

 Discovery Series®

WHO DOES JESUS THINK YOU ARE?



ARIA SPEARS

Created by Our Daily Bread Ministries
in Partnership with Adult & Teen Challenge

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introduction

Who Does Jesus Think You Are?

We all struggle with identity questions at some point in our lives: Who are we? What should we do with our seven or eight decades of life? What do we mean to the other people in our lives? In this booklet produced in collaboration with Adult & Teen Challenge, author Aria Spears looks at an even more fundamental identity question: Who does *Jesus* think we are? By tracing the work of Jesus in cultivating the fruit of the Spirit in his people, Spears unpacks not only the character of Jesus but also our own identities in him.

by Aria Spears

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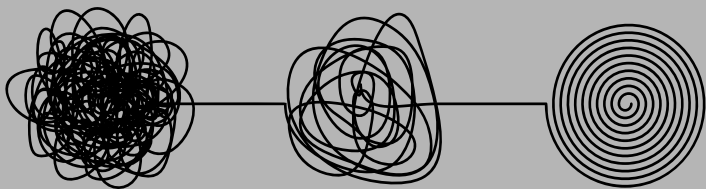
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Introduction

What do you think—is it possible for people to change?

In his letter to the church in a region called Galatia, Paul wrote at a time when the Galatians were very misinformed about what exactly helps people to do just that: change.

At the time, local teachers misinformed these early church goers about what it meant to be saved. Instead of focusing on Jesus and what he accomplished, the teachers instead focused on making sure people kept extra rules the teachers believed were necessary for salvation.

Paul took this misinformation seriously. He went to great lengths to demonstrate to this confused church why these extra rules were unnecessary and

unhelpful. Paul said Jesus fulfilled these regulations (the Law) through his life, death and resurrection. So through faith, followers of Jesus could actually be free. Paul encouraged them that Jesus did not die so people could add more rules to their routine. It is for *freedom* that Christ set us free (GALATIANS 5:1). But what does freedom in Jesus mean exactly? Freedom in Jesus looks like “faith working through love” (GALATIANS 5:6).

A life lived in surrender to Jesus looks like increasing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. Paul says these are the “fruit of the Spirit,” or the evidence of Jesus’s transformational work in a person. It doesn’t happen overnight, but these things can steadily become a reality in you through Jesus. As you actively partner with Jesus and with people who will have your back and hold you accountable, over time, you will see the fruit of your identity in Christ revealed.

That’s just scratching the surface, though. Let’s dive into each of these “fruits” to discover how *Jesus* first walked out these fruits of the Spirit, and then how he empowers *us* to walk them out as well through how we relate to one another.



one

Love

What does Jesus see when he looks at me?

Though considered **one** of the most famous, well-known verses in the Bible, many don't realize that in John 3, Jesus wasn't speaking to a crowd—he was speaking to one person. Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus, a religious leader who had come to visit him, perhaps in secret and at night. Jesus was a controversial figure among the religious leaders, and as the leaders in their community, they had a responsibility to discern exactly who Jesus was and whether he could be trusted. Was he the Messiah? Or was he a spiritual danger to their

community? It is not clear exactly what questions Nicodemus might have had in mind as he came to Jesus that night. But Nicodemus needed answers.

Although his exact motivations for coming to Jesus are not clear in the text, it *is* clear that he came to learn more about who Jesus was. And Jesus used different images to reveal the nature of his identity to Nicodemus. Jesus told Nicodemus that no one can enter the kingdom without being “born again” or “born from above” (JOHN 3:3). Nicodemus is surprised—and confused—by this answer, and seeks clarification. Jesus calls him out—*You’re a religious teacher and you don’t know this?* But despite Nicodemus not understanding what he should, Jesus doesn’t stop the conversation. Jesus doesn’t *always* explain further, but in this case, he goes on in greater detail.

