

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 OTHERS THINK" | MATTHEW 3: 13-17 | PASTOR BRIAN BELL

WARM-UP QUESTION:

- **What was a nickname you had at one point in your life?**

"Jesus Identifies With Sinners" Matthew 3: 13-15

Jesus who was perfectly righteous identifies Himself with unrighteous people. Before He dies for sinners, He stands among them.

- **What can be learned or appreciated from Jesus identifying with sinners?**

"The Spirit Descends and The Father Names the Son" Matthew 3:16-17

Jesus shows a dependence on the Spirit. God the Father declares His delight and love for Jesus before any public achievement.

- **What are ways to accept what the Father says about us and to live out our belonging?**
- **What are ways to depend on the Spirit like Jesus?**

"Why Approval Is So Attractive and How It Enslaves Us"

Approval from others promises belonging and it leads to people doing all kinds of things for acceptance.

- **What are ways people seek acceptance that are unhealthy and unwise?**
- **Why does seeking approval from people eventually lead to disappointment?**

"Living the True Story"

When people go through life knowing that in Christ they are already accepted and loved by God, they are truly free.

- **What would change in your work and family if you genuinely believed you were already loved by God?**

REFLECTION AND APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

Jesus was declared a beloved Son by the Father and the Spirit before Jesus had done anything. He lived out that identity despite accusations from enemies. With Jesus, you no longer have to negotiate your identity with the crowd, you receive it from the Father.

- **Who has the loudest voice in your life?**
- **Where in your life have you confused acceptance with obedience?**
- **Listen to what God says about you and receive it with thanksgiving and praise this week.**

The Stories We Tell Ourselves

08-09-26

2. *I Am What Others Think*

I. Announce:

- A. Welcome to those **online** and in the *additional seating* area.
- B. *Slide1-7 AP*: Community Outreach. **CMCA**. CK Christmas Play. *Women's R&R*. Divorce Care. **At Risk**. Women's Christmas Mtg.
- C. *Slide8* Employment Opportunity.
- D. *Slide9* **Prayer**:

II. Intro:

- A. Our Series is: *The Stories We Tell Ourselves*.
- B. *Slide10* This Sunday's False Story: *I Am What Others Think*. *or, I am only as valuable as other people's approval*.
- C. *We are going to combat that with the Truth*: My **deepest identity** is received from **God**, *not negotiated with the crowd*.
 - 1. *See* when **God's voice** becomes *the defining voice*, the *opinions of others* lose their power to name us.
 - 2. *We may outgrow the playground, but we never completely outgrow the desire to be **accepted***.
- D. We have all walked away from a conversation replaying every word ...

*"Did I say too much? - Did they **misunderstand** me? - Why didn't they respond? - I wonder what they're thinking about me."*

 - 1. *Or* post something online and realize *technology, social media, and our online communities* have simply **amplified** what has always been true about the human heart ... ***We long to be accepted!***
 - a) *There is nothing wrong with wanting to be loved*. The **problem** comes when acceptance becomes the **source** of our identity - *instead of* the **fruit** of it.

2. **People become our mirror.** We begin asking questions we were never meant to ask: *Who am I? Am I enough? Do I matter?* And we let everyone else answer them.

E. **The first lie** (last week) said, *I am what I achieve.* This week's lie is even more *subtle*, *I am what others think.*

1. Achievement asks, *What have I done?* - Approval asks, *What do they think about me?*

a) One builds an identity on performance. The other builds an identity on perception. *Neither is stable.*

F. **A Modern Problem**

G. We are probably living in the most *approval-driven culture* in history.

1. Likes. Followers. Views. Ratings. Reviews. Popularity. Image.

2. **Never before** have we had so many *opportunities* to ask **strangers**, *"Do you approve of me?"*

a) *Yet anxiety continues to rise.* Because **approval** was never designed to *carry the weight* of **identity**.

