

FAITH FOUNDATIONS

Theme 2: A new identity in Christ

Overview of this theme



Week 1: I am loved

Learning objective:

To recognize our identity as dearly loved children of God, loved unconditionally for who we are, contrasted with being loved according to what we do or how we perform.

Scripture Jer 31:3, Isaiah 49:13-16a, 1 Jn 3:1, Eph 3:17b-19

Key elements:

Explore the amazing truth that we are God's beloved. Henri Nouwen is our teacher tonight.

- Our sense of identity tends to be determined by what we do or what others say about us.
- Jesus' strength came from his knowledge of who he was, the beloved Son of God. That gave him strength to face all the temptations and trials and hardships of his ministry.
- We can learn to do the same. We need to learn to know--deeply--that we are beloved daughters and sons of God. We need to learn to let this truth speak louder than our experience. But this is not easy. We have to keep coming back to it and train ourselves to believe it.
- (The 2nd part in the series at The Crystal Cathedral is also excellent and applicable. Watch it yourself, and point your mentorees to it in the Dig Deeper section).

Application:

The questions from the Bible study capture it well. Be sure you have considered these for yourself so you can help your group get their minds and heart around them:

- What effect do you think it might have on your life as the truth about your belovedness really sinks into your heart?
- In what ways have you experienced God's unconditional love for you?
- What are some practical ways for you to claim the knowledge that you are loved unconditionally?

This week try to stay aware of this truth and the effect this has on your experience.

Tips for the group discussion:

- Open with a discussion about the video.
 1. What stands out for you from Nouwen's teaching?
 2. Think back to Henri's 1st diagram. How much does your sense of who you are come from what you do, or what others say about you, or how people treat you?
- Look at the Bible passages: Read them together, then give them time individually to make the things that strike them. Let their observations lead a conversation about the truths and promises of the passages, then move into the application section.
- Read Nouwen's *Our First Love* together (or point them to it for home).
- Be sure to leave sufficient time for prayer.
- Encourage them in following through with the Dig Deeper suggestions at home for learning more, and also to allow God to speak to them personally through the Bible.

Resources:

Henri Nouwen *Becoming the Beloved* teachings (Hour of Power)

Henri Nouwen article: *Our First Love* (p. 2 of Bible study)

Henri Nouwen book: *The Return of the Prodigal Son*

Week 2: Who I Am in Christ

Learning objectives:

- That they'll begin to grasp that they have been given a new identity as children of God. A transaction changed our status when we believed in Christ. Tonight we'll try to get our minds and hearts around this change in status so that we can begin to apply it to our daily lives.

Scripture Ephesians 1:3-8

Key elements:

- I've shortened this passage to just 6 verses which should make it very manageable to complete. (For those who are enthusiastic, point them to Eph 2:1-10 to do the same observation and interpretation.)
- This passage is loaded with truths about what God has done for us in choosing us and making us his own, and how that shows how incredible God's love for us is. Be sure to soak yourself in the truths of this passage in preparation for the evening. (I've underlined key truths in the text to help them to notice them.)

Application:

- What does Ephesians 1 (for starters) tell us about our identity and worth?
- What does this mean to me personally?
- (At home) Reflect upon "Who I Am in Christ" truths. Claim these truths about our changed status and allow them to alter the way we think about ourselves.

Tips for the group discussion:

- I have specifically chosen the NLT in English because it puts potentially difficult theological terms like 'predestination' in understandable normal speech. I think it's wise for all our groups to use this English translation - I base this upon the feedback I've received through all my years in Crossroads that the English language releases people (especially those from the reformed tradition) from the loaded terminology of their upbringing.
- You may want to open your Bibles to the Dutch as well, but be aware of potential tangents of discussing Predestination and Election. Keep the conversation focus on the most important stuff about being chosen to be God's children, made his heirs, the wonder and privilege of being brought into God's family.
- It'll be helpful if they write on the chart during the group, at least for some of the verses, for this will model for them how they can pull out biblical principles on their own.
- Encourage them to review the passage at home (and point them to the Dig Deeper section).
- Before you close, move on to Anderson's Who I am in Christ verses. If you have time you may want to model how they can take one of the truths, look it up, and apply it to their lives. (Choose one beforehand which is meaningful to you.)
- Idea for the prayer time: Each one responds to (just) one of the truths they've learned this evening - with thanksgiving that it IS true, and with a prayer that this truth would be worked out in their experience.

Resources:

- Terry Wardle Outrageous Love, Transforming Power, Chapter 2
- Neil Anderson Victory over the Darkness, Chapters 3-4

Mentor Evening: A reflection on my identity in Christ

Objectives of the evening:

- Continue to get to know each other and develop relationships of trust.
- To 'seal' what has been taught this month. You'll want to go away with a good sense of their current understanding of their new identity - and with having helped them to grasp it a little bit deeper. (Remember that this is a d-e-e-p theme, so affirm the steps they are taking and encourage them on this path.)
- To introduce the idea of Status and Style. Our status is secure / Our lifestyle changes in response to it. We are introducing this idea here and will come back to it later in the Transformation theme.

Keep in mind:

- Discover their level of understanding of this month's theme and how they are putting it into practice: Do they have questions? Stories of growth already? Are they experiencing barriers?
- Review for yourself this month's learning objectives and have a few questions 'in your pocket' about believing more in what God says about them than what they hear from other sources (or their feelings or experience) ... and how it is going as they begin to work into their daily experience what it means to live out their secure status in Christ.
- Be aware of who missed an evening. Encourage sharing from others to fill in the gaps and consider meeting separately if needed.