITION: Read aloud the second paragraph on page 86 of the PSG:

As hard as this may have been for the disciples to hear, Jesus was about to add a shocking challenge: He was not the only one that must die!

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What does Christ's death and resurrection teach us about His identity?

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Luke 9:21-22 Commentary

Jesus took up His cross for us.

[Verse 21] Peter correctly assessed Jesus' identity. One might think once the disciples knew Jesus' identity, He would have sent them forth to proclaim it. Surprisingly, He **strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone**. Why would Jesus instruct His followers to withhold the truth from people to whom they ministered? The answer was one of context and timing. In the Old Testament, prophecies about the Messiah were many. Some of the prophecies predicted the Messiah would establish an earthly kingdom (see Isa. 11:1-10; Jer. 23:5-6). The Jewish people felt the pain of Roman oppression and longed for their freedom. Consequently, they held dear those sacred passages that spoke of a political Messiah who would one day reign over all the earth and establish Israel as a prominent nation.

However, other passages depicted the Messiah as a suffering Servant. The prophet Isaiah also spoke of a Messiah who quietly accomplished God's purpose (see Isa. 42:1-4). This Messiah would suffer greatly and even die at the hands of wicked people (see 53:7-9). He would suffer in place of God's people and for their sins. Unfortunately, in a day of Roman oppression, many Israelites probably preferred to cling to the hope of a coming reigning king who would overthrow Rome. Therefore, it's likely Jesus wanted His disciples to withhold the information about His true identity as Messiah until the appropriate day came to proclaim it.

[Verse 22] Jesus then began to rehearse for His disciples what events would take place in the coming days. Coming in the wake of Peter's confession, these words probably seemed out of place and certainly undesirable. Nonetheless, Jesus knew His disciples needed to hear them. Jesus described Himself as **the Son of Man**. The expression essentially denotes a member of the human race. Ezekiel used it to describe himself over 90 times throughout his book (see Ezek. 2:1 and 4:1, for example). Daniel also used the expression to describe a heavenly being who appeared before God to receive a kingdom that would never pass away (see Dan. 7:13-14). All the nations of the world would serve and worship that particular Son of Man!

Jesus told His disciples that He must **suffer many things**. Again, the prophet Isaiah described the Messiah as one who would suffer much (see Isa. 53:4-12). Jesus described how He would **be rejected** by the Jewish leadership. The term **elders** here denotes a group of leaders. The term **chief priests** designates especially influential members of the priesthood who served in the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus also mentioned rejection by the **teachers of the law**. These were the keepers of the sacred tradition and some comprised part of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leadership council.

Jesus would do more than suffer; He would **be killed**. This wasn't something the disciples wanted to hear. Jesus also shared with His followers that He would **on the third day be raised to life**. He repeated the concept of His resurrection to His disciples on other occasions, as well (see Luke 24:6-7). However, the disciples clearly failed to take it to heart. When Jesus was arrested, His disciples ran terrified into the night, unaware that the dawn of the resurrection lay just ahead (see Matt. 26:56).

STUDY THE BIBLE

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Luke 9:23-26

23 Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.

25 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? 26 Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

READ: Luke 9:23-26 on page 86 of the PSG.

SUMMARIZE: Help group members engage the main points from pages 86-87 of the PSG:

1. "Just as the apostles began to catch their breath after hearing the news of Jesus' divine appointment with death, Jesus told them of their own."
2. "If we want to call ourselves followers of Christ, we must say yes to Jesus, which means we must also say no to ourselves."
3. "Jesus calls us to make a decision about Him. But it can't be a private decision. Nobody can be a Christian and keep his or her faith completely private."
4. "We must understand who Jesus is so that we can understand who we are. Our identities are built on the foundation of His identity."

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 87 of the PSG: **"What does it look like on a practical level to deny ourselves? To daily take up a cross?"**

Note: Encourage group members to emphasize the word "practical" when answering this question.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 87 of the PSG: **"How can we help one another obey Jesus' instructions in these verses?"**

GUIDE: Refer back to "The Point" for this session: **"Jesus' identity is foundational to who I am."** As time permits, encourage volunteers to share any final thoughts and questions.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What steps can we take to let go of our lives and embrace our identity in Christ?

Luke 9:23-26 Commentary

Following Jesus means taking up our cross daily.

[Verse 23] Jesus had just given His disciples what certainly sounded like terrible news. He was going to die! However, Jesus wasn't finished. Next, He described the life to which He called His followers.

Jesus called **whoever** wanted to come with Him to radical obedience. Jesus seeks people who will follow Him wherever He leads. Jesus asked anyone who wanted to follow Him to do three things. First, **deny themselves**. Jesus called His followers to a life of self-denial, laying aside personal agendas and priorities so they may fully obey Him. Second, Jesus instructed His would-be followers to **take up their cross daily**. In other words, following Jesus means a willingness to die. We should be ready to die with respect to our own priorities and agendas. At the same time, church history is full of people who have willingly paid the ultimate price to follow Jesus—even through to our present day. Third, Jesus instructed His would-be disciples to **follow** Him. He provided no destination and no further details; He only instructed that they follow Him.

[Verse 24] The world then, as the world now, offered values conflicting with God's. Many sought wealth, power, and prestige to find meaning in life, but all of these ultimately would prove dead ends. Jesus said one who sought to **save their life** through doing such things would **lose it**. At the end of life, such people would see all their aspirations and things in which they had placed value crumble to dust. Jesus contrasted such people with the individual who **loses their life** for the sake of following Jesus. Such a person would **save it** because he or she had aligned with God's purpose through Jesus.

[Verse 25] Jesus then clarified what He had just said. His opening words **what good is it for someone** indicate where the question is going. Even if someone **gain the whole world**, Jesus indicated the person had no real gain, because the one who does so will **lose or forfeit their very self**. Jesus was describing someone who failed to gain eternal life because he had placed too great a value in the wrong things. He had discounted the call of Christ to pursue other things he deemed important. In the end, Jesus said, he would lose it all.

[Verse 26] Jesus recognized that no one could be completely sold out to Him and yet embrace all the world had to offer. **Whoever** found themselves **ashamed** of Jesus and His **words** would be in such a state because they woefully underestimated the value of following Jesus. Instead, they placed confidence in things the world offered them.

Jesus described the sad outcome that lay ahead. **The Son of Man** would **be ashamed** of all who were ashamed of Him and His words! The expression **when he comes in his glory** describes Jesus' second coming, when He returns to gather His people and be with them forever (see Matt. 24:31; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). The majesty of that day will be shared by **the Father and ... the holy angels**. In the day of Jesus' appearing, only what we have done for Jesus will matter.

