

REAL IDENTITY

GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE

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This guide is to be used in conjunction with *Real Identity: Where Bible and Life Meet* by Thaddeus Barnum (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2013).

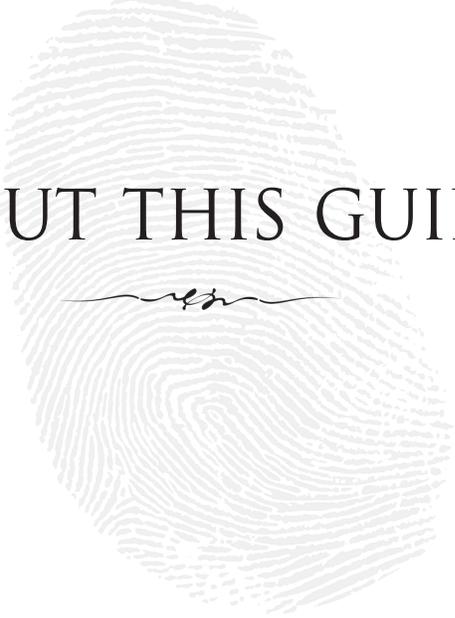
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CONTENTS

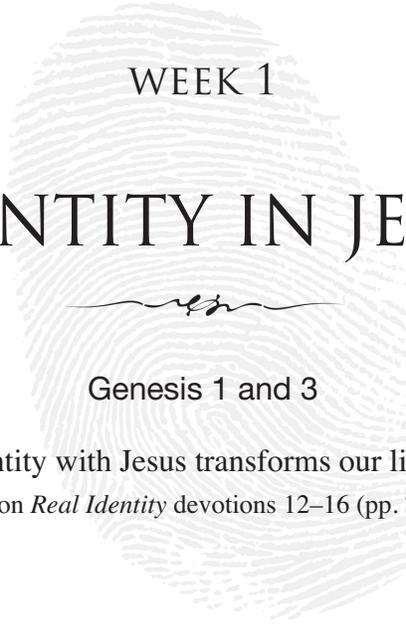
About This Guide	4
Week 1. Identity in Jesus	5
Week 2. Calling in Jesus	7
Week 3. Covenant in Jesus	9
Week 4. Obedience in Jesus	11



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Real Identity by Thaddeus Barnum serves as the text for this four-week interactive study. With clarity and utmost practicality, *Real Identity* helps us understand what it means to have a vital relationship with Jesus. This relationship includes a distinct identity, high calling, and significant covenant. But it also challenges us to practice obedient faith, even when hard trials invade our lives.

Trust the Lord to enrich your life and the lives of your group members as you explore your real identity in these four sessions.



WEEK 1

IDENTITY IN JESUS

Genesis 1 and 3

Identity with Jesus transforms our lives.
Based on *Real Identity* devotions 12–16 (pp. 73–96)

TO THE FACILITATOR

Congratulations! God has chosen you to lead a group of His children in the study and application of His inspired Word. As the facilitator, you have a high calling, serious responsibility, and wonderful opportunity. As you rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance, He will make every session a memorable success.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

Jesus commissioned His disciples to make disciples throughout the entire world (Matt. 28:16–20). That solemn task would involve far more than simply filling the converts heads with knowledge. It would involve charging them with the responsibility of obeying everything the Lord had commanded. Taking the counsel of the author of *Real Identity* to heart, each of us in the church needs to do less selling and more applying.

According to Ephesians 1:3–4, our identity with Jesus began before God created the world (Gen. 1). Although God created us in His image to be holy, our first parents fell into sin when the Devil tempted them (Gen. 3:1–7). As a result, sin marred God's image in us, caused us to fear Him, separated us from Him, rendered us incapable of being holy, and brought pain and sorrow into the world (Gen. 3:8–24).

However, God planned to redeem us (Gen. 3:15) and restore us to His image (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:17–18). Because of our identity in Jesus, we are new creations in whom the Holy Spirit

lives and strives to conform us to the image of Christ. As we apply God's Word to daily life, the Holy Spirit makes us holy.