Looking back on the passage, readers today have the benefit of hundreds of years of church tradition to interpret what Jesus meant. Back then, however, most of what Jesus said was completely new to Nicodemus and he found it hard to understand. But even then, Jesus continued speaking. Eventually, he finally connected something which would have been very familiar to Nicodemus: “And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (JOHN 3:14–15).

This image of Moses, an ancient Israelite Jewish leader and prophet, would have been extremely familiar to Nicodemus. This story Jesus referenced was passed down from generation to generation.

Perhaps then things started to make a little more sense to Nicodemus.

Jesus uses this familiar story to help Nicodemus understand his next point, which was absolutely critical in John 3:16–17:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

In this story, we see that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus with respect in the midst of Nicodemus' questions, but Jesus also helped elevate Nicodemus' learning through things he could relate to and understand.

Jesus loving you means that it is okay to ask questions—even tough questions. It means you can take a breath and be honest with him about where you're at right now spiritually, emotionally, and in every area of your life. It means you don't have to figure it all out before you turn to him for help, comfort or hope.

Jesus knows exactly who you are created to be. He sees your past, present and future and he loves you at every point. Sometimes you won't understand the answers you discern in prayer, community, or in reading Scripture. But that's okay. Jesus took the first step, not to “condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (JOHN 3:17).



two

Joy

How does Jesus view my past?

Jesus stirs up trouble related to the story of someone he met in John 4. He decided to take a shortcut his disciples didn't appreciate when he walked through an area known as Samaria. The Samaritans and Jews were serious rivals. While waiting for the disciples to return from a nearby town with lunch, Jesus sits down at a well and asks a Samaritan woman if she'd give him a drink of water. It was socially unacceptable for Jesus to *be* at the well, much less ask to drink from the cup of a Samaritan.

She isn't shy about her cynicism—she asks how a

Jew could ask her for a glass of water? He responds by telling her that if she knew who was asking her for water, she could ask him and he would give her living water (4:10). She thinks he is questioning her people's history, but he responds, "those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (4:14). She then says she wants to try this water so she doesn't have to be thirsty or return to the well each day.

She is intrigued already, but Jesus takes it a step further by providing insight into her home life. He asks her to bring her husband, to which she replies that she has no husband. Jesus then describes her life's concrete details in John 4:17–18: "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

How did he know that? She may have wondered. She declares him to be a prophet, inquiring about whether a particular place of worship is better than another, as contested by Samaritans and Jews at the time. At this, Jesus gives more insight than she bargained for. He says clearly to this Samaritan woman that he is the Messiah. He said, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you" (JOHN 4:26).

The disciples arrive on the scene at that moment, disoriented and astonished to find Jesus speaking to a Samaritan woman. She didn't waste any time on what they thought of her, however. At that moment, she dropped her water jars by the well, and ran back

to the city declaring, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” Some call her the first evangelist, as she declared who Jesus was to her city, bringing them to listen to him.

Jesus wasn’t afraid to break social convention and act against stereotypes about people in order to reach them. The disciples had difficulty accepting the fact that Jesus would even *speak* to a Samaritan woman. But Jesus took it a step further. He didn’t just engage in small talk with this woman cast low on the social ladder—he revealed his true identity as the Messiah!

Jesus saw the reality of her life, but also saw so much more in her. She was emboldened to break social convention, use her voice to declare his message and lead her entire city back to him.

This is what joy looks like. It is more than a feeling, it is a sense of seeing Jesus and being seen by him. Jesus sees the reality of your life—the hurt, the mistakes, the relationships, the victories, the memories. He sees it all. But that’s not all he sees. He sees what you are capable of with the help of the Holy Spirit. He sees the creativity and love of God at work in your unique personality and perspective on the world.

In every season, you are significant, you are seen and you are known. He is always revealing the ways in which YOUR unique contribution is absolutely critical to his story. And that purpose ignites joy. You can share joy with others in highlighting their strengths or how their work or efforts have helped you. When you show others that what they do and who they are matters, it can help spark joy.



three

Peace

How does Jesus help in hard times?

In John 11, Mary and Martha experienced the worst-case scenario—and Jesus wasn't there.

