

The Mapmaker's Guide to Joyful, Spirit-filled Ministry

Map 17 - Our Identity and Influence - Part 2

Spiritual Exercise

One of the mistakes I made in my early Christian life was to assume that the verse I heard someone quote was the whole thought of the passage. As I began to search for deeper meaning, I discovered that the rest of the truth helped me understand more of what had been a mystery to me. Here is one example.

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Philippians 2:12-13

When all I knew of this passage was “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”, it left me confused. Why should I do anything regarding salvation with fear (*phobos*) and trembling? God didn't give us a “spirit of fear”. What should I be trembling with fear about?

Then someone showed me verse 13, and understanding came. My fear should be that I might miss or get in the way of God's work in me. This discovery led to another.

Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Luke 12:32

How awesome to discover that God's good pleasure is to give us His kingdom!! As we prepare to turn our hearts to God in prayer, let's praise Him for the full revelation of His word. Let's commit ourselves to His good pleasure; and ask Him for a personal understanding about His will and work in us.

Prayer

Father God, You are a mystery to us, but only because we have not sought You with our whole hearts. Forgive us. Help us. Thank you for making surrender all the more easy, as we come to understand You in our searching. Thank you for encouraging us in such a loving way. We love because You first loved us. The revelation of Your love is our heart's desire - that we may love You and others more. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction

In the Old Testament, the people of God were led by kings, priests and prophets. Under the New Covenant, the leadership identities have changed. Jesus is now the King over many kings; and everyone in His kingdom is a royal priest. Prophet is now part of a five-fold gift given by the King; along with pastor, teacher, evangelist and apostle. Quite a few new identities have been added (e.g., disciple, bondservant, ambassador, elder and deacon).

Sadly, most Christians have allowed the world to define their identity. From well-intentioned parents, teachers and pastors, to mean-spirited oppressors, controllers and bullies, we have heard and accepted an identity that is much lower than our Creator intends. Of course, Satan is behind much of this. He is conspiring with our carnal nature, suggesting that we settle for less.

Finding and keeping our identity is one of most challenging and critical battles we will face. Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy had no idea of their importance in the battle for Narnia until they discovered that they were the Kings and Queens. Like them, it is time we discovered who we are -

not for ourselves, but for God's glory and for His kingdom. Experiencing joy and power in His plan is dependent on our participation in the full identity and influence we have been assigned.

Definition

Authority (*exousia*): power of choice, liberty of doing as one pleases; physical and mental power (the ability or strength with which one is endued, which he either possesses or exercises); the power of authority (influence) and of right (privilege). *Blue Letter Bible Outline of Biblical Usage*

Influence (noun): The capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behavior of someone or something, or the effect itself. www.google.com

The Greek word for authority, *exousia*, is more often translated "power" (in no less than sixty-nine verses). *Exousia* is the delegated authoritative power of God. With it comes privilege and influence. While the world holds authority to mean something like "the power to tell others what to do", the authority delegated by God is the privilege to influence the world as instruments of God's power.

Consider for a moment what this means about God's love for mankind. He has delegated His power to His children that they might overcome the Evil One; that many might be saved. He has made them a vessel for that power; that they would learn to be instruments and weapons of righteousness; for He is preparing the Bride to co-reign with His Son.

Searching Out the Matter

(All Scripture references, but those noted, are NKJV; Thomas Nelson, Inc.; footnotes excluded)

This lesson will carry us deeper into the mysteries of God. However, it is important to note that you will not find your identity and influence defined here. Your identity is something you must discover by the Holy Spirit. The questions you will find are provided as a help in your search. They are not rhetorical. I challenge you to consider each one carefully - to use them with the intention of hearing from God. Faith comes by hearing; and hearing by the (*rhema*, spoken) word of God.

Quick Review

Before moving on, make sure you can answer the following questions from Part 1:

1. Who is serving who?
2. What does God expect as the return on his investment?
3. How do we determine the nature (or position) of our influence?

Okay, now let's explore the truth about our identity and influence.

A Different Perspective

As we explore our identity in Christ, let's lay aside how we see it (the self-focused view) and consider what it means to Christ. In a sense, putting ourselves in His shoes. Why has He identified us the way He has - both generally (as a church) and in our specific roles? What are His expectations of us?

