

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are designed to help you talk about God's word and Pastor Brian's message with friends and family. You of course can use your own questions, but we'd like to give you this tool to encourage Biblical fellowship and discipleship in your circle of relationships. **Enjoy discovering more about Him!**

"THE STORIES WE TELL OURSELVES: I AM WHAT I ACHIEVE" | EPHESIANS 2: 1-12 | PASTOR BRIAN BELL

WARM-UP QUESTION:

- What was something you really wanted to achieve in life when you were a teenager?

"The Story We Naturally Believe and Why It Is So Attractive" Ephesians 2: 1-2

Our culture teaches all of us to think about life in terms of achievement, that approval follows performance. But this is a dead end.

- What is the difference between seeking to achieve something valuable and seeking value in achievements?
- How can a focus on achievement be an attempt at control and independence?

"How This Story Enslaves Us"

The focus on achievement and earning value impacts how people rest, handle failure and success and how they treat others.

- What are ways a focus on achievement becomes a prison or slavery?

"What the Gospel Says Instead" Ephesians 2: 4-5

God makes people alive out of His great mercy and love to save them from this dead life.

- Why is it good news that God makes people alive before they did anything to earn that love?

"Identity Is Received, Not Earned, For We Are God's Workmanship" Ephesians 2: 8-10

Jesus saves through grace; a gift no one earned that people receive in faith. God made us and has good works for us to do.

- How does grace eliminate boasting and pride?
- How does doing good works because God already saved a sign of an identity rooted in Jesus' love?

REFLECTION AND APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

So many seek control and value through their own achievements, but that is a trap and is a dead end for life. God, through His love and mercy, makes us alive through Jesus' sacrifice. Our identity is what we receive from Him: His workmanship that is deeply loved.

- What are ways you still struggle to earn or achieve value?
- What would it look like in your life to live knowing you were loved without achieving anything?
- Ask God to renew your freedom in Him this week.

The Stories We Tell Ourselves

08-02-26

#1 I Am What I Achieve

I. Announce:

- A. Welcome to those **online** and in the *additional seating* area.
- B. **Slide1-5 AP:** REAL. Single Moms. GriefShare/Loss of spouses. Divorce Care.
- C. **Slide6 Employment Opportunity:** We are hiring a full-time *Facilities Maintenance* team member. This position works Sun-Thurs, 40 hours per week. [\$20 pr hr. Benefits include paid health insurance, group life insurance, vacation, sick pay, & participation in other employee benefits] **Anyone interested may apply through the church website.**
- D. **Slide7 Baby Dedication 3rd:** David Zacharias Mota. Mom: Bridgette.
- E. **Slide8a Prayer:**

II. Intro: I Am What I Achieve - Text is from Eph. 2:1-10.

- A. New Sun Series: **The Stories We Tell Ourselves.**
- B. Goal: *Confronting Common Internal Narratives* with **Gospel Truth**. [does u hear 1?]
 - 1. I Am What I Achieve. 2. I Am What Others Think. 3. I'll be Happy When ...
 - 4. I Have to Hold Everything Together. 5. My Past Defines Me. (Dan)
- C. False Story: **If I accomplish** enough, I'll finally **be** enough.
 - 1. Truth: **You are saved by** **grace**, **not** **performance**.
- D. Big Idea: Your identity is **received**, not *earned/achieved*.
- E. **Achievement is** *not* **bad** ...
 - 1. Hard work, excellence, growth, and accomplishment, **can all** **honor** **God**.
 - 2. The danger comes when achievement stops being something we **do** **and** becomes the basis of **who we are**.
- F. **The false story says:** "I am **valuable** because I am productive." - "I **matter** because I am successful." - "I am **secure** because I am needed." = "I am only as good as my last accomplishment." - "If I slow down, fail, or disappoint someone, I may discover that **I am not enough**."

1. The gospel tells a completely different story. [listen for 2 words that may change your life]
 - a) Before we did anything for God, God acted for us. Our identity begins *not with* what **we** accomplish, *but with* what **Christ** has accomplished.

G. Have you ever heard *a familiar internal voice* say to you, *If I could just accomplish this one thing, then I would finally feel good about myself.*

1. For one person, it is getting the promotion. For another, it is building the successful business. For another, it is raising impressive children. For another, it is having the perfect marriage. For a ministry leader, it might be growing your group, teaching the perfect sermon, or being seen as effective.

