

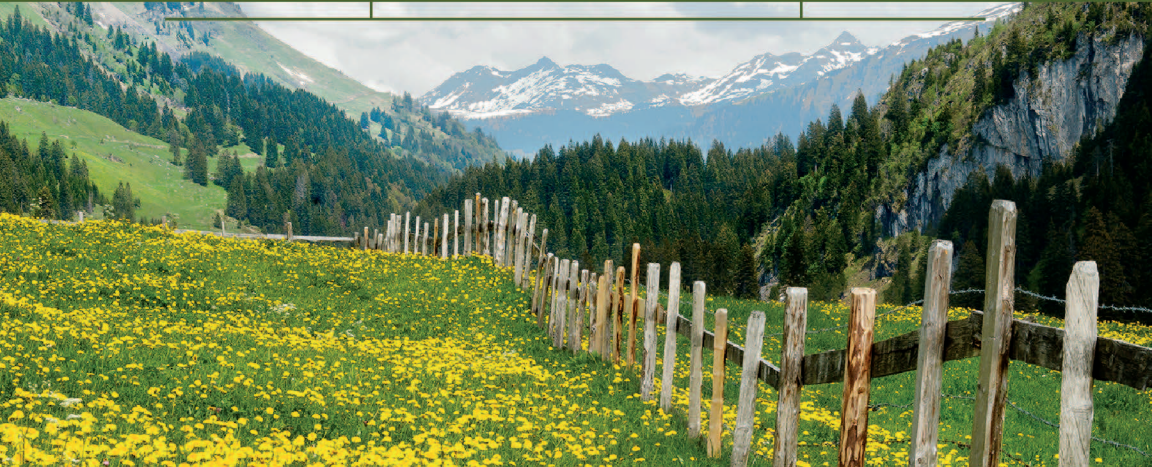
REVISED & EXPANDED

CHARLES F. STANLEY BIBLE STUDY SERIES



DISCOVERING YOUR IDENTITY

UNDERSTAND WHO YOU ARE
IN GOD'S EYES



CHARLES F. STANLEY

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THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

DISCOVERING YOUR IDENTITY
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INTRODUCTION

A FRESH LOOK AT YOUR IDENTITY AS A BELIEVER

We all have an outlook on the world and on life—a way of looking at things, valuing things, and judging things. This perspective is something we have *learned*. As a result, many of us today have a wrong understanding about certain things, such as our identity as believers in Christ. We truly do not know who we *are* in Christ. We have misconceptions about why God forgives, what salvation means to our life on this earth, and who God has called us to be.

In order to gain the right perspective, we need to go to the Word of God . . . and stay there. Books on self-esteem may be helpful, but only if they are firmly based on Scripture. The Bible is God's foremost communication on the subject of self-esteem and self-identity. We must return to it continually to discover who we are, how we are to respond to life's situations, and how we are to interact with others. Our perspective is wrong if it doesn't match up with God's truth.

This book can be used by you alone or by several people in a small-group study. At various times, you will be asked to relate to the material in one of the following four ways.

First, what new insights have you gained? Make notes about the insights you have. You may want to record them in your Bible or in a separate journal. As you reflect on your new understanding, you are likely to see how God has moved in your life.

Second, have you ever had a similar experience? You approach the Bible from your own unique background . . . your own particular set

of understandings about the world that you bring with you when you open God's Word. For this reason, it is important to consider how your experiences are shaping your understanding and allow yourself to be open to the truth that God reveals.

Third, how do you feel about the material? While you should not depend solely on your emotions as a gauge for your faith, it is important for you to be aware of them as you study a passage of Scripture and can freely express them to God. Sometimes, the Holy Spirit will use your emotions to compel you to look at your life in a different or challenging way.

Fourth, in what way do you feel challenged to respond or to act? God's Word may inspire you or challenge you to take a particular action. Take this challenge seriously and find ways to move into it. If God reveals a particular need that He wants you to address, take that as His "marching orders." God will empower you to do something with the challenge that He has just given you.

Start your Bible study sessions in prayer. Ask God to give you spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear. As you conclude your study, ask the Lord to seal what you have learned so you will not forget it. Ask Him to help you grow into the fullness of the nature and character of Christ Jesus.

I encourage you to keep the Bible at the center of your study. A genuine Bible study stays focused on God's Word and promotes a growing faith and a closer walk with the Holy Spirit in each person who participates.

LESSON 1



YOU ARE A SAINT!

IN THIS LESSON

Learning: What exactly is a saint?

Growing: How does “sainthood”
apply to my self-evaluation?

King David wrote, “Sing praise to the LORD, you *saints* of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name” (Psalm 30:4, emphasis added). Look at that word *saint* in this verse. Is this how you see yourself? Do you regard yourself as a saint?

