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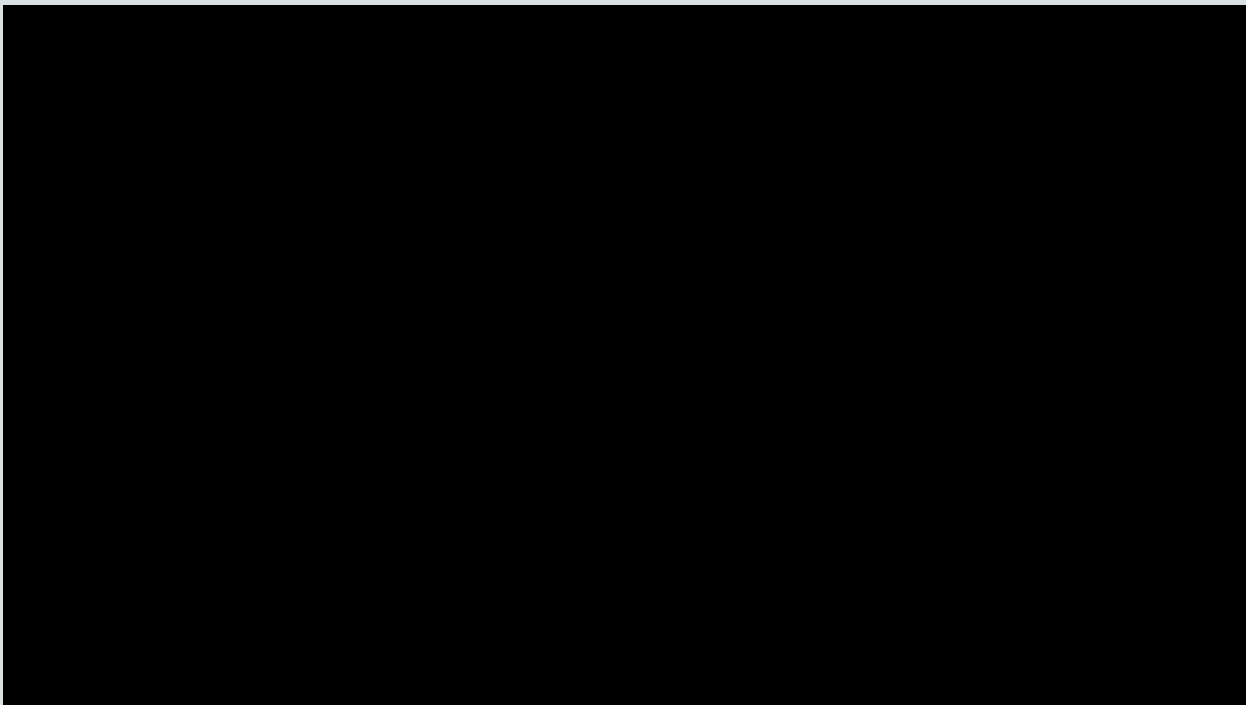
Week 2 - Identity

SUMMARY

We were created with a purpose. All too often, we deviate from that purpose and pursue things that rob us of true joy. We find ourselves gripped by selfishness and the pursuit of happiness as defined by the world. True joy, meaning, and purpose are found in loving God by living for others.

MISSIONS SPOTLIGHT

Watch the "ReachGlobal - Why Missions" video (10 minutes). This video introduces students to three missionaries and their journey of taking up their cross for the cause of Christ. Choosing to follow Him into missions is more important than worldly success and comfort.



MAIN MESSAGE

LETTING GO

The pursuit of happiness and success is a great thing, but what if we are going about it wrong? What if our definition of success comes from what our culture has influenced us to think rather than how God defines it?

Ask your group what it means to be happy and successful in the world. Typical answers include being popular, comfortable, wealthy, most talented, and having the best possessions.

We have been trained to believe that we need to have the best, the biggest, and the most "stuff" in order to be fulfilled. The problem is that we know these things don't bring true fulfillment; instead, they create a longing for more. Satisfaction is momentary. The more we have, the more we want. Achievements and

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material possessions will never fully satisfy. This pursuit of more for yourself only enslaves you and leads to hopelessness. It's a human tendency that all of us must recognize.

So, what's the answer? How can we truly find happiness and success in life that is lasting and eternal? Jesus tells us that the answer lies in letting go of our self-focused lives and beginning to serve others. He says that we find life by spending ourselves for His glory and for the good of others. To truly follow Him is to die to ourselves and live for God.