It will also be helpful to consider our identity in Christ's Kingdom from the perspective of His followers within our spheres of influence. The children of God have both understanding and revelation regarding our identity. Understanding is based on our titles (e.g., elder, teacher, pastor) and what others know them to mean. Revelation comes via the gift of discernment, or through someone that "knows" us well - like the mother who sees her daughter's nurturing gift and senses she will become a nurse.

Whether from understanding or revelation, who we are to the Body of Christ says something profound about our identity. What are their expectations of us? And what does Christ desire us to be to and for them?

Lastly, even the lost are drawn to us by the Holy Spirit. Why are they coming to us? What do they hope to see or find?

It can be a challenge to consider our identity and influence from another's perspective. We have become such self-focused people. You will have to be other-focused and self-controlled. I assure you it will be worth the effort; for you will discover that there is more to you than you have believed.

Beginning with our Foundational Identity

God has established three identities that all Christians are called to fulfill in the New Covenant: Disciple, bondservant, and ambassador.

Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. Matthew 4:19

Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. Matthew 8:23

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. Luke 6:40

Disciples follow their teacher and are made to be like him. As we have learned, this is much different than "student". Students seek to learn only what they need to know, while disciples surrender to a relationship with the One that will make them - to know Him and His life fully.

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men – as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. 1Peter 2:15-16

A bondservant is one who has volunteered to serve; believing that life under the master's reign is better than a life of independence. A bondservant is eager to know his master's heart and to do his bidding.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 2Corinthians 5:20

It is important to recognize that ambassadors are responsible to the kingdom of origin, not to the one to which they are sent. Also, ambassadors carry with them the rights of the kingdom of origin. As we shall see, the responsibilities and rights of our Master are far greater than those of this world.

The lifestyle of a bondservant-disciple-ambassador looks very different from that of the average "Christian": different mindset, different activity, etc. What do you think our King expects to see when He looks out over His kingdom people? What should He see in your life? What influence do you carry?

Greater Than...

Now that we have an understanding of our foundational identity, let's look at Christ's description of us as His followers.

For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. Luke 7:28

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. John 14:12

Have you considered what Christ must have imagined for those that would follow Him? Don't let your opinion of yourself limit your consideration of this. What exploits filled His anticipations for us? Greater than the prophets! Doing greater things than He! What does He expect His designated leaders to accomplish with those within our spheres of influence?

Kings and Priests

^{5b} To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, ⁶ and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.
Amen. Revelation 1:5b-6

⁹ But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises [virtues] of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 1Peter2:9-10

God and His children, in heaven and on earth, know that you have been made a king and a priest - together a royal priesthood. What does this mean to them? Are we carrying the demeanor of a king - or that of a pauper?

⁴ Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1Peter 2:4-6

The holy priesthood were the only ones that could enter the Holy of Holies, where God dwelt between the cherubim and seraphim. What did the people think of those that walked worthy of such an anointing and privilege? What influence did they have with the people?

Christ's Gifts to the Church

Expectations are a normal part of life. We are surrounded by them. Our employer expects us to perform at an acceptable level. Our tennis or bridge partner expects us to keep our heads in the game. And our children... well, our children expect more than we ever imagined someone could expect of another human being. Such is life.

Drowned in the expectations of those we know and love are the expectations of the One we love most of all. What do we do with the expectations of the Gift Giver?

⁷ But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ¹¹ And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;
Ephesians 4:7,11-13

Have you ever considered that you might be one of Christ's gifts to the church? Have you asked Him which gift He intends for you to be for Him and His church? What do these gifts and identities mean to Him and them? What should the church anticipate from you as His gift? What influence have you been given to accomplish Christ's intention? What is the consequence if these gifts are not in operation?

What about the "positions" of elder and deacon?

¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.
James 5:14-15

For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. 1Timothy 3:13

What is Christ and His Body looking for out of these individuals? Are we taking full advantage of their anointing for the spiritual and physical needs of the fellowship? Why not? Are you one of them?

