



**Educate  
+ Engage**



MIND  
MATTERS



Formed by  
God's Love

### OVERVIEW

God's love for you has the power to transform your life. Rather than being defined by what other voices say about you, allowing God's love to define you changes your whole identity.

#### Scripture Passage

1 John 4:16 (NKJV)

God is love; and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

### EDUCATE

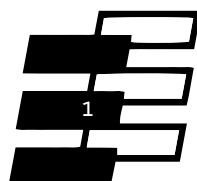
In our last lesson, we discussed how our minds are formed by the experiences we encounter in life. We can see this pattern in humanity start all the way back in the Book of Genesis, in the beginning of all creation. We read previously in Genesis 1 how God created the first humans in His own image and later called His creation "very good."

In Genesis 2, we read how the serpent first approached Eve and began to tempt her with the fruit of the forbidden tree. He ultimately convinced her to try the fruit and Adam followed:

"But a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold" (Genesis 2:6-11)

This is an interesting exchange between Adam and God. God obviously knew what Adam and Eve had done and where they were hiding, but He chose to call out to them anyways. When Adam answered, he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." Adam was not hiding because he was fearful or feeling guilty for having committed the first sin. Rather, he was hiding because he realized how shameful it was for him to be uncovered in front of God.

God's response was also unexpected, as He replied, "Who told you that you were naked?" In other words, "What other voices have you been listening to?" God understood that the eyes of



Adam and Eve had been opened, and they had been shown things about themselves He had not taught them. They had come to understand something new about their identity other than who God had created them to be.

**Point 1: God created you as His image bearer, and this is what our identity should be rooted in.**

God created Adam and Eve in their nakedness, in their humanity. It wasn't a mistake God had made, but through their sin, they began to feel ashamed of how they were created.

We discussed in last week's lesson how our thoughts are shaped by what we experience. When we experience something multiple times in our lives, it can become more than just a thought, but a belief about ourselves.

Here is an example of this. Let's say that every time you cried growing up, you were told that you were overly dramatic or sensitive. Maybe you were told that over and over, until you truly believed that about yourself, and now anytime you have a big emotion, you feel like you can't really believe that that emotion is justified, because you believe you're too dramatic. So you hide that part of yourself from not only the people around you, but from God too.

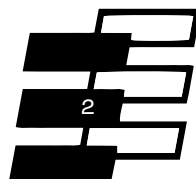
In this example, the voices of the people around you, whether they intended to or not, determined what you believed about yourself. These beliefs often lead to us feeling ashamed of who we are. Shame is a difficult emotion because, unlike guilt, which leads to us feeling bad about something we've done, shame causes us to feel bad about who we are. It can so easily push us away from God, causing us to believe that we are not good enough for Him.

It can become easy to define our identity by the voices around us and what they've led us to believe about ourselves.

**Discussion Question: What is something positive that has been spoken over you that you have adopted as part of who you are?**

*For the teacher, here are some examples to spark conversation: a coach who called you a hard worker, a parent who noticed how creative you are, and so on.*

Some of the things you have come to believe about yourself may be positive or accurate, while some may be shameful. But just as with Adam and Eve, God did not create us with the intent that we would have to hide parts of ourselves in order to be loved by Him. While the voices we've heard in life so far may have led us to believe we could never fully be loved by God just as we are, God's Word proclaims something different.



**Point 2: It is important for us to see ourselves through God's love for us.**

Consider these verses:

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13, NKJV).

"But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NKJV).

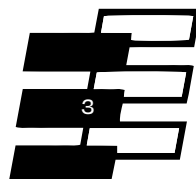
These passages proclaim two truths about God's love. The first is that there is no greater love than God's love, and the second is that we don't have to qualify for God's love. This paradox is hard to wrap our minds around! God loves us even though we will never be able to earn that love. Those two truths should cancel each other out, but they don't! We can hold both truths together. Holding those two opposing truths can feel a bit uncomfortable. In fact, many times we try to avoid the tension it creates by deciding to simply try harder. To be better. To do more. To somehow meet God halfway and become more deserving of that incredible love. But the truth is that we will not have earned God's love any more even with all this striving. We will always be unworthy, and yet we will always be loved. It is as simple and as profound as that.

When we allow God's love to become a reality for us, when we meditate on it and remind ourselves of it, it begins to reshape our whole lens of the world around us and of ourselves.

**Point 3: God's love allows us to heal from shame and mistaken beliefs about ourselves.**

As we have mentioned in this series, the experiences we have had in life are what have formed us so far, but new experiences can cause a transformation within us. God intentionally designed us in this way because He desires for us to be healed. He desires for us to continually become more like Him and to accept His goodness and love toward us.

Healing from our past happens when we are able to revisit past experiences, but what we experience in the present moment is different from what we experienced in the past. In other words, there is a mismatch from the initial experience and the new experience we have. When we invite God into our past hurts, we are able to reexperience those hurts in the presence of unconditional love and care. We are no longer alone in facing those experiences. Every time we revisit a memory (good or bad), the memory changes slightly. It's as if our brain is full of boxes on shelves, and how we experience what is in each box we open depends on the factors we are encountering when we open the box. So if I revisit a painful memory in a time when I am surrounded by support and love, then the memory does not seem as painful as it once was. This "recoding" of memories is the first step toward healing.



As we grow in our trust of God, we have the ability to invite Him further and further into our hearts. He becomes the security we have searched for in every relationship before Him. His love becomes the foundation of our identities. We no longer have to prove our worth or hide parts of ourselves to be accepted or find belonging. Rather, we can rest in the truth of who God has called us to be: His children and bearers of His image.

### Closing

Our identity as Christians is not found in anything we can accomplish in this world, but rather who we belong to. God has adopted us as children into His family, calling us by name and covering us with His unconditional love. As we learn to accept that love, it begins to heal places in us that were once shameful or not good enough. He alone becomes our firm foundation.

### ENGAGE

As you go through your week this week, ask yourself the question, "Whose voices are you listening to?" Who is defining what you think about yourself? Spend some time meditating on God and His love toward you and allow that love to challenge the beliefs you hold about yourself.