Referring to God, Thaddeus Barnum said, "This is the One who created us in His image and promised, when all things come to their perfect fulfillment, to restore us back into that image" (*Real Identity*, p. 76).

FOCUS ON LIFE



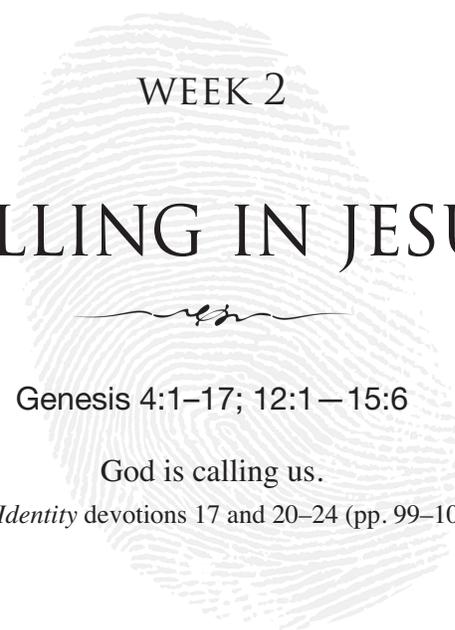
Discuss the following with your group.

1. What do you learn about God's character from the creation account in Genesis 1?
2. What damage has sin caused in the world?
3. Why are individuals prone to blame God for tragic circumstances that occur in their lives?
4. Why do you agree or disagree with the author's observation on page 95 of *Real Identity*: "He is here, just like He promised. In this land of dark and terror. He is here."
5. How has sin changed the human body from its original condition?
6. How has sin changed the human psyche from its original condition?
7. What does the Holy Spirit use to restore God's image in us? (See John 17:17 and Rom. 5:3-5; 8:26-29.)
8. How can a believer overcome wrongful fear? Fear of failure? Fear of dying?
9. On page 76 of *Real Identity* the author wrote: "We see our deepest suffering through the lens of Him who is God. God the unchanging God. God the holy God. God who chose us to be with Him. Now. Always. Forever." How might you apply the author's observation to your own life?
10. In chapter 16 of *Real Identity*, titled "Somewhere Safe" (pp. 92-96), the author relates the story of a woman whose husband left her and their children to live with another woman. What helped the abandoned wife recover from her husband's treachery? How might you and other Christians help in a similar situation?
11. What do you think is the best way to show you are grateful for your identity in Jesus?

WRAP-UP



Dismiss the group members with prayer. Ask the Lord's help for them as they reveal their identity in Jesus to others this week.



WEEK 2

CALLING IN JESUS

Genesis 4:1–17; 12:1–15:6

God is calling us.

Based on *Real Identity* devotions 17 and 20–24 (pp. 99–102, 113–137)

TO THE FACILITATOR

Likely your group is small enough to permit you to pray for each member by name. By all means, do so. Your prayers will prepare hearts to receive God’s message more readily.

FOCUS ON GOD’S WORD

God provided a blood sacrifice as a covering for Adam and Eve’s nakedness and for their sin (Gen. 3:21). Later, their sons Cain and Abel recognized that God was calling them to worship Him, so they brought offerings. Cain offered produce, whereas Abel offered animal sacrifices by faith (Gen. 4:3–4; Heb. 11:4). When God gave Cain the opportunity to do what was right, he rejected it. Apparently, Cain heeded the Devil’s voice rather than God’s.

After the flood (Gen. 7) and the Tower of Babel incident (Gen. 11), God called Abram from his pagan homeland to go to an undisclosed land (Gen. 12:1). Hebrews 11:8 says Abram responded with faith. He left his homeland not knowing where he was going. In *Real Identity*, Barnum assures us that we can obey God’s call if we know the One calling. The circumstances do not matter, he tells us. “It only matters that [God] is with us, leading us” (p. 116).

God’s way isn’t always easy, but if He calls us to follow His leading, we should obey His call fully and persist in doing so. Abram’s faith faltered at times. His father and his nephew Lot accompanied him from the homeland (Gen. 11:31; 12:4); and when a famine struck the new land, he went to Egypt (12:10), where he encountered big trouble (12:11–20).