Their brother Lazarus, Jesus's friend, had been sick. They sent someone to request that Jesus come help them, and Jesus agreed. But he didn't come right away. He chose to wait two days before journeying to their town called Bethany.

Before they even arrived, Jesus knew the worst had happened—Lazarus died. He told his disciples plainly right before their trip, saying "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there,

so that you may believe. But let us go to him”

(JOHN 11:14–15).

When they finally arrived, Lazarus had already been in his tomb for days. When one sister, Martha, heard that Jesus was coming, she went out on the road to meet him, declaring “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him” (vv. 21–22). Jesus shares that he is the resurrection and the life and asks if Martha believes it. She affirms her belief and then goes to find her sister, Mary, who had been at the house.

Mary got up quickly and went to where Martha had met Jesus and met him there, too. She fell at his feet, repeating what her sister had cried, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (v. 32). Jesus is moved by her grief and sadness. And when they took him to see the tomb where Lazarus died, Jesus himself cried. He wept at the tomb of his friend, Lazarus, with Mary, Martha and their loved ones.

Soon after, Jesus approaches the tomb and issues what seemed like an absurd request—“Take away the stone.” Though reluctant to open a tomb of someone already dead for four days, people remove the stone and wait. Jesus said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me” (vv. 41–42). He then called to the dead man, “Lazarus! Come out!” And Lazarus came walking out of his tomb, alive, and still wrapped in his burial clothes!

In this story, Jesus is said to have known from

the time he left on the journey toward Bethany that Lazarus would die and live again—but he still wept at his friend’s tomb. He still grieved with Mary and Martha. He knew what was going to occur and even despite that, stayed present in each moment. He still cried.

The peace of Christ does not mean the absence of conflict, grief, or pain. Living in peace means you walk with an awareness that Christ is always with you. He not only experienced the pain of grief in this story, but also throughout his life and ministry. He faced rejection, betrayal, pain, danger, hunger, thirst. The Spirit is a Comforter (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4) but not in the form of flat religious platitudes. Living in peace doesn’t mean you have to suppress or hide your pain or grief—it means you can walk through them with courage. Both with Jesus and your community.

And as Jesus walks with you through hard times, you can share that same comfort with others in their challenging moments. Sometimes, peace is less about having the right words and more about simply being there. It is choosing to stick with someone in their grief, rather than walk away to where it is more comfortable. It is allowing people space to grieve and ask questions, rather than try to fix them with platitudes.

There’s nothing that can prepare us for when the worst happens. But the peace of Christ means you’ll *never* walk alone.



four

Patience

How does Jesus view my weakness?

One man Jesus encountered in John 5 had been ill and unable to walk for over three decades—thirty-eight years, in fact. This man worked hard to experience the healing he wanted for all these years, sitting close to a pool which he saw heal others time and again. His healing never came, though.

Jesus saw him one day, and “knew that he had been there a long time” (JOHN 5:6). Not presuming any particular outcome, Jesus asked the man if he wanted to be well? After so many years trying on his own, the man responded to Jesus with his frustrations about

how others always received the healing before he had the chance. In response, Jesus simply told the man, “Stand up, take your mat and walk” (JOHN 5:9). And suddenly, the man picked up his mat and walked!

Jesus once again stirred up controversy, since Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath and later, implied to the religious leaders that he was able to heal on the Sabbath because he was equal with God (JOHN 5:15-17). But what Jesus cared most about was how the healed man was doing. Jesus left the leaders and instead found the healed man in the temple.

Sometimes with Jesus’s help, change within us happens in an instant and we experience a miracle. Other times with Jesus’s help, change or healing can take patience, hard work, rest, support and time.

But like the man in the story, Jesus always welcomes us to become active participants in the process. We might answer with all of the reasons it might fail, but thankfully, he is greater than every one of those reasons. With patience to stick with us on the journey, Jesus asks us, “Do you want to be made well?”