H. **The Context of Mt.3**

I. Matthew intentionally places **Jesus' baptism before** His public ministry.

1. Before the Sermon on the Mount. Before the miracles. Before the crowds. Before the rejection. Before the cross.

2. **The Father speaks before** Jesus does anything *publicly*.

3. **That order matters!** - **Identity** comes before ministry. **Relationship** comes before responsibility. **Belonging** comes before serving.

a) This is uniquely true of **Jesus** as *the eternal Son*, *but through faith in Christ*, we are **adopted** into that same family.

b) **Our identity** also begins with *God's gracious declaration*, *not* our public performance.

III. Slide11 **1. JESUS IDENTIFIES WITH SINNERS (Mt.3:13-15)**

- A. *13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.*
- B. **John Hesitates** - *I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?* (14)
- C. **John Understands** - Jesus has no sins to confess. Why would He enter these waters?
- D. **Jesus Responds** - *Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*
1. Jesus steps into the water **not** because He needs cleansing, He steps into our place. **The One** who is *perfectly righteous* identifies Himself with *unrighteous people*.
 2. *Already*, the Gospel is unfolding. Before He **dies** for sinners... He **stands among sinners**.
- E. **Our identity** begins with a **Savior** who willingly *came near*. He is *not ashamed* to identify with us.

IV. Slide12 **2. THE SPIRIT DESCENDS (Mt.3:16)**

- A. *16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;*
- B. **The heavens open**. The Spirit descends like a dove. **And** as you know **this marks the beginning** of Jesus' public ministry.
1. Everything Jesus is about to do will be accomplished through **dependence upon the Spirit**.
 2. **There is a beautiful principle here**. The Father does not send Jesus out empty, He **equips** Him. **God** **never** calls us to live the Christian life apart from His presence.

V. Slide13 **3. THE FATHER NAMES THE SON (Mt.3:17)**

- A. *17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*
- B. This is the heart of the message. *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*
1. Notice what Jesus has not done yet: He hasn't preached. He hasn't healed. He hasn't cast out demons. He hasn't walked on water. He hasn't raised Lazarus. He hasn't died on the cross - He hasn't risen.
 - a) The Father's delight precedes Jesus' ministry. His identity is declared before His activity.
- C. Again... This declaration belongs uniquely to Jesus. Yet because we are united to Christ, God welcomes us into His family. Our identity also begins with grace.
- D. Here's the Great Reversal - The world says perform first, then maybe you'll belong. God says, belong first, now go and live like My child.
1. Religion says, work for acceptance. The Gospel says, work because you are accepted.

VI. Slide14a 4. WHY APPROVAL IS SO ATTRACTIVE

- A. Because approval promises belonging.
1. We all carry a deep desire to hear someone say, "I'm proud of you." - "You matter." - "I'm glad you're here." - "I love you."
 2. Those desires are not sinful, God created us for relationship.
 - a) The problem comes when we expect finite people to meet an infinite need.
 - b) Slide14b No spouse. No parent. No child - No church. No employer. No audience. No friend ... can carry the weight of being your ultimate source of Identity.
 3. Eventually every human relationship disappoints. Not because people are bad, but because they were never meant to be God.

VII. Slide15a 5. HOW APPROVAL ENSLAVES US

- A. We become Chameleons when we change in different rooms/crowds (church/work/home). Different personality. Different convictions. Whatever earns acceptance.