Lot had a choice. He could have stayed with Abram in the land to which God had called Abram, but instead Lot chose what he thought was a much better place—the region of Sodom and eventually Sodom itself (Gen 13:1–13). As Barnum observes, the Devil “makes hell look like Eden” (*Real Identity*, p. 125). Lot heeded the wrong voice and paid a heavy price for that choice. He experienced torment of soul (2 Pet. 2:8), was captured by a militant force but was later rescued by Abram, lost everything he had in Sodom, and eventually lost his wife (Gen. 14:1–24; 19:23–26).

Following Abram’s rescue of hostage Lot, the Lord dispatched Melchizedek to bless Abram (Gen. 14:18–20). God’s blessing accompanies the performance of His will.

Genesis 15:1–6 unfolds the account of the Lord meeting with Abram and giving him the promise of the supernatural birth of the heir to the blessings He had promised to Abram (Gen. 12:2–3). If we heed God’s call, we will be blessed and be a source of blessing to others.

FOCUS ON LIFE



Discuss the following with your group.

1. Abel came to God in faith. How can we acquire more faith (see Rom. 10:17)?
2. How might the Devil try to talk us out of obeying God’s call?
3. What might have been going through Sarai’s mind when her husband told her they would be moving to an undisclosed location?
4. What “baggage” or “blankets” (*Real Identity*, pp. 118, 121) have you carried when God called you to a new job or to a new community?
5. Does God’s call guarantee that everything will be comfortable and enjoyable if we obey? Why or why not?
6. Read 1 John 2:15–17. How does the warning given in this passage apply to the story of Lot?
7. Are you inspired by the story of the preacher with cancer (see pp. 113–117)? If so, how does it inspire you?
8. Why do you agree or disagree with what the preacher wrote: “But when God calls, He is to be obeyed in spite of all natural feelings” (*Real Identity*, p. 115)?
9. Who do you think is faithful to God’s call: the person who becomes a part of the culture or the one who remains apart from the culture? Explain your reasoning.
10. How might God bless the Christian who obeys His call?
11. Why do you agree or disagree that the Christian who rarely reads the Bible is likely to have very little faith?

WRAP-UP



Invite the group members to offer a silent prayer in which they covenant with God to listen for His call with an obedient heart.

WEEK 3

COVENANT IN JESUS

Genesis 15:7–21; 17:7–14; Mark 10:1–9; Luke 22:14–23

We have a covenant relationship with God.

Based on *Real Identity* from devotions 25–29 and 32 (pp. 141–165, 176–180)

TO THE FACILITATOR

Arriving on time to greet group members as they arrive conveys a significant message. It says the study and discussion of God’s Word is important. Also it communicates your excitement about the session.

FOCUS ON GOD’S WORD

God made a covenant (testament or contract) with Abraham, but this was not a customary contract in which two parties agreed to do certain things. This covenant was unilateral. After Abraham had divided and laid out animal sacrifices, God passed between them. He did not ask Abraham to meet Him halfway. This was God’s covenant that included ironclad promises about His relationship with Abraham and Abraham’s descendants (Gen. 15:7–21).

We can trust God to keep His promises—all of them—because His love never fails. In Genesis 17:7–8, He assured Abraham that His covenant promises were everlasting, and as a sign that Abraham and his descendants were the heirs of the covenant, they were to receive circumcision. However, physical circumcision does not give a person a right relationship with God; only circumcision of the heart by the Holy Spirit marks him or her as a child of God (Rom. 2:29; Phil. 3:2–3).

A covenant relationship with the Lord does not give us license to sin. As Barnum points out, God has erected fences to keep us out of sin. “There are fences, boundary lines. Stay inside and we

find what the Bible calls blessings. Leap outside and the Bible calls it curses” (*Real Identity*, p. 159).

Luke 22:14–23 relates the account of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus and His disciples—all but one—were in a close relationship. For centuries the Lord’s Supper has given believers the opportunity to reflect on Jesus’ sacrificial love for us and to reflect upon our love for Him and one another.

FOCUS ON LIFE



Discuss the following with your group.

1. What impresses you most about the way in which God made a covenant with Abraham? Explain your answer.

2. Why do you agree or disagree that the promises of Abrahamic covenant apply to Jews today?

3. Why do you agree or disagree that the Jews have an exclusive right to the land of Israel?

4. Why do you agree or disagree with Barnum’s statement that the day God made a covenant with Abraham was “the day that towers above all others throughout the entire recording of the Old Testament” (*Real Identity*, p. 143)?

5. What “fences” do you believe God has erected to keep us from leaping into sin?

6. How would you respond to someone who claims he or she doesn’t have to be concerned about his or her sinning because he or she is a Christian?

7. How does the Lord’s Supper strengthen your relationship with the Lord?

8. How does the Lord’s Supper strengthen your relationship with fellow believers?

9. How does the Lord’s Supper help to keep you inside “the boundaries”?

WRAP-UP



Conclude this session by asking each group member to complete this sentence: “Because I have a relationship with the Lord . . .”

WEEK 4

OBEDIENCE IN JESUS

Genesis 22

Faith obeys God without asking why.

Based on *Real Identity* devotions 34 and 36–40 (pp. 188–192, 198–222)

TO THE FACILITATOR

Someone has said there is no telling how far a person may go when starting with a pat on the back. Pat your group members on the back for participating well in each session. An appropriate compliment may motivate them to put forth their best effort.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

After promising Abraham he would have his very own son through whom the covenant promises would continue, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice that son, Isaac (Gen. 22:1–2). What would Abraham do? If Isaac died before fathering a son, the covenant promises would die with him. Promptly and without asking why, Abraham prepared to offer Isaac as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah, the place God had designated (22:3–5).

Hebrews 11:17 notes, “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac.” As Barnum points out, the Bible does not tell us exactly when faith came to Abraham, but sometimes faith is there when we are tested. Sometimes, though, it doesn’t come until we have to step out in obedience. Barnum counsels, “Just do what we know to do and trust that faith will follow” (*Real Identity*, p. 200).

At the foot of Moriah, Abraham told his servants to stay put, while he and his son ascended the mountain. He added, “We will . . . return to you” (Gen. 22:5). Faith laid behind those words!

When Isaac observed that the wood and fire were on hand for the sacrifice, he asked Abraham, “Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” (22:7). Abraham’s answer revealed his faith and is also

prophetic. He said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (22:8). Isn’t that precisely what God did when He offered His Son, the Lamb of God, as the sacrifice for our sins?

But if Abraham had slain his son, he fully believed God would raise him from the dead (Heb. 11:17–19). God’s promises were ironclad!

Abraham had passed the test. His faith held firm and he proved he loved God more than he loved his son Isaac. God provided a ram for the burnt offering (Gen. 22:13), and then reiterated His covenant promises to Abraham (22:15–8).

It must have been a joyful occasion when Abraham and Isaac returned to the waiting servants.

FOCUS ON LIFE



Discuss the following with your group.

1. How do you think Abraham must have felt when God commanded him to offer Isaac, the son of promise, as a burnt offering?
2. After reading about Allie’s test of faith (*Real Identity*, pp. 188–192), how do you reconcile her test with the Bible’s portrayal of God as all-loving?
3. What recent test of faith did you experience? How did you meet it? What was the outcome?
4. Why do you agree or disagree with Barnum’s assertion that faith may not come until we have taken a step of obedience? (See *Real Identity*, pp. 198–202.)
5. Why do you agree or disagree that disobeying God often results in painful consequences? If you agree, without identifying any individuals, what examples can you give to support your answer?
6. Although Genesis 22 focus primarily on Abraham’s obedience and faith, what evidence of these qualities do you see in Isaac?
7. How does the account of Abraham’s offering of Isaac remind you of what occurred on Golgotha?

WRAP-UP



Ask the group members to identify at least one step of obedience the Lord wants every believer to take. Close the session with prayer.

If your group benefited from studying *Real Identity* together, watch for the release of Thaddeus Barnum’s next book, *Real Love*, a sixty-day devotional through 1 John, available August 2014.