

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Dare to Be IDENTIFIED WITH CHRIST

Introduction: Amen. Well today, we are continuing our series “Dare to Be Different.” And we are exploring ways that we might be obedient to **Romans 12:2**: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” We’ve dared to be **KINGDOM-MINDED**. We’ve dared to be **TRUTHFUL**. We’ve dared to be **LOVING**. And today I want to dare you to be **IDENTIFIED WITH CHRIST**. That’s where we are going today, church.

I read a stat this last week that **91% of Americans agree with this statement: “The best way to find yourself is by looking within yourself.”**¹ The best way to find yourself is by looking *within yourself*! In other words, “If you want to discover who you are and what your purpose is, the place to look is inside your heart... [So] trust your heart. Go with your gut. No one else gets to define you.”² You have to be true to yourself. You define yourself!

Sounds dreamy, right? Sounds like the typical speech given at a graduation ceremony. Be true to yourself! You do you! Live your Truth! You can be anything you want to be. Just look inside of yourself and self-actualize.

Now all of that sounds great. That kind of stuff gets us pumped up! But there’s a danger in living your life that way. And nobody ever tells you about that. Here’s the danger—if you try to find your identity by what’s inside of you, you may find yourself disappointed down the road a little ways. You may find out that what’s inside of you isn’t a solid foundation to build your identity or your life on.

Here’s why. I see three problems with this. Let me elaborate.³

1) The first problem is that what’s inside of you is unstable. It’s unstable, because when you look deep inside yourself, you will find that your deepest longings and dreams contradict each other. For example, I love this person and I want to marry them, but I also want to have a phenomenally successful career. And I also want to have a big family, but I also want to work hard and make lots of money, but I also want to travel the world and have a lot of vacation time. And I want to have lots of kids, but I also want to spend a lot of alone time with my spouse. I want to live in a small town because it’s slow-paced and safe, but I also want to imbibe the urban energy of the big city. I want this, but I want this. I want that, but I also want that. **Francis Spufford** says it this way, “You are a being whose wants make no sense. They don’t harmonize. Your desires deep down are discordantly arranged so that you want truly to possess and you want truly not to possess at the very same time. You are equipped (you eventually will realize) for farce and tragedy much more than you are for happy endings.”⁴ **I’ve never heard a statement like that at a graduation ceremony.**

The point is this. Those feelings and desires inside of you are unstable. And the fact that you waffle back and forth between those desires reveals that your inner feelings are not as ordered and coherent as you’d like to think. They are jumbled in your mind, and they are constantly in flux. And if you build your identity and your hopes and dreams on what’s inside of you, you will live your life confused and frustrated.

2) Here’s another problem. What’s inside of you is oftentimes deceitful.

I read a book this last week by Trevin Wax called *Rethinking Your Self: The Power of Looking Up Before Looking In*. Every person in this room who is 40 years old and younger should go read that book. It’s phenomenally insightful at helping us discern some of the false narratives in our world right now.

¹ Taken from Trevin Wax, *Rethinking Your Self: The Power of Looking Up Before Looking In* (Nashville: B&H, 2020), Kindle Location 527. For a good summary of Wax’s ideas in this book, see his article “‘Finding Yourself’ Is Harder Than You Think” at the TGC website: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/finding-yourself/>

² Ibid.

³ What follows derives from a great message I heard once by Tim Keller given to Wheaton College entitled, “Our Identity: The Christian Alternative to Late Modernity’s Story,” November 11, 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ehw87PqTwKw>. Keller actually gives four reasons why we can’t find our identity inside of ourselves: 1) It’s incoherent, 2) It’s unstable, 3) it’s illusory, and it’s crushing.

⁴ Quoted in Ibid. Taken from Francis Spufford, *Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense* (HarperOne, 2013).

Wax writes, “A recent survey shows 86 percent of Americans, when asked about finding happiness, agree with the statement: ‘To be fulfilled in life, you should pursue the things you desire most.’ Here is the key to happiness! Look inside to find yourself, figure out what you desire most, and then find fulfillment in life by pursuing those desires. Go for whatever you want, and never give up!”⁵ But here’s the problem with that. Your desires aren’t trustworthy. “Looking into your heart to discover your deepest desires isn’t as easy as you think it is. Your desires will trick you. ‘Follow your heart,’ we say, but we can find case after case where people say their hearts led them astray.”⁶ What about a drug addict who only desires the thing that is killing him? Should he follow his heart? What about the adulteress who wants to cheat on her husband and walk away from her family. That’s her deepest desire. Should she just follow her heart?

