



TROPHY OF GRACE

IDENTITY [AM I GOOD ENOUGH?]

THE HURDLE

Why does this happen to me? Two nights ago after our semifinal win I felt great, helping lead our team to the championship—I was on top of the world! Tonight I feel worthless. I had to watch the last two minutes of my senior year from the sideline because I fouled out on a stupid play committed out of frustration. Everyone was sure we'd win this year—I feel like I let my team, community, and self down. I hate that my self-image swings on how I play the game.

In what ways does your attitude toward yourself change based on your performance as an athlete? Student? In relationships?

What kinds of personal goals have you set? How will accomplishing those goals cause you to feel different about yourself?

How does the stress of trying to measure up to others' (coaches/peers/parents/media) expectations affect you?

Our culture tells us we have to DO something to be important, to be valuable and wanted by others. But the relentless pursuit of performance to measure our worth is a deceitful trap: we're always just one mistake away (one bad game, one slump, one bad season) from falling short of our ideal. At some level, everyone strives for a secure identity that lasts beyond each performance.

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I am nothing but a sports slave.

Dennis Rodman

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I HEAR YA

Here are a few people from the Bible who also wrestled with the issue of identity...

The Rich Young Ruler – his identity was built around his good works and his wealth and he couldn't give it up to follow Jesus (Matthew 19:16-26).

The Rich Fool – his identity was built around his material possessions (Luke 12:13-21).

The Woman at the Well – her identity was built around her current lover (John 4:7-26).

Zacchaeus – his identity was built around being a wealthy tax collector (Luke 19: 1-10).

Paul – his identity was built around being a religious zealot (Philippians 3:4-10).

As athletes we must understand the importance of finding our identity in Christ alone and not in our athletic performance.

LISTEN UP

While there's certainly nothing wrong with wanting respect from others, seeking human approval becomes a roller-coaster ride that never ultimately satisfies. On the other hand, understanding God's constant acceptance of us offers a security that can set us free. When God becomes our chief audience, we find ourselves less concerned about others' opinions and judgments.

Read Ephesians 2:8-10.

1. What do these verses say about how you are saved from your sins?

You are saved by _____ through _____ NOT _____.

Grace: unmerited favor toward us

Faith: what you trust in

Works: efforts to gain approval

2. Verse 2:8 says that your salvation by grace through faith is a gift of God. What does the word gift imply? How might the giver of the gift feel if you tried to pay him back for the gift?

3. Ephesians 1 describes "gifts" you are freely given based on God's unconditional love for you. Look at the list below and identify what "gift" you most appreciate. Why?

God chose you (1:4)

God adopted you (1:5)

God calls you Beloved (1:6)

God totally forgives you (1:7)

God lavished grace on you (1:8)

God gives you an inheritance (1:11)

God sealed His promise forever (1:14)

4. What does 2:10 tell us should be a result of God's grace toward us? What is the difference between working for acceptance versus working from acceptance?

FOR THE RECORD

God accepts us because we are His beloved children through Jesus' work on the cross not our talent level or game performance. God's grace gives us a new life in Christ, a whole new way of thinking, freeing us from the addictive, dead end pursuit of worldly success. If God accepts us just as we are and He is our primary audience, we are free to be ourselves

with others without chasing their approval or considering ourselves a failure when our performance or circumstances take a turn for the worst. When we see ourselves through Jesus' eyes, we develop the foundation for a secure identity. Over time, being truly loved, accepted, and forgiven by God supplies confidence to play and live in freedom.



YOUR MOVE

Competitive sports make intense performance demands on us. “Love” and “grace” aren’t usually words associated with sports, so as athletes we shouldn’t be surprised at struggling with the practical implications of God’s love for us. But Christ’s forgiveness sets us free from both His condemnation (spiritual) and the slavery produced by other’s opinions (performance). When God accepts you, all other opinions about you become secondary.

1. Which is true about you and why?

I love sports (I am free to give and express myself) and experience the joy it brings.

I need sports (I am dependent upon sports) because of what sports can give me.

What is the difference between loving sports and needing sports?

2. What role does approval from others play in how you feel about yourself when you win? Lose? When you play all the time? When you don’t play at all?

3. In religious circles, what are “works” people do to pursue God’s love and approval? What kinds of “works” do you do as an athlete or coach in hopes of gaining approval?

4. Which of the truths listed in Ephesians 1:4-14 is most meaningful to you? Why? Claim that truth for yourself and use it against the temptation to ride the “performance rollercoaster.” For example, after a poor performance you can choose to deny inner condemnation and replace it with faith that God’s love is sufficient even when you feel rejected by others.

5. Sports can feed your need for approval without you ever realizing it, and before your acceptance from God will have practical benefit in your life you have to acknowledge your desire to get your approval from your performance. Understanding your identity in Christ is a process of renewing your mind and learning to think differently from the way the world tells you to think. Ask God to help you build your identity in Him and not your performance.

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The trophy that matters is not on our shelves or resumes. It is the soul that we become. That is the crown that we will one day cast before God.

John Ortberg
Pastor/Author

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For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page for more exercises in discovering what God says is really true about you.

AS YOU ENTER

“THERE IS THEREFORE NOW NO CONDEMNATION TO THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS.”
(ROMANS 8:1)

Who are You in Christ?

Meditate on one passage each day and thank God for how He has made you special!

New creation: II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20

Child of God: John 1:12; Ephesians 1:4-6

Friend of Jesus: John 15:15

Justified through faith: Romans 5:1-2

Complete in Christ: Colossians 2:9-10

Able to honor God with your body: I Corinthians 6:19-20, 9:24-27

Slave or Free?

Read Romans 6.

1. What does it mean to be a slave?
2. What does it mean to be free?
3. What did Jesus do to free us from our sins? (vs. 6-7)
4. Wages are something that you earn, gifts are something that you receive. What does verse 23 say we've earned?

What gift have we been given?

When You Know Christ...

Your sins are forgiven by God's grace. (Colossians 1:13-14)

You are to continue to grow in your faith. (Colossians 2:6)

You have great worth because Jesus paid a great price to redeem you. (I Corinthians 6:20)

You can overcome bad habits and develop new ones. (Matthew 19:26)

You can use your talents to bring glory to God. (Colossians 3:17,23)

You have great power available to you through the Holy Spirit. (II Timothy 1:7)

God will finish the good work that He started in you. (Philippians 1:6)

AS YOU LEAVE

- » ASK GOD TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR WORTH COMES FROM YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST.
- » REMIND YOURSELF THAT YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN WHO HAPPENS TO BE AN ATHLETE, NOT AN ATHLETE WHO HAPPENS TO BE A CHRISTIAN.