- a) But **achievement** has a way of *moving the finish line.*

- b) You finally accomplish what you were reaching for, and almost immediately *another goal takes its place.* The applause fades. The accomplishment becomes old news. What once made you feel successful becomes *the new minimum expectation.* [funny watching a **Dobie** chasing a *docked tail*]

2. Achievement can give us a momentary sense of worth, but it cannot carry the weight of our **identity**.

- a) What happens to your identity when the thing you are good at **is taken away?**

- b) When you are **no longer producing, winning, leading, succeeding, earning, parenting, serving, or being praised, who are you then?**

H. Slide8b John Piper said, *Who do you believe has the greatest power to determine who you are and what you are worth? That is your god.* [you, others, social media, world, God]

1. Our identity is not dependent on what **others say** about us, or even **what we think** about ourselves, but by **what God says about us.** [He's not mad at us - He's madly in love with us!]

I. We are fed lies all day about **what's important** in life, and **how to be important** in life, and **how to look** important in life.

1. This dramatically affects our view of our **identity** and our **value**. And although we can't un-hear the lies of the enemy, we can **replace them**

with the truth from God's Word.

III. Slide9a 1. THE STORY WE NATURALLY BELIEVE (Eph. 2:1-2)

- A. 1 And you were **dead** in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience -
- B. Paul begins Ephesians 2 by describing humanity *apart from Christ*: *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked*. Eph. 2:1-2
 - 1. That is a startling beginning. Paul **doesn't** say we were *underperforming*. He **doesn't** say we needed *a little improvement, more discipline, or a better strategy*. He says, **we were dead!** (as doornail, 14cnt, nailed thru-bent, unusable)
 - a) Dead people cannot improve themselves. They cannot perform their way into life. *They cannot build a résumé impressive enough to resurrect themselves.*
 - 2. But our culture teaches us to think almost entirely in terms of achievement.
 - a) We learn early ... that **approval** often follows **performance**.
- C. Slide9b Key distinction: There is a major difference between saying, *I achieved something valuable*, and saying, *I am valuable because I achieved something*. The 1st can produce *gratitude*. The 2nd produces *bondage*.

IV. Slide10a 2. WHY THIS STORY IS SO ATTRACTIVE (Eph. 2:1-2) same

- A. 1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which **you once walked**, **following the course of this world**, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience -
- B. The **achievement** story is attractive because it seems to *give us control*.
 - 1. **Grace** requires **receiving**. **Achievement** allows us to believe we are **earning**. **Grace** says, *You need to be rescued*. **Achievement** says, *You can rescue yourself*. **Grace** says, *You are dependent*. **Achievement** says, *You are self-made*.

- C. **Performance** gives us something **measurable**. We can compare *numbers, titles, results, attendance, income, grades, accomplishments, and recognition*.
1. It also gives us a way to feel superior. Paul says that we **once lived according to, the course of this world** (or *according to this evil age*). Eph.2:2
- D. The world's system constantly **ranks people**. It creates **ladders** and then tells us that our worth depends on *where we stand on that ladder*. [which rung?]
1. **Even good things can become identity projects: Ministry** can become proof that *I matter*. **Parenting** can become proof that *I am successful*. **Serving** can become proof that *I am needed*. **Generosity** can become proof that *I am good*. **Bible knowledge** can become proof that *I am sp.*
- E. **Achievement is especially deceptive** because it can look like **faithfulness** on the outside **while** being driven by **insecurity** on the inside.
- F. **Slide10b** Am I doing this because **I am loved**, **or** am I doing it so that I will feel lovable?

V. Slide11a **3. HOW THIS STORY ENSLAVES US**

- A. The achievement story **promises freedom**, **but** eventually it becomes **a cruel master**.
- B. **It makes rest feel irresponsible** - We may stop working physically, **but** inwardly we are still *measuring, planning, worrying, and evaluating*.
- C. **It makes failure feel fatal** - When achievement is something you do, failure is painful.
1. **A failed project becomes, I am a failure. A struggling child becomes, I failed as a parent. A church problem becomes, I am not a good pastor. A financial setback becomes, I am worthless.**
- D. **It makes success temporary** - Success **never** says, *"That is enough."* (achievement is like drinking *saltwater*. The more you drink, the thirstier you become).
- E. **It makes other people into competitors** - Another person's success can feel like a threat. **Instead of celebrating them, I compare myself with them.**
- F. **It causes us to use people** - People become *audiences, stepping-stones, supporters, or measurements of our influence* **rather than people to love.**