Each of us acts on the basis of how we view ourselves. Our opinion of self directs and focuses our behavior every hour of every day. If we have a faulty self-image—which is having any self-image other than what God says about us—we will behave in a way that is contrary

to God’s highest purposes and plan for our lives. This is why having a correct self-image is important. It affects the way we make choices, deal with problems, and approach tasks and challenges in life. A correct self-image also impacts how we deal with other people.

Jesus taught that we are to love our neighbors *as we love ourselves*. He said to His disciples, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37–40). We are to love, appreciate, value, and treat others in the same way that we love, appreciate, value, and treat *ourselves*.

This means that if we do *not* love ourselves in an appropriate way, we cannot love others as God wants us to love them. A God-based self-image is vital if we are going to relate to others in a truly Christ-like way. It is also vital if we want to show the love of God to them.

1. Why do you think that Jesus said loving your neighbor is like loving God? Why does He list loving God first before loving others?

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2. Why do you think Jesus said, “love your neighbor as yourself,” rather than, “learn to love yourself, then love your neighbor the same way”? Explain.

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3. Why do “all the Law and the Prophets” hang from these two commandments?

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THE BASIS FOR YOUR SAINTHOOD

The Bible says those who believe in Christ and have accepted Him as their Savior are *saints*—and each of us must choose to believe what the Bible says. This is not based on how we *feel*. Most of us do not feel like saints on any given day. But feelings come and go. What we feel is often highly unpredictable, and emotions are not a basis for making decisions about our true identity. For some people, an unruly hairdo or a spilled cup of coffee can ruin a day emotionally. No . . . emotions are not the basis on which we conclude that we are saints.

Nor is being a saint based on our *understanding* about sainthood. Few people can truly say they understand fully what it means to be a follower of Christ. None of us can fully explain the mystery of why God would choose to love us, forgive us, extend mercy and grace to us, or send His Son to die for us. A finite mind can never understand the infinite wisdom and power of almighty God. No . . . understanding is not the basis on which we conclude that we are saints.

Perhaps you have heard people say to you, “Oh, you are a real saint!” What they actually mean is, “You are truly a kind person, a generous person, or a helpful person.” From a biblical point of view, sainthood has nothing to do with what we *do* in the form of good works or kind gestures. Sainthood is bestowed on those who believe

in Christ solely on the basis of *what Jesus Christ has done*. The opinions of others are irrelevant and of no consequence.

So, what qualifies us to be saints? Only one thing: we must accept—receive, believe, and personally embrace—the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Our relationship with Jesus is what qualifies us to be saints. Nothing else is required!

However, within the concept of sainthood we find a number of other important truths. What does it truly *mean* to be a saint? How do saints live out their lives? What do saints do? These questions are at the heart of this study. When you acknowledge that you are a saint—a believer in Jesus Christ—you are just at the starting point for discovering *who you are in Christ*.

- 4. In what ways have you been relying on others to give you a sense of self-worth or to define your identity?

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- 5. How do you feel about being called “a saint of God”? How do you generally think of yourself in that regard?

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A “RIGHT” SELF-ESTEEM

We hear a great deal about self-esteem today. Countless books and online resources have been created on the subject. Nearly all of them are aimed at helping a person *raise* low self-esteem to achieve a *good* self-esteem. These resources address two broad categories.

First, there are some people who have self-esteem that is too *high*. In my opinion this represents a relatively small percentage of people, especially since many of those who *act* as if they think too highly of themselves are actually masking a low self-image. Those with too-high self-esteem are arrogant, self-centered, and have no regard for others. They believe the entire universe revolves around them. Too-high self-esteem leads them to conclude, “I can make it on my own if everybody else will just get out of my way.” They suffer from the “Big I” syndrome.

Second, there are those who have self-esteem that is too *low*. Most people fall into this category. They look around and conclude, “I’m not good enough, capable enough, or valuable enough. I’m worthless.” They see themselves without purpose or desirability. They cannot comprehend others might love them and value them—much less that *God* can love them.

In many cases, those with too-low self-esteem adopt a *false humility*—a kind of humility not before God but before others. They say, “I can’t do what other people can do. I can’t succeed as much as they succeed. I couldn’t possibly be as effective as another person in this role.” In their low self-esteem, they become “doormats” for others to walk on, which often leads to them feeling frustrated, discouraged, depressed, and without hope for their future.

What we don’t tend to realize is that people with too-low self-esteem also see the world through the filter of their own self and their own lack of ability. They are just as guilty of the “Big I syndrome” as those with too-high self-esteem. They are focused too much on *themselves*.

6. “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Philippians 2:3). Paul uses esteem as a verb in this verse. It is something you choose to do, not something that “just is.” How does this apply to your own self-esteem?

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7. What would your life be like if everyone you know esteemed themselves to be better than others? What if everyone esteemed others as better than themselves?

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THE ERROR OF COMPARISON

One great error that people make, regardless of whether their self-esteem is too low or too high, is that they compare *themselves* to *others*. God never calls us to compare ourselves with anyone! Each of us has been given a unique, one-of-a-kind, irreplaceable purpose in God’s plan. We have been created *as we are* by a loving God who wants us to fulfill the purpose that *He* has for our lives. It is when we compare ourselves to others that we say, “I’m not like that person,” and then conclude, “I’m not as good,” or, “I’m so much better.”

Comparison separates and divides us from one another. But of even greater consequence is the fact it leads us to false conclusions

about ourselves and, therefore, to faulty behaviors. When we think we are better than others, we treat them as inferior or as failures. When we think we are not as valuable as others, we treat them with undue deference, resentment, and envy. Both sets of behaviors keep us from loving others completely or appreciating the fullness of *who* God made them to be.

God calls us to neither a too-high nor a too-low self-esteem. He wants us to have a *right* self-esteem. A correct self-image can never be rooted in comparison with others. It can never be concluded on the basis of what others think about us, say to us, or even the way we feel about ourselves. A correct self-image is based on what *God* says about us in His Word.

Correct self-esteem is opposite to the “Big I” syndrome. Correct self-esteem says we do not know ourselves fully—but God does. Correct self-esteem says we cannot determine our own goodness or achieve our own forgiveness and righteousness—but we can accept what Jesus has done on our behalf. Correct self-esteem concludes we do not have the ability to love others unconditionally in our own strength—but we can love others as God helps us love them.

What *God* says about our identity is opposite to what the world says. The world says, “You have to make your own success.” God says, “Have a relationship with Me, trust Me, and I will give you total fulfillment and satisfaction.” The world says, “If you don’t make your own way, you will be run over or disregarded by others.” God says, “The greatest among you will become the servant of all, and in that, I will be well pleased with you.” The world says, “Get all you can so you can become all you are.” God says, “Give away all you can so you can gain your own soul.” God wants us to look to *Him* for our self-definition and our identity.

This is the focus of this study—to *who you are looking for your identity, image, and worth*. Perhaps you are listening to “replays” of what parents and others have said to you when you were a child. Some of those replays are faulty! Or maybe you are looking to spouses,

family members, friends, bosses, teachers, or others in authority to define you. Recognize that in many cases their understanding of you is limited. Often, they don't know the real you at all! No other person in this world knows you fully nor has the ability to see your past or your future.

God is the only reliable source of accurate, wise, and eternal information about you. He alone loves you unconditionally, understands you fully, and knows the fullness of purpose that He has built into your life. If you are ever going to discover your *true* identity in Christ Jesus—if you are going to discover what it means to be a saint—you must turn to God and His Word.

- 8.** In what ways have you been relying on others to give you a sense of your self-worth or to define your identity?

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- 9.** “Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26–28). What were Jesus’ purposes in coming to earth? How do these purposes relate to your identity?

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You are a Saint!

10. How do you react to the Lord's commandment to be a "slave"?

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TODAY AND TOMORROW

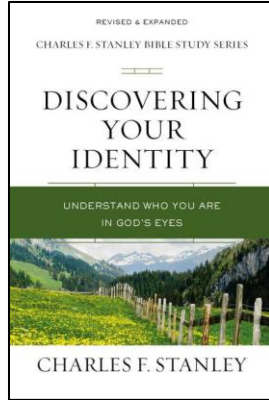
Today: A too low self-esteem leads to the same errors as a too high self-esteem: I become proud.

Tomorrow: I will ask the Lord to show me through His Word how to have a right self-esteem.

CLOSING PRAYER

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Father, we thank You for loving us. You are so patient to put up with our doubts, our fears, our anxieties, and so much of what has absolutely no basis whatsoever. Help us today to recognize the true identity that we have been given in Christ. Help us to see ourselves in the way that You see us—as Your chosen saints, ready and prepared to do Your work in this world.



DISCOVERING YOUR IDENTITY

by Charles F. Stanley

Who are you?

The only right way to understand who you are is to see yourself from God's perspective, as described in His Word. In *Discovering Your Identity*, you will be led through the many layers of understanding who you are in the eyes of God. As your search God's Word, you will discover many truths about yourself—such as the fact you are a beloved child of God, you are the heir of God's inheritance, and you are a member of the Body of Christ. In short . . . you are God's masterpiece!

The **Charles F. Stanley Bible Study Series** is a unique approach to Bible study, incorporating biblical truth, personal insights, emotional responses, and a call to action. Each study draws on Dr. Stanley's many years of teaching the guiding principles found in God's Word, showing how we can apply them in practical ways to every situation we face. This edition of the series has been completely revised and updated, and includes two brand-new lessons from Dr. Stanley.

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