



Identity Lesson 3

Mark 12:29-31

²⁹ “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Over the last few weeks we’ve focused our attention on our relationship with God and how we are to love God, with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our mind and with all of our strength. For the next two weeks we’ll focus our attention on the second part of these verses, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’.

We know that the Bible is about God’s love for us and how we can love him back, but it is also about us loving other people the way we would want them to love us back. You could say that the whole Bible is a relational book and that it exists because God wants good relationships with us and among us.

Let’s look at a relational model from Dr. Robert Kellemen, author of *Soul Physicians*. Kellemen states that among the Trinity is, “A constant love exchange of intimate knowing, communing, and communicating. Love continually given and received.” That there is, “A mutual admiration and adoration of shared glory.” That God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit continually live in “revealed and expressed” delight. We long for something similar, but endure much less. Generally we would fit into one of the categories below. Let’s take a look at relational models that exist in a fallen world:

- **Shallow Relationships:** We remain aloof, distant, and comfortable. We rarely talk about vital issues, steering clear of “spiritual” topics lest we become “too personal”.
- **Shaming Relationships:** We are sin-spotters who see only fallen ness and evil and nothing of the image of God in one another. We confront, but we don’t care. We put down, but don’t build up. We discourage rather than fan into flame.
- **Secular Relationships:** Like the “Rulers of the Gentile,” we “lord it over one another,” always having to be the one in charge or the one focused upon. We compete against one another, rather than completing and complementing one another. We expend our energy maneuvering and jockeying for position.
- **Self-Sufficient Relationships:** We play the role of “The Lone Ranger,” not asking for help, though we desperately need it.

- Self-Protective Relationships: Like Adam and Eve, we relate out of fear and end up hiding and covering. We clothe ourselves with so many layers that we don't even know who the real "us" is. Our thoughts constantly stray to how am I coming across? What do others think of me?
- Sanctioned Relationships: We burden one another with pharisaic rules, regulations, and rituals, and, like the Pharisees, refuse to lift even one finger to help carry the burdens of others. Even those closest to us. Our relationships are legal, not loving.
- Selfish Relationships: These are manipulative relationships where we exploit one another. Adroitly we finesse conversations and situations so our "needs" are met.
- Spiteful Relationships: When our "needs" are not met, we retaliate. As James tells us, "we kill and we covet". We kill with words, with cold shoulders, and with silence.

Group Discussion:

1. In the many relationships that exist in your life; marriage, family, fellow believers in Christ, and non-believers do any of those relationships fit into the models from above? Take a few minutes and match the relational model that is most prevalent to the various relationships in your life.

Shallow Relationships
 Shaming Relationships
 Secular Relationships
 Self-Sufficient Relationships
 Sanctioned Relationships
 Selfish Relationships
 Spiteful Relationships

Family
 Co-workers
 Christian Friends
 Non-Christian Friends
 Neighbors

2. How have you typically felt these models effecting the relationships in your life?

Marc Montanye, the Director of Counseling and City Care at Christ Community Church commented, "In my life, I'm NOT proud to say, I've fit into more than one of these categories. But, as my relationship with God gets stronger and as I become more and more like Christ through sanctification, I feel the changes taking place in me. Maybe you're asking, "How does that happen?" "What changes do I need to experience in my life so that I can experience more loving relationships with the people around me and with God?"

Watch this video from Dr. Brene` Brown, University of Houston researcher and educator, paying particular attention to what she has to say about the effects empathy, shame, courage, compassion and connection have on relationships.

[Brene` Brown Video](#)

Group Discussion:

3. What degree of connection do you long for in the relationships of your life? Have you found the degree of connection you long for? Where?

4. How has shame (fear, blame, and disconnection) hindered your ability to connect with those around you and/or with God?

The path away from shame leads outward, first toward God, and then toward other people. First you put words on your shame; then you listened to what the Lord said to you in particular. Then you believed and trusted, and trust, you will find, leads to action. Now you have reason to move toward other people rather than away from them. You were clothed and cleansed so there is no reason to hide. You have something good to say so you want to share it. And you are commissioned by the King so you are not speaking on your own behalf. This simple step outward is in direct defiance of the isolation and hiding so essential to shame.

Scripture identifies this path in different ways.

- Love God; love your neighbor. (Luke 10:27)
- Trust Jesus and obey him. (Psalm 37:3)
- Put your faith in Jesus; express it in love. (Galatians 5:6)

“You will still notice the residue of shame. The difference is that it will be more than counterbalanced by the honor of being associated with the King and his purposes. When you falter (and you will), you can re-read the Gospels and learn again about the shamed King whose entire ministry was marked by the scorn and contempt of the people.”

Excerpt From: Edward T. Welch. “Shame Interrupted.”

Read these Bible passages:

Galatians 3:26-28 New International Version (NIV)

26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, **27** for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **28** There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:2-3 New International Version (NIV)

2 Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, **3** because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.

*this idea of no longer being naked is important in overcoming shame ... the illustration of Adam and Eve in the Garden is a profound image of this nakedness causing shame and then God providing a covering for their shame.

1 Corinthians 15:54 New International Version (NIV)

54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

Group Discussion:

5. How does being clothed in Christ free us from shame?
6. How might empathy help you to overcome any shame that inhibits connection?

7. If you have been in a group for a short amount of time (less than a year), what would help you build courage to share your story with others?
8. If you have been in a group for over a year, what has allowed you to openly share your story? What has inhibited you from sharing your story?
9. Finally, this week, consider all that's been discussed and process the study through the lens of courage and compassion. In your life where do you need to ask God for courage and compassion? Pray a prayer this week asking for God to reveal His courage and compassion to you in areas of your life where it's needed.