In the same way, when we show patience, we are admitting that we can’t control other people or all of life’s circumstances. Patience allows for the space people often need to make their own decisions, even if it doesn’t fit what we prefer.

Jesus extends patience to us with a consistent invitation to follow and abide in him. We extend patience to others by inviting them into our lives with healthy boundaries and then allowing them to decide.



five

Kindness

What does it mean for Jesus to accept me?

In John 7, Jesus is traveling with his brothers through a place called Galilee, and even his own brothers misunderstood him.

It was risky for him to travel through Galilee because locals were seeking to kill Jesus. His brothers encouraged him to go to Judea with them so that the disciples might see what he was doing. They said, “For no one who wants to be known publicly acts in secret. Since You are doing these things, show Yourself to the world” (JOHN 7:4 BSB). It might seem like an encouragement at first, but the writer of John

adds a detail to illuminate their true intentions: John says they said this, “For not even his brothers believed in him” (JOHN 7:5).

Jesus faced misunderstanding from his own family. But that wasn’t the last time he would be misunderstood. He told his brothers to go celebrate the feast without him, and then—for reasons that are hard to decipher from the passage—Jesus went to the feast in Jerusalem in secret, on his own (JOHN 7:10).

This begins a wide array of encounters in which people cast judgments about Jesus and his *real* identity. Some recognized him as the one religious leaders were trying to kill, but they couldn’t discern whether he was the Messiah they had waited for (JOHN 7:25-27). Others saw his signs and considered that enough to believe he was the Messiah. A specific group of religious leaders, the Pharisees, heard Jesus was in town and, with the chief priests, tried to have him arrested to no avail.

This went on throughout the feast, with division among the crowds increasing. Jesus was judged, criticized, insulted and misunderstood. Though he lived a perfect life, not everyone could see that perfection.

It’s tough when we are misunderstood—when people judge us without knowing the full story. It’s a comfort that Jesus understands.

Soon after these events, in John 8, Jesus faces someone else who was misunderstood by a crowd—a woman said to be caught in adultery. The scribes and Pharisees were still working to test and arrest Jesus.

They brought the woman before Jesus, reminding

him of the passage in the Law which says people caught in this kind of situation should be stoned to death while ignoring the man with whom she was caught. They asked Jesus what he thought they should do.

He doesn't respond initially. But then Jesus responded to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her" (JOHN 8:7). Of course, knowing none of them were sinless, each one slowly left until only Jesus and the woman remained. In the end, Jesus did not accuse her, but said, "Neither do I condemn you ... Go and sin no more."

Jesus experienced constant judgment throughout his ministry. Everywhere he went, people made assumptions about his character, his identity, his past and his value. It is easy to identify with Jesus and the woman in this story—we all likely know what it means to be judged.

When we live into the kindness of Christ as part of our identity, it means we think carefully about how we respond to misunderstandings and judgment. Sometimes the kind response is assertive truth and accountability and other times, the most loving response is to overlook an offense. The more we grow in Christ, the more wisdom we cultivate about when to apply each approach.

When the kindness of Christ becomes part of your identity, you experience the kindness of Christ toward you. And then you can see others through different eyes.



six

Goodness

What does Jesus think of my pain?

In John 2, Jesus was invited to a wedding with his mother and disciples, and this became the setting for his first sign. At weddings during this time, it was expected for the hosts to keep the wine flowing throughout the wedding festivities. At one point, Jesus's mother, Mary, tells Jesus the wine ran out. She appears to have expected him to do something about it.

There were six jars and after Jesus told the servants to fill each of these large jars with water, he delegated one servant to fill a cup from these jars and take it to the banquet host to try without

mentioning its origin (JOHN 2:7-8). The water turned to wine, and it was so good, the host said it was even better than the wine with which the wedding started! The wedding hosts had more than enough to share with their neighbors, thanks to Jesus.

Directly following this passage in John 2:13, Jesus leaves that town and travels to a big city, Jerusalem. Instead of delighting wedding guests with delicious wine, however, his arrival at the temple had a markedly different tone. When Jesus arrived at the temple, he saw people selling cattle, sheep, doves and more. People coming to the temple often needed to purchase animals and other items to perform ritual sacrifices. Perhaps these sellers had taken advantage of them by incorrectly exchanging money or other methods.

In response to their practices, Jesus poured out the money from their tables onto the ground and flipped tables saying, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” This event is described in John 2:17 not as a practice to emulate, per se, but as fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

Holding both of these scenes together, one might see that the goodness of Jesus lies both in abundance and in justice. Abundance in providing excellent wine for the sake of wedding hosts, and justice in confronting indulgence and greed of the market sellers at the temple.

Both abundance and justice are necessary to understand Jesus’s work in the world and your identity in him. When Jesus died, he died not only to

offer freedom from your own sin, but also from the shame of those committed against you. His abundant grace offers forgiveness, and his justice also demands accountability.

When it comes to embracing goodness in your identity in Christ, both of these elements are also necessary for transformation: abundant grace and justice.

This can look like grace, forgiveness, and accountability. Forgiveness without accountability does not transform—it leaves people stuck in the same patterns. Jesus offers overflowing, abundant love and forgiveness, but his justice also calls you into more through repentance, or lasting change through his power at work in you.

Goodness calls us to face the consequences of our own choices, as well as the consequences of others' choices against us with Jesus's help (and sometimes, professional help, too!). And it also calls us to hold others within our realm of responsibility accountable for their choices.

Facing these realities with the wisdom, support, and love of our community, we can create more good in the world, as Jesus provided abundant generosity and hospitality at the wedding. And with just accountability, we can also ensure our communities remain safe, true, and transformational.



seven

Faithfulness

What happens if I make a mistake?

Along with stories, the gospel of John also contains a lot of Jesus's teachings to illustrate what Jesus means when he says people can participate in his kingdom and work. One comforting example is from John 15, when he compares connection to him to a plant, or rather, a vine:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in

you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

(JOHN 15:1–11)

When it comes to adopting faithfulness as part of your identity in Christ, this passage says it is centered on “abiding” in him like a branch abides in the larger vine. When you see a tree or a vine, the off-shooting branches and leaves are so utterly connected to the vine itself, it is as if they are one. Because they are. As verse four above says, if you take scissors to cut a branch, it would never bear any fruit. In fact, it would wither and die.

Spiritual practices such as prayer, reading your Bible and spending time in a healthy, spiritual church community are aspects of abiding. But at the same time, faithfulness is not necessarily about checking boxes or saying the right prayers at the right time. It is even more than that.

Faithfulness is seeing these spiritual practices not as to-do list items, but as opportunities for true transformation. Opportunities to respond to your ongoing, living relationship with Christ.

Faithfulness is trusting Jesus as you open the bill you're not sure how to pay. Faithfulness is stopping what you're doing to listen a little closer to a child. Faithfulness is taking seriously your character and integrity on the job. Faithfulness is stopping by the house of a cranky neighbor to check in.

Faithfulness is an ongoing, honest conversation with Jesus about the people you encounter, the worries from the day, and the hopes in your heart. It is surrendering what you think you should accomplish and trusting in what he is capable of doing in and through you. Faithfulness is confessing the thoughts and actions you know don't honor him. Faithfulness is asking for forgiveness. Faithfulness is taking accountability for your choices and finding help when you need it.

Ultimately, faithfulness is refusing to escape or to numb yourself to life, and instead, choosing to invite Jesus into all of it. Faithfulness is showing up as best you can with Jesus to your life's challenges and opportunities. It is being brave enough to trust that he wants a relationship with you both when you feel strong and spiritual—and also when you feel weak.

Faithfulness is holding on to “the vine” of Christ. But it is also remembering that Christ is always holding on to you, too.



eight

Gentleness

Does Jesus really care about my life?

John 13 features an iconic story in which Jesus does the unthinkable.