- B. We **avoid** difficult conversations. Truth becomes negotiable. Peacekeeping replaces peacemaking.
- C. We constantly **compare**. Someone else's success, becomes our **insecurity**.
- D. We fear **rejection** more than **disobedience**. *This may be the most dangerous.*
1. Eventually we ask *What will people think?* before asking *What does God say?*
- E. **Slide15b** Picture your mind living its entire life inside a courtroom. Every conversation is another trial. Every meeting is another verdict. Every compliment is temporary acquittal. Every criticism is another conviction. [that's exhausting ...]
1. Yet some people spend their entire lives **waiting** for *the jury to decide ... whether they're enough?*
 2. **Slide15c The Gospel** announces something astonishing - The **Judge** has already spoken, **not** because of *your performance*, **but** because of **Christ**.
 - a) You no longer live **for** the verdict, you live **from** the verdict.
- F. Notice something beautiful. The Father speaks only **1 sentence**, **but** that sentence answers nearly every insecurity. *This is my beloved Son...* (**Identity**) *...with whom I am well pleased.* (**Acceptance. Love. Delight. Belonging**).
1. Everything we spend our lives chasing... **Jesus** already possesses. **And** through **union with Him**... we are **welcomed** into that same relationship.
- G. **Slide15d** Paul writes, *In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.* (Eph.1:4-5)
1. We **don't** become sons and daughters **by impressing** God. We become sons and daughters **because of Christ**.

VIII.Slide16a 6. LIVING THE TRUE STORY

- A. **Instead of** asking, *What do people think of me?* begin asking, *What has God already said about me in Christ?*
1. **Instead of** entering every room *hoping to earn acceptance* - enter remembering **you already belong to Him**.

- B. **Slide16b** Maybe tell yourself, *In Christ - I enter every room - already loved.*
That changes everything! You no longer need to impress. You are free to serve. You are free to tell the truth. You are free to apologize. You are free to admit weakness. You are free to fail. Because your identity isn't hanging in the balance.
 [so practically - 3 things ...]
1. **Before a difficult meeting...** remind yourself: *I don't enter this room looking for my identity. I bring my identity with me.*
 2. **When criticized...** Ask, *Is there wisdom here I need to hear? Not, Has my value decreased?*
 - a) Criticism may *expose your behavior*. It **cannot** redefine your identity.
 3. **When praised...** Receive it gratefully, **but don't** build your home there.
 - a) Compliments make *wonderful visitors*, **but terrible landlords**.
- C. Who has the **loudest voice** in your life? Whose **disappointment** do you fear most? What **image** are you constantly trying to maintain? Where have you confused **acceptance** with obedience? What would change if you **genuinely believed** you were already loved by God?

IX. Slide17 CHRIST CONNECTION

- A. The Father's Declaration at Jesus' baptism was *followed almost immediately by* The Wilderness Temptation.
- B. **And the first temptation** (stones/bread) was **not** simply about bread. It was about **identity**.
1. **If you are the Son of God...** (Mt. 4:3) - Satan attacked the very thing the Father had just **declared**.
 2. **The enemy still works the same way.** He whispers, *Are you really loved?*
 - *Are you really enough?* - *Has God really accepted you?*
 - a) Jesus answered *every temptation* by trusting the Father's Word rather than *the tempter's lies*. And because Jesus remained faithful where we often fail, His righteousness becomes **ours** through faith.

C. Slide 18a Closing

D. The greatest question in your life is **not**, *What do people think about me?* It is, *Whose voice will define me?*

1. **The crowd** is loud. **Social media** is loud. **Critics** are loud. Even **your own inner voice** can be loud. **But** above **every competing voice** stands **the voice of The Father**. **And** because of Jesus Christ, you no longer have to negotiate your **identity** with the crowd. You receive it from your **Father**.

E. Practical Take Away

- F. **Preaching the gospel to yourself.** *Aka Biblical Self-Talk.* (intentionally speak God's truth to your own heart **instead of** letting *your emotions, fears, or other people's opinions* have the final word).
- G. **Slide 18b** In Col.3:1-2 *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is... **Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*** Paul was essentially saying, *Remind yourself of what is already true about you in Christ, and then deliberately set your mind there.*
 1. The Psalms gives a clear example of actually talking to yourself, ***Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God.*** Ps.42:5 (He doesn't merely **listen to** his soul; he **speaks to** his soul)
 - a) Sometimes you need to **stop listening to** yourself and **start preaching truth to** yourself.

H. Keywords: approval, others, Christ.