I heard Tim Keller say once that many people in our day are looking for marriage. He says many people today want “a spouse who ‘accepts me as I am’ and neither demands that you change nor requires you to sacrifice any of your own substantial desires, interests, and dreams. This kind of marriage is a fiction—it doesn’t exist.”⁷ Similarly, people are looking for a church like that too... a place that is all acceptance, acceptance, acceptance, without the slightest bit of expectation. Even if a church like that does exist, that’s not a healthy church. And you should not be looking for that.

Sometimes when you look inside of yourself, you know what you find? You find selfishness. Sometimes you find hatefulness. Is that the real you? Sometimes you find lust and sinful sexual desire? Is that the “real you”? Should you just let that out and let the world have to deal with it? I think some people in our world today say “yes.” That’s what you do. I’m not so sure.

3) Here’s another problem. Finding your identity by looking inside of yourself is oftentimes **crushing**. And sometimes we as parents put inordinate amounts of pressure on our kids by saying stuff like, “Just follow your dreams.” “Just be true to yourself.” And “You can be anything you want to be when you grow up.” No! No, they can’t. If they’re 5’4” and 130 pounds soaking wet, they can’t play professional football. Alright! And if they aren’t mechanically inclined, they can’t be engineers. I know. I tried it.

Sometimes dreams can be exciting, and they can be invigorating, but they can also be a crushing burden if we don’t realize them. And if you haven’t lived long enough to have your dreams dashed against the rocks, just wait. It’s coming.

And that’s not the saddest thing in life, by the way. The saddest thing is when people achieve their wildest dreams in Hollywood or in athletics or wherever, and they realize it’s utterly empty. It’s a sham. It doesn’t bring lasting contentment.

There’s a great scene in the movie “Chariots of Fire” where Harold Abrams, the sprinter tells his girlfriend, “When that gun goes off, I’ve got 10 seconds to justify my existence in this world.” “I’ve got 10 seconds to justify my existence in this world.” How many people have tried to acquire meaning in their lives by something like that? And what happens if you don’t succeed? How do you rebound from that? And even when you do succeed, what are you left with? There’s an inevitable letdown when you realize that you’ve achieved everything you’ve set out to achieve, and it has left you empty and unfulfilled. Let me tell you folks, if you find your identity in that, you will fail. Because even if you succeed you will fail. And it will crush you.

And to all that you might say, “Thanks a lot, Pastor Tony. Now I’m depressed. You’ve just dashed all my hopes and dreams. What do we do now?” Well, what if there’s another way? What if there’s a better way, a more stable way, to think about identity? Could I interest you in that?

Let’s talk about that this morning. Church I want to give you today four statements about your identity. Four statements to build your life on. And I want to approach this by addressing this overarching question. **What is your true identity as a Christian?**

One question. Four answers. Here we go. #1. What is your true identity, Christian?

1. You are **made** in the **image** of **God**

Genesis 1:27 – So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Psalms 100:3 – Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁵ Wax, *Rethink Your Self*, Kindle Location 579.

⁶ Ibid, 604.

⁷ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (Penguin, 2016), 144.

Now this is true of all human beings, not just Christians. All human beings are made in the image of God. But still, we need to be reminded of this as Christians. We are made in God's image. That statement is both humbling and exhilarating. Why is it shortsighted to look inside of ourselves for meaning and for identity? It's shortsighted, because we are a created being. And there is a Creator! We are a derivative being. Looking inside of ourselves for purpose and meaning is insufficient.

But when we look out on the world and the animal kingdom and we see the vast beauty of all that God created... when we see the beauty of the peacock and the majesty of the Siberian tiger... when we see the complexity of the duck-billed platypus, and the durability of a penguin or a whale or an African Elephant ... we see these animals and praise God for them. But we can also say, "they ain't got nothin' on us." We are made in the image of God. I am made in the image of God. When we start talking identity, we've got to start there. Anything else is deficient.

And by the way, realizing that our identity derives from God is also stabilizing. We don't have to self-create meaning. We don't have to self-actualize purpose. That's incredibly stressful. Instead, we can go to God, and say, "You created me. You know who I am, and how I work best. You tell me who I am. You tell me what I was meant for." Man, that's so much better than the pressure of having to look inside of myself and try to determine my purpose in life.