1. It's a *utilitarian* approach to relationships - people are valuable only as long as they're useful. - *When achievement becomes our god, people become tools instead of neighbors.*

G. *Slide11b* It creates **pride** and **despair** - When we succeed, we feel superior. When we fail, we feel worthless. The **gospel** frees us from both :)

VI. *Slide12a* 4. **WHAT THE GOSPEL SAYS INSTEAD** (Eph. 2:4,5)

A. 4 **But God**, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were **dead** in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

B. The great turning point comes in verse 4, **But God**, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us.

1. Those may be 2 of the most hopeful words in Scripture - **But God!**

a) We were **dead**, but God made us alive. We were **enslaved**, but God showed mercy. We were **separated**, but God brought us near. We had **no spiritual résumé** to present, but God loved us.

2. Notice the order: God did not love us because we became alive.

God made us alive because He loved us. - God did not save us because we were *impressive*. God saved us because He is merciful.

a) (2:5) Even when we were **dead** in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved (LKGNT the perf. tense points to the completed action w/a continuing result, thus emphasizing the continuous state or condition).

C. *Slide12b* The subject of the passage is **not** what we did - God made us alive. God raised us up. God seated us with Christ. God showed us grace.

1. *Our new identity is rooted in **God's action**, not ours.*

VII. *Slide13a* 5. **IDENTITY IS RECEIVED, NOT EARNED** (Eph. 2:8)

A. Paul makes the message unmistakable, *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is **not your own doing**; it is the **gift of God**.* Eph. 2:8

- B. **Grace** means that salvation is **not a reward for the deserving**, it is **a gift** for the *undeserving*. - **A wage is earned. A trophy is achieved. But A gift is received.*
1. So we do not **achieve** our way into the family of God, we are **adopted** into it. We do not **perform** our way into Christ, we are **united with Christ** by grace through faith.
- C. **Slide13b** (vs.9) continues, *Not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*
1. Grace eliminates boasting. At the foot of the cross, nobody has an impressive résumé. We all come with empty hands.

VIII. Slide14a **6. WE ARE GOD'S WORKMANSHIP** (Eph. 2:10)

- A. Verse 10 protects us from misunderstanding grace, *10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*
- B. Paul does not say good works are unimportant. He puts them in their proper place.
1. **Slide14b** We are not saved **by** good **works**, we are saved **for** good **works**. **Works** are not the **root** of salvation, they are the **fruit** of salvation. We do not **work** in order to create an identity, we **work** because God has **already given us one**.
- C. The word *workmanship* carries the idea of something God has made. We are His creation, His *craftsmanship*, His *poiema*, His *work*.
1. The false story says, *I am what I make of myself*. The gospel says: *I am what God, by grace, is making me*.

IX. Slide15a **CHRIST CONNECTION**

- A. Jesus is the only person who could truly stand before God on the basis of his own righteousness. He perfectly obeyed. He completed the work the Father gave him. He fulfilled the law. He never sinned.
1. Yet on the cross, **Jesus** was treated as though **He** had lived our life, so that through faith we could be treated as though **we** had lived his.

2. At the cross, Jesus declared: It is finished. John 19:30. The most important work in your life has already been finished.

a) You cannot **add to it**. You cannot **improve it**. You can only **receive it**.

B. **Slide 15b I AM What I Achieve???** - **NO!** my identity is, **I AM What I Received!**

C. **Prayer:** Lord help us to begin each day, reminding ourselves: **I am loved.**

I am saved by grace. I belong to Christ. I am God's workmanship. and I have nothing to prove and no one to impress.

D. **Communion:** All morning we've been talking about the lie, *If I accomplish enough, I'll finally be enough.* **The cross** completely *dismantles* that story.

1. **Communion** is not a **reward** for people who performed well this week - it's a meal for people who know **they need grace**.

E. Most other tables in the world often asks, *What have you brought?* - **The Lord's Table asks only 1 question:** *Will you receive what Christ has already achieved, brought to the table - His Life?*)

Come to the communion table focused on 1 thing, you're coming **empty-handed**.

F. **Ask:** **Forgive us for** trying to prove our worth. **Forgive us when** we have confused our performance with my identity. **Forgive us for** not just receiving Your grace instead of trying to earn it. **Lord**, what *burden of striving* do I need to lay down at the foot of the cross today?

G. Keywords: