

Why Christian Teens Have an Identity Crisis

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Gen Z is facing an unprecedented identity crisis. Every time I ask youth pastors or Christian leaders what they think the biggest struggle for teens today, the answer is the same: identity. Teens are struggling to know who they are and what they matter. I hear their questions and, as an early-20s Gen Z, I can relate.

Who am I? What determines my identity? What is the purpose of life?

Do a quick web search on “identity crisis” and it’s not hard to figure out the general consensus on how to fix one. We’re encouraged to “look inward and explore,” “go on a journey of self-discovery,” “do things that make you happy,” “ignore judgment” and, in short, turn our focus entirely toward ourselves. According to this thinking, our identity is something only we can define, and our emotions get the ruling vote on who we are. Any objective standard of identity has been torn away. Growing up amid such uncertainty, is it any wonder teens are questioning who they are?

Identity in Christ . . . or Identity Crisis?

Pastors and parents understand the importance of identity and have generally sought to help teens recognize their identity is in Christ. I’ve heard numerous sermons, read dozens of articles, and listened to countless songs that talk about “who God says we are” or encourage us that we’re loved or valuable or worthy.

This content comes from the right desire, but often, it starts at the wrong place. Understanding who we are in Christ is critically important, but beginning a theology of identity with who *we* are leaves out the most important piece of the story—who God is.

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Lists of “who you are” statements are filled with deep truth but often little substance. *You are loved* . . . but those words hardly make a dent in love-hungry hearts if they don’t understand *who* loves them. *You are chosen* . . . but chosen by whom? Why were we chosen? *You are redeemed* . . . but those words mean nothing if we don’t deeply comprehend what we’re redeemed from and the greatness of our Redeemer’s heart. Far too often, we open with the “you are,” “we are,” “I am,” story instead of the “he is” story.

Identity in Christ Begins with the Gospel

Teens (and adults) *do* need to know who they are. If we disregard the important truths that we’re loved, chosen, redeemed, and forgiven, we have a truncated theology of identity. But when our default responses to important questions of identity focus more on us than on God, we settle for answers that mimic the world’s self-focused approach.

“Identity in Christ” cannot be separated from Christ and all that comes within the message of the gospel—God’s holiness, mankind’s rebellion, and Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. If our teaching of identity glosses over these foundational truths, “identity in Christ” simply becomes a Christian catchphrase that leaves the hearers wondering how to find identity in God when all they’ve been told is more about themselves.

Identity in Christ Understands the *Imago Dei*

To have a solid understanding of biblical identity, we also need to comprehend the rich theology of the *imago Dei*—image of God. Scripture tells us that “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” ([Gen. 1:27](#)). Humans are the only creatures with this incredible distinction.

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This may sound like we are back to focusing inward, but the *imago Dei* has radical implications for identity that go beyond ourselves. After all, it’s about his image, not our own. We’re simply bearers—reflections and shadows—of the image. The *imago Dei* imbues humanity with intrinsic value, reveals the depth of God’s character and creativity, gives us guidelines on how we should live, work, and use our bodies, and defines the ultimate goal of our lives—to glorify and exalt our Creator.

Yet the greatest power and beauty of the *imago Dei* is found in the character of the God whose image we bear. Our understanding of identity is enriched and made secure as we plunge deeper into the immeasurable depths of God’s goodness, power, and wisdom. The more we know God, the more secure our identity will be. Created in the image of a perfect and holy God and shaped by his hand, we can rest securely knowing that the DNA in our bodies and all the days of our lives were written before our hearts began beating. And the One who wrote the script is sovereign over all.

We Need More God-Discovery

The true reason for today’s identity crisis is not that we have forgotten who we are, but that, as a society, we have rejected the God who created us. Cut off from the source of all life and truth, humanity naturally flounders. Hard hearts sink into confusion and despair as they refuse to grasp hold of the lifeline of truth extended to them—the knowledge of God and the saving blood of Jesus. (I explore these themes further in [Stand Up, Stand Strong: A Call to Bold Faith in a Confused Culture](#).)

There is a greater and more lasting standard of identity than what can be found from an internet search. Look to God’s Word and explore his truth. Go on a journey of knowing the God who created you. Do things that glorify God and serve others. Ignore the lies that tell you identity is found within yourself. Turn your focus to Jesus Christ and his truth and righteousness have the ruling vote on who you are.

We cannot find within ourselves what can only be found in the heart of God. But in his heart, we find all we need more besides.

Involved in Women's Ministry? Add This to Your Discipleship Tool Kit.



We need one another. Yet we don't always know how to develop deep relationships to help us grow in the Christian life. Younger believers benefit from the guidance and wisdom of more mature saints as their faith deepens. But too often, potential mentors lack clarity and training on how to engage in discipling those they can influence.

Whether you're longing to find a spiritual mentor or hoping to serve as a guide for someone else, we have a FREE resource to encourage and equip you. In *Growing Together: Taking Mentoring Beyond Small Talk and Prayer Requests*, Melissa Kruger, TGC's vice president of discipleship programming, offers encouraging lessons to guide conversations that promote spiritual growth in bot

the mentee and mentor.

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