Not only are you made in the image of God, Christian, but you are also a child of God. Here's a second answer to that question, What is your true identity as a Christian? And this one, unlike the first one, is limited to only Christians. Christian,

2. You are a **child of God**

John 1:12 – But to all who did receive [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

Galatians 3:26 – For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

Romans 8:14-17 – For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...

When you get saved, Christian, the Holy Spirit comes inside of you. The Holy Spirit reminds you constantly that you belong to God. You are a child of God! Your identity is not found inside yourself. It's not determined by the culture or what the culture says about you. It's determined by what God says about you. God says, "because of your faith in Jesus Christ, you are mine. You are my child, and nothing will ever, ever change that."

"Pastor Tony, I'm a republican. I'm a democrat. I'm an American. I'm Illinoisan. I'm black. I'm white. I'm Asian. I'm Hispanic. I'm introverted. I'm extroverted. I'm a Cubs fan. I'm a Cardinals fan. I'm a vegetarian, Pastor Tony. I'm ... not a vegetarian. That's who I am."

"I'm a teacher. I'm an engineer. I'm a cop. I'm a nurse. I'm a stay-at-home mom. I'm a father. I'm a mother. I'm a husband. I'm a wife. I'm a son. I'm a daughter. I'm a grandfather. I'm a grandmother. I'm an elder in the church. I'm a deacon. I'm a volunteer. I'm a musician on the worship team. That's who I am."

"I'm disabled. I'm diabetic, Pastor Tony." "I'm a veteran. I'm a valedictorian. I'm male. I'm female. I'm a five on the enneagram test. I'm an ESTJ. I'm a simple person, Pastor Tony. I'm complicated, Pastor Tony. I'm a wide-eyed optimist. I'm a pessimist. That's just who I am."

Listen, Listen. Before you are any of those other things, and there is nothing wrong with being any of those things... Before you are any of those other things, you are made in the image of God and you are a child of God because of your faith in Jesus Christ. Your identity has to start there! And if it doesn't start there, you will live a disordered and unstable life. Life is hard enough, even when you find your identity in Christ. Why would you find your identity in something else... something inherently unstable?

Do you know why identity politics is so powerful and destructive in our world right now? Do you know why people get so angry and spiteful and even violent about their "identity"? It's because they don't have anything else. They don't derive their essence, their meaning from their Creator. And that's unstable. If you are a democrat or a republican before you are a child of God, you are unstable. What happens when your party doesn't get elected? You lose it! If you are a parent, before you are a child of God, what happens when your kids fail you? You lose it! What happens when your spouse dies and you

have built your life on your identity of being married? What happens when you lose your job, and you have built your life on professional success, instead of building it on solid ground?

Here, write these down. Let me give you a few “Fake IDs” that people build their life on.⁸ I’ll give you five. Here’s the first.

Finding my identity in my **“self”**

We’ve dealt with this already. You be you. You do you. Live your truth. I self-identify as this. I self-identify as that. Me, me, me, me, me, me, me! Don’t people grow tired of that? Don’t people look inside of themselves and think, there’s got to be something better in this world than what’s inside of me? **“God, I hope that’s true. God, I hope you exist and can give meaning to my life.”** God does exist and he gives true meaning to your life that you can’t find in your “self.”⁹ C.S. Lewis said, **“God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way.”**¹⁰

Finding my identity in my **accomplishments**

The problem with this is that few people really accomplish what they set out to accomplish. So what happens when you fail? And even those who do accomplish what they want are disillusioned by it. I read once that a large number of professional athletes struggle with suicide and depression after they retire, even the really successful ones! Because they get to the end, and they say, **“Is this all there is?” Is this what I worked so hard for? I thought it’d be better than this.”**

Listen, even if you accomplish everything you set out to accomplish in this life, and even if you are happy with it after you accomplish it... even if Tom Brady, fifty years from now, is happy with his accomplishment and all those Superbowls, according to a modern day secular mindset, the sun will burn up the earth in a few million years and nobody will ever, ever remember us... and it will all be forgotten for eternity. How do y’all feel about that? Is that depressing? I’m not trying to depress you or demotivate you from being goal-oriented. Just don’t find your identity in your accomplishments. They won’t last.

Finding my identity in my **dreams**

Chase those rainbows, baby! That’s where you find yourself. Just follow your dreams. It’s all very reminiscent of a song from a great musical, “The Sound of Music.”

Climb every mountain, Ford every stream,

Follow every rainbow, ‘Till you find your dream.