He washes his followers' feet. It says that Jesus knew his time to die had nearly arrived. And at the last dinner he would eat with all of his disciples (including Judas, who would betray him), Jesus did a task reserved for the lowest of common servants at the time.

To their shock, Jesus, “knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God” (JOHN 13:3), got up and washed each person's feet. Jesus tells

the disciples that he did this as an example of what he expected each of his followers to do—wash one another's feet, or serve one another.

Because washing feet is not a common form of hospitality for most in the U.S. today, it is hard to imagine the shock the disciples likely felt as their respected teacher washed the dirt from their daytime travels. Consider what it might be like for you to invite the pastor or professor or teacher you respect the most over for dinner. As you prepare the finishing touches, this person comes to you asking where you keep the bathroom cleaning supplies. How would you respond?

Jesus didn't choose to wash one disciple's feet and then delegate out the rest of the work—he washed those of each person individually. He took time for each person, conveying not only service, but lavish generosity. Jesus set aside all of his power and authority to show gentleness and care for each of them. They walked with him in the dust and dirt all over the region during their years together, and before his journey to the cross, Jesus took a moment to model the kind of gentle service required by love.

Accepting the gentleness of Jesus as part of your identity can mean slowing down like Jesus did to serve the people in your sphere of influence. It is slowing down to listen to what they need or care about, and responding in kind.



nine

Self-Control

How does Jesus make a difference?

After Jesus died, his followers didn't possess the full picture of what was happening like we do today. When he went to the cross, they knew that he died—but they didn't fully know what that meant for them. They left everything to follow Jesus. When Jesus was sentenced to death, it seemed like it was all over.

Perhaps they felt like all of their work and sacrifice had come to nothing. They once managed crowds clamoring for Jesus's attention and time. They were his friends, students and closest confidants. After

Jesus died, however, the crowds were gone. And so was Jesus. They might have asked themselves, “What now?”

In John 21, Jesus’s followers called Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael and others were grieving the loss of their teacher and friend after Jesus’s death. Perhaps not knowing what else to do and perhaps needing income, they returned to something all too familiar—fishing.

John 21:3 says it was Peter specifically who suggested they go fishing, an activity which had contoured his days for years before Jesus’s invitation to follow him. Years after that invitation, Peter now found himself without any other option but to return to his old life. In the wake of his grief, it is hard to say whether Peter felt relief or regret in returning to his old way of living.

They set out the nets, but it says they fished all night and caught nothing. It was all familiar: the net, the boat, the process, the skills. But yet they caught nothing.

After hours of trying, it says the morning dawned and Jesus (now risen from the dead) called to them from the shore, telling them to try fishing on the other side. Without knowing who it was that called to them, they tried and “were not able to haul [the net] in because there were so many fish” (JOHN 21:6).

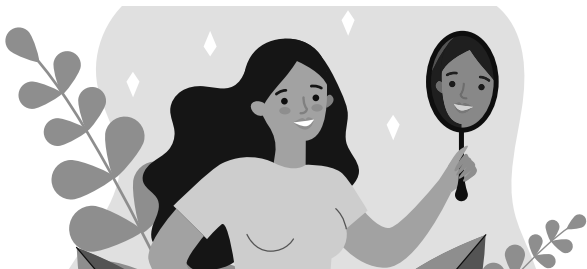
Peter recognized it was Jesus at this moment, and jumped into the water, pushing to reach him on the land. When he and the other disciples arrived, Jesus had already made them a breakfast of fish and bread. It sizzled over hot coals, ready for them to eat. While they labored for fish, Jesus labored for them.

They likely remembered when Jesus had multiplied those very foods earlier in their ministry together, as portrayed in John 6.

Even their old way of life was made new. The nets, the boat, the skills, the process were the same as they had always been. But the disciples, such as Peter, were different. This time, they didn't fish alone. Jesus's presence brought new meaning to something they may have done all their lives.

Like Peter and the disciples on their fishing boat, even if the scenery of your life seems the same, it can end differently because *you* are different. Jesus's active presence in your life now means there is hope for today to be different than yesterday and all of the days prior.