The Temple of God

Lastly, let us consider our identity in the world - with those lost and wandering outside the Kingdom of God. Have you ever considered what it means to be the temple of God on the earth?

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

“I will dwell in them
And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people.”

2Corinthians 6:16

²¹ So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”

²² And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

John 20:21-23

We are the temple of the New Covenant; dedicated for the habitation of God. Like temples past, the presence and glory of God should fill us, and we should become the place where God can be seen and experienced. Most important to Jesus here, we are to be the place where the rest of humanity will know God works on their behalf, to repair all that has been broken; to know our God forgives and restores. God established the temple as a holy place of sacrifice, forgiveness, atonement, meeting, and restoration. Those in the world that are drawn by the Holy Spirit, though they may not know it, are looking for this in us.

Conclusion

Now that we know God has planted a desire in our heart and surrounded us with fellowship for the adventure, we must continue to search out the center of God’s will in the identity He has given us. This may be an identity we have already been given - explicitly or implicitly. It may be one that He is waiting for us to step into. And we may be resisting it - out of fear, disobedience, misunderstanding or false-humility. It is time we stepped into the identity and influence given to each one of us individually, and as a fellowship, by God Almighty.

Application

The things of God are foolishness to the world. This includes the way we think of ourselves. We must resist the deception of the enemies of God to dumb down our identity. On the other hand, we must be careful to avoid presumption. The only way to know our personal identity and sphere of influence is to ask and receive the Lord’s revelation.

Reckoning

My identity and influence in this life is beyond the world’s assessment - it is of an eternal kingdom.

Assignment

1. Review your answers to the questions asked throughout this lesson. Discuss the ones that most impacted you with someone you are discipling.
2. In a two column chart record what God has had to say about your identity (column 1) and your influence potential (column 2). Periodically review this as a reminder of your identity and influence for the kingdom and glory of God.
3. Revisit the Sphere of Influence tool with consideration for your identity and influence for them. What are you to each one?

Devotion

The Conflict of Dreams

From Rob Streetman, inLight Adventure Blog

Dear Dreamers,

There is something wrong with the church in America. If that comes as a surprise to you, then I strongly (but tenderly) suggest you get your head out of the sand. The statistics are irrefutable: Divorce and abortion rates the same in the church as in the world; 65 - 87% of college freshman, who were raised in Christian families, are leaving the church; the total dollars spent by the church in America divided by the number of baptisms - \$1.55 million. The question is no longer "Do we have a problem?", but "What can be done about it?"

Personally, I have not given up hope in God's grace and mercy for the church in American. I believe that His eyes are still roaming, to and fro across this Earth (and our nation), looking for those in whom He can show Himself strong. I just wonder how much more He will tolerate. It is time for decisive action; action that will not come from the corporate church, but from each individual and family.

The answer is radical, but simple.

I am convinced that every Christian must intentionally, and solemnly, return the American Dream - trade it back in - for the dream God has had for you since before time began. As I've said before, the American Dream has cast a spell on the church in America. We have drunk deeply of its potion, and have become drunk with its intoxication. It is impossible to overestimate the damage our worldly drunkenness and stupor has brought down on our children, grandchildren... Oh, Lord, when will it stop?

Let me be clear - the American Dream and God's dream are not the same. It is an insult to Him to even suggest such a thing. The abundant life is not measured in square footage, retirement savings and legacies. America is no longer a Christian nation. America is more like the world (described as our enemy in the Bible) than many nations on this Earth. And friendship with the world is enmity toward God. When will we stop investing in, and depending on, the kingdoms of this world? Are we not called to be fully committed to the kingdom of God?

Dear brethren, we are so far from God's dream for us that it's just too difficult to describe it in terms that are understandable in our current situation. In fact, it would be better to challenge you with seeking that perspective from Him and His word. Here are a few good starting points:

But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 1 Peter 2:9-10

...that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power... Ephesians 1:18-19

Please, please, please, don't stop with a mental assent to these verses. Take this to the Lord and ask Him to show you how much greater His dream is for you and your family - not in the sweet-by-and-by, but in the abundance of His life right now.

And ask for the grace to repent of such a tragic, foolish transaction. Our children's eternal lives depend on it.

Your fellow ambassador,

Rob