When I was a kid... here’s a little insight into your pastor... when I was a kid, I didn’t listen to Backstreet Boys or New Kids on the Block. I listened to Michael W. Smith and Rich Mullins. It’s true. And I’m not ashamed to say it. That’s who we listened to as a family. And we also listened to Simon and Garfunkel for some reason. I don’t really know why.

But my musical soulmate as a kid was Rich Mullins. And I still remember that song “Maker of Noses.” And in that song, Mullins satirizes contemporary wisdom in our day this way,

They said boy you just follow your heart // But my heart just led me into my chest

They said follow your nose // But the direction changed every time I went and turned my head

And they said boy you just follow your dreams // But my dreams were only misty notions

I remember singing that song and arguing with Rich Mullins about it. **“Shouldn’t we follow our dreams, Rich. Come on. Don’t be such a cynic. I should follow my dreams. I’m going to be an NBA Basketball player someday.”** But then you get a little older. Then your dreams change or your dreams get dashed against the rocks because of something outside of your control, and you say, **“you know, I think he was right. My dreams were only misty notions.”**

And then, Rich sings this. And this has been the heart cry of my life...

But the Father of hearts and the Maker of noses

And the Giver of dreams He’s the one I have chosen

And I will follow Him

Don’t find your identity in your dreams, Harvest Decatur. That doesn’t end well.

Finding my identity in my **culture**

⁸ See the article by David Powlison, “Brother, Where Is Your Identity?”: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/brother-where-is-your-identity/>

⁹ For more on this, see Wax’s Trevin Wax, *Rethinking Your Self* on how to look up to find identity before you look in and out. Also see Jen Oshman, *Enough About Me: Find Lasting Joy in the Age of Self* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).

¹⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 1952), 50.

In her excellent book, *Enough About Me*, Jen Oshman writes, “Culture tells us the remedy for our burnout is more me-time. What we need is more rest. More quiet times alone. A nicer luxury vehicle that can block out the stress of the world. Possibly a nanny and a cleaning lady to help us balance it all. More wine. More coffee. Therapy, medicine. More self-talk. Get your tribe, get your people, get your momfia to remind you that you are enough and you can do this. But I propose that we need to go way back to the beginning. We need to remember who we are and whose we are. How were we created and by whom?” “God says, ‘I made you in my image to live for my glory.’ Culture says, ‘Be self-made in whatever image you like and live for your own glory. This is a counterfeit calling, and it’s killing us.”¹¹

Be careful that you don’t find your identity in your culture. And there are certain things that we imbibe from our culture without even knowing it. Even as Christians! That’s why we need to be transformed! That’s why Paul says, “Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”¹²

Finding my identity in my **socio-political group**

Gay. Bi. Straight. Trans. LGBTQ+. Black. White. Non-white. Liberal. Conservative. Progressive. Libertarian. Blue-collar. White-collar. Suburban. Urban. Rural. WASP. non-WASP. Finding your identity in these things, and then weaponizing them to punish others who are not like you is not the way forward. Identity politics is not the answer for what ails our country. And it’s not the answer for what ails our souls.¹³

So enough about Fake IDs. Let’s drill down a little deeper on our “true identity” as Christians. Go ahead and write this down as #3 in your notes. You are made in the image of God. You are a child of God. And thirdly...

3. You are a **follower** of Jesus Christ

Now we should intuit that from the term “Christian.” Christians are “Christ”-ians. We should be identified by Him as followers of him. But that’s not always clear with the term “Christian.” **Sometimes “Christian” is just a religious box to check on a Census poll.**

But if you are truly a blood-bought, born-again, Spirit-filled Christian, you are a follower of Jesus. And your identity and your activity is linked to him.

Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

Jesus said, “whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matt 10:38).

Jesus said, “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also” (John 12:26).

Jesus went up to his first disciples and said, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” And you know what they did? They left their nets and they followed Jesus (Mark 1:16-20).

I think one of the great illustrations of this in the NT is the Apostle Matthew. Matthew, if you remember, was a hated tax-collector. And yet, here’s what Matthew writes when Jesus interacts with him in Galilee.

Matthew 9:9 – As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.”

That’s it. It’s all very unceremonious. **“Follow me!” “Okay! Let’s go.”**

And later when Jesus was questioned about calling a sinner to come follow him, Jesus answered very succinctly, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt 9:13). As Paul writes, “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). All have sinned; but here’s the good news, **“Jesus only saves sinners.”** And he calls sinners like us to come and follow him. Isn’t that good?