Accepting the fruit of self-control as part of your identity means you acknowledge the power of Jesus's presence in every area of your life. Spirit-empowered self-control is more than willpower alone. It is the grace of Jesus working within you as you partner with him and others. It is the renewal of your heart and mind to want something different for your life. It is the encouragement of a spiritual community spurring you on. It is the empowerment to follow Jesus and to do good.



Conclusion

Like **Galatians** portrays, adding more spiritual rules or activities won't do it. But Galatians and the stories of Jesus show, it is Jesus who transforms from the inside out.

The fruit of the Spirit displays your identity in Christ, wherever you are, whether you are all alone, at home with your family, speaking on a platform, or working on the job.

No matter what challenges or opportunities life brings you, your value, your worth, and your identity remain constant:

- Jesus loves you and you love others.
- Jesus rejoices in you and you live with joy.
- Jesus is always with you and you dwell in peace.

- Jesus is patient with you and you show patience.
- Jesus is kind toward you and you are kind to others.
- Jesus shows abundant and just goodness, and you contribute good.
- Jesus is committed to you and you are faithful to him.
- Jesus serves you and you gently serve others.
- Jesus empowers you and you are transformed.

There's more to you than your past. Every day is an invitation to transform into someone new. Your identity in Christ means every day is an opportunity to begin again.

In recognition of Jesus's active and present love for you and the empowerment of the Spirit at work in your life, what if change *is* possible?

There are certainly ways you can grow in your identity in Christ and in the fruit of the Spirit on your own. You can read or listen to your Bible; you can study books by credible teachers and pastors of the Bible; you can create art, music, or poetry to express your love for Jesus and others; you can pray and listen; you can think about the circumstances of your day and invite Christ to walk through them with you.

But your growth also depends on your willingness to invite others into the process and into your life. It can be hard to do sometimes, depending on your past and experiences, but finding trustworthy, mature, credible people to walk with you in your journey to change

can make all the difference. You might find a support group, a licensed counselor or therapist, a Sunday school class, an addiction recovery organization, a parent group, a volunteering opportunity, an accountability partner, a running group or book club, a Bible study, and any other combination of people, groups and places that allow opportunity for you to learn, grow and give with others.

Attending church creates an amazing opportunity to worship, pray, and learn with others pursuing a life with Jesus. And ultimately, the church is composed of people, and there are plenty of ways you can find additional care, support, and help to change throughout the week alongside them.

Jesus works beyond the four walls of your church. He works in the kitchen as you wash the dishes. He works with you on the job when you're in a meeting with a tough manager. He works with you as you decide to show up to your support group. He works with you at the park while you walk and talk with a friend.

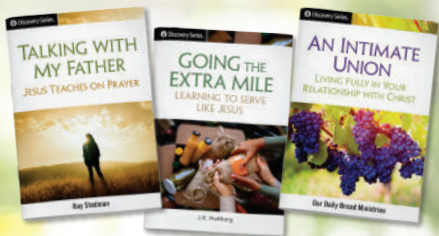
He works beyond the four walls of the church because he is interested in partnering with you in *every* area of your life. Growing in your identity in Christ can happen any and everywhere, because Jesus is *always* working for your good.

As you choose to partner with Jesus in taking responsibility for your own well-being and investing energy into his heart and kingdom purposes, you will find that change *is* possible. And that perhaps, change can begin right now—right where you are.

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Who are we, really?

Everyone asks questions about their own personal identity at some point in their life. And it can be unnerving to not have a good answer. In this booklet, discover an even more important identity question: Who does *Jesus* think we are? By tracing the work of Jesus in cultivating the fruit of the Spirit in his people, we can learn about not only Jesus but also how his view of us transforms us from the inside out.

Aria Spears is a strategic communication professional, licensed minister, and civic leadership enthusiast. She is a current M.Div. candidate at Duke Divinity School with a focus on missional innovation.

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