Matthew was one of Jesus’s disciples. Jesus called other disciples to come follow him. And then, he told those disciples to make more disciples. In fact, the last command he gave them in the **Book of Matthew** is “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” **Part of being a follower of Jesus is inviting other people to become followers with you. A disciple is a learner. Learners have to learn, and learners have to learn well enough to teach others. That’s the nature of a disciple. That’s what a**

¹¹ Oshman, *Enough About Me*, 38, 53.

¹² For more on this, see the Video, “What the Bible Says about Our Identity in Christ”: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/video/bible-says-identity-christ/>

¹³ To see the historical trajectory from focus on “self” to destructive identity politics, see Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Crossway, 2020).

“follower” of Jesus does. Jesus said in Luke 6:40 – “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.” **We are becoming like our teacher, Jesus Christ.**

Now here’s the thing about following Jesus. Let me be clear about this. Your identity as a follower of Jesus cannot be trumped by anything else, and it cannot be kept secret. Your following of Jesus has to dominate everything in your life. Jesus is the King. He’s the Lord. You don’t half-heartedly follow the King, but then have allegiance to someone else on the side. That’s treason.

Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it (Luke 9:23-27). Jesus also said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:25-33).

And to that you might say, **“Yikes, that’s asking a lot.”** But if you look at that passage in detail, and if you study that with the best commentaries, I think you come to find out the real point of what Jesus was saying. He’s saying with some pretty characteristic cultural language and some Hebrew figures of speech, that nothing in your life can be prioritized above Jesus. **You’ve got to put him first. You’ve got to surrender all to him including your very life if you want to be his disciple.**

And I know how this sounds. This goes against every impulse we have in our independent, individualistic, Western society. This really rubs us the wrong way. But this is what Jesus calls us to, and this is where the greatest human satisfaction is found in this world. In fact the deepest joys and most satisfying aspects of life can’t be found any other way. They can’t be found surrendering to yourself or to your family or to some other human cause or endeavor. They’re only found in following Jesus and surrendering your life to him as a disciple.

And also, you can’t be a silent follower of Jesus either. Jesus said, “if you confess me before men, I’ll confess you before my Father. If you deny me, I’ll deny you” (Luke 12:8-9). **You might say, “Shh, Pastor Tony. Shh. I’m one of those secret Christians. I follow Christ, but I just don’t tell anyone about it?” O yeah. Well I’m a purple unicorn! I’m the abominable snowman. It’s the same category. Secret Christians and they abominable snowman. They are both figments of your imagination.** There are no secret followers of Jesus Christ. To be a follower of Christ is to be a professing follower of Jesus Christ. And why wouldn’t you want to profess that? Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sin, in order to save your soul. Why would you want to hide that from people? Why would you want to be secretive about that?

And here’s a final statement about your identity. Write this down as #4. This last one might hurt your feelings a little bit, so brace yourself. 1) You are made in the image of God, 2) You are a child of God, 3) You are a follower of Jesus Christ, and finally...
4. You are a sheep

If you ever start struggling with your identity, with who you are, do me a favor. Go and read John 10. Go and read where Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.” Anchor your identity in that.

Now we’re speaking in metaphor here obviously. I’m using Jesus’s language of sheep and shepherds in **John 10**. And understandably that designation, sheep, doesn’t sound very flattering. Some people recoil in horror at first hearing that. **“I don’t want to be a sheep. Sheep are dumb. Sheep are weak. Sheep are fragile, little animals.”** And that’s true. But the context of our identity as a sheep in **John 10** is actually a very precious thing.

You see, in **John 10**, Jesus was talking to a group of Pharisees and he says this, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (10:1-3).

Later in that same passage, in **vs. 11**, Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep” (10:11-15).

Now let me say two things about this passage. Two things about your identity. 1) First, Jesus knows you by name and calls you. 2) And Jesus, the Good Shepherd, dies for you.¹⁴

First of all notice in **vs. 3**. “The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (10:3). Listen, church, you need someone to name you. And Jesus says, “[The good shepherd] calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” Now a few things here about sheep. Sheep are the most non-self-sufficient animals in the animal kingdom. They are terribly vulnerable and terribly inept at taking care of themselves. And that’s part of the reason that sheep were from the very beginning domesticated animals that were used as livestock by human beings. And this sheep/shepherd imagery used by Jesus to describe God and his people goes way back in Biblical history. **Psalm 23**, “The LORD [Yawheh] is my shepherd... he makes me lie down in green pastures, etc., etc.” And I know that we often attribute a lack of intelligence to sheep. That’s true compared to some other mammals (e.g. horses and dogs and dolphins). But the picture that God paints with this sheep imagery is not a lack of intelligence, but a lack of self-sufficiency. The sheep need the shepherd, because they are vulnerable. And they are dependent on the shepherd.

And here’s another important aspect about sheep. They respond by name when you call them. That’s true. **They aren’t like cats. They’re more like dogs in that way.** And Jesus says about us, “The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” That is such a precious image right there. We hear Jesus’ voice and he calls us by name. And he leads us.

Sanja and I when we were in Turks and Caicos a few years ago. I got a chance to preach for a church down there. And while we were there, we sang that song, **“He knows my Name.”**

***He knows my name /// He knows my every thought
He sees each tears that falls // And hears me when I call”***

That’s the idea that Jesus conveys in **John 10**. The sheep are being called by the Great Shepherd, Jesus. It’s such a tender and precious image. I hope you feel that.

And I know how it is in our day. The idea that Jesus would have such ownership over our lives that we would be compared to sheep is absolutely repulsive in our day. Modern people hate this. **“Me a sheep? Never. I’m the shepherd! I’m the master of my life. “I am the master of my fate! I am the captain of my soul.” “Why would I want to be a follower of Jesus? Why would I want to be a sheep? I want to discover my own identity. I want to create my own identity.”** That’s the spirit of our age right now. You’ve got to find yourself. You’ve got to be true to yourself (whatever that means). You’ve got to self-express and self-discover. That’s the opposite of a sheep. Expressive individualism! That’s what we call it in our day.

Can I just tell you something? I’ve done the expressive individualism thing. I’ve followed that road before in my own life. It’s not all that it’s cracked up to be. It’s unstable. It’s deceitful. It’s crushing. And you know where I am right now? You know where I’ve found peace and joy and fulfillment? I just want to be a sheep! I just want to be called by my Shepherd and follow him. I don’t care anymore if the world thinks that’s restrictive or constricting. I just want to be a sheep.

And watch this. Let’s look at John 10 again. **John 10:3** says “The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” And in **John 10:11**, Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” In **John 10:14**, Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep” (10:14-15). **Tim Keller says, “Only if you have the esteem of someone you esteem will you have self-esteem... to know that God loves you, the Lord of the Universe loves you, that is the most powerful basis for a stable identity in the world.”¹⁵**

And to think not only does the LORD of the Universe love you, but he died for you. Jesus says it right here, “and I lay down my life for the sheep.” You might think, **“O sheep, that such a menial designation and metaphor for disciples.”** Obviously not! Not if Jesus, the Great Shepherd, was willing to die for you, his sheep. **Jesus loves you. Jesus calls you. Jesus died for you. Jesus owns you. Jesus is your Great Shepherd, church. Find your identity in that. Find your identity in being one of Jesus’s sheep.**

I’ll close with this. Tommy Nelson tells the story of when he met his hero once, the great coach of the Dallas Cowboys, Tom Landry. They were doing some conference together, and Tommy went up to

¹⁴ What follows is derived from the three points in Tim Keller, “Our Identity: The Christian Alternative to Late Modernity’s Story”

¹⁵ Ibid.

introduce himself. And he was all nervous. His palms were sweaty. His voice was cracking. And he said, “Hello Tom Landry, I’m Tommy Nelson.” And Tom Landry turned to him and said, “Tommy Nelson, I know who you are. I know your name.” And Tommy said, “when that happened, he just about died and went to heaven right there.” That was one of the greatest moments of his life. “Tom Landry knew my name. He knew who he was.”

I had a similar experience when I was eighteen and I met Rich Mullins just a few months before he died. He didn’t remember my name. Rich Mullins could barely remember the songs that he wrote, so I didn’t expect him to remember my name. But he took some time to sign some autographs for me and talk to me.

Now here’s the point. If Jesus really did create the universe... and if he really is the God of the Universe, do you know how amazing it is that he knows your name and that he has called you to follow him? Do you know how amazing a thing it is that you can be called “a follower of Jesus Christ.” And not only is he the creator of the universe, but he died for you. Tom Landry didn’t create the universe, and he certainly didn’t die for Tommy Nelson. Rich Mullins didn’t create the universe and he certainly didn’t die for you or me. But Jesus did. And he knows my name. And he knows your name.

Harvest Decatur, you are made in the image of God. You are a child of God. You are a follower of Jesus Christ. And you are one of Jesus’s sheep. Praise God! I don’t know about you, but that’s where I’m going to find my identity. I’m going to hang my hat right there.