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

“Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?” Luke 9:23-25

Items of great value have great cost. If an item didn't cost anything, it would not hold value. It could easily be discarded, and you are out of pocket for nothing. But no one would ever toss something of great value. You would protect it, cherish it, and even risk your life for it.

Consider a high school student who values friendship so highly that they would risk their reputation or safety to defend a bullied friend, even if it means facing backlash from others.

Think about a new mother who values her baby so much that she sacrifices sleep, comfort, and her own body to provide and care for the child.

Or imagine a soldier whose deep love for country, freedom, and protecting the defenseless takes them to the ends of the earth to fight against injustice, risking their life for something of great value.

What is the value of life?

God values life so much that He gave His one and only Son to die for us so we might have life in Him.

But not a life that is consumed with our own pursuits. True life is found when we lay down our self-centered desires to pursue Him.

Following Jesus comes at a cost. It requires turning away from our selfish ways. We pay that cost when we truly believe that the life we can have in Him is better and more valuable than the one found in pursuing our own desires.

Jesus poses a question to His disciples—and to you and me: “What does it profit a person to gain the whole world but lose their soul?”

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It's a profound dilemma we all must wrestle with. Is gaining temporary pleasure, wealth, and status worth it? Is forfeiting our soul, true peace, contentment, joy, and freedom worth the temporary gain?

Jesus says, "If you want to find true life, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me."

What does it mean to "take up your cross daily"?

He commands us to die to ourselves and to take up our new life in Him.

It requires self-denial, complete dedication, and willing obedience. Jesus emphasizes continued action. He wants us to follow, be free, and live like Him.

Our culture tells us that happiness and life come from having the nicest car, the biggest house, the best technology, the most money, the most friends, or being famous. But in Jesus, we find life by letting go of these selfish pursuits and choosing to give our lives away for His glory.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Read Luke 16:19-31

Let's consider the lives of each of these men in the story. The rich man had everything the world could offer, but Lazarus was poor, hungry, and sick. The world seemed to view him as worthless, and his life as a waste.

The rich man might have been seen as successful and happy due to his wealth, but Jesus explains that it was all temporary pleasures and ultimately ended up being a waste. In contrast, Lazarus had a difficult life, yet he knew God, and God ultimately exalted and blessed him for all eternity.

Don't be overcome by the world's lie that success comes from accumulating more for yourself. This path leads only to disappointment and an insatiable longing. We must let go of the cultural pressures and live for what lasts eternally. Instead of allowing the world to dictate importance, let's prioritize what God considers significant (Matthew 6:33).

Consider these quotes:

- "Only one life will soon be passed, only what's done for Christ will last." — C.T. Studd
- "Our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding in something that doesn't really matter." — D.L. Moody

The Kingdom of God brings a reversal of fortunes. The rich, proud, and powerful will be humbled, while the poor, humble, and oppressed will be exalted.

Is it worth it?

Each person must ask themselves: Is laying down my life for Jesus worth it?

Is taking up the cross and following God worth it?



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Why would I give up ease, comfort, and personal gain?

Because He spent Himself for you! At the cross, Jesus gave everything so you could gain everything. He is worthy of our sacrifice, worship, and life.

The good news is that when you surrender your life to Him, you find new life (Luke 9:23-25).

This new life has purpose, meaning, hope, and a future (Romans 5:1-5).

Wrap Up

When Jesus was pressed with the question “What is the greatest commandment?” by the religious leaders of the day, His response was clear: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind,” and “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

We were created with a purpose: to love God and love others. However, all too often, we deviate from that purpose and pursue things that rob us of true joy. We find ourselves gripped by selfishness and the pursuit of happiness as defined by the world. But true joy, meaning, and purpose are found in loving God by living for others. When we lose our lives for Him and for others, we discover real life.

SPEND YOURSELF

Isaiah 58:6-11

God instructs us to spend ourselves on behalf of those in need, and then our light will rise, and healing will quickly appear.

What does it mean to “Spend Yourself”?

It means living in such a way that you are fully committed to God and His commands, willing to make sacrifices to glorify Him and bless others. This requires giving of your time, talents, and resources.

Going against culture can be challenging, but as you prioritize God above all else, He will reveal His way and give you His heart.

The way of Christ involves loving others before yourself and being willing to spend yourself for their well-being. It's a life of love, compassion, generosity, and sacrifice.

Jesus teaches that true happiness, purpose, and life come from living for others rather than being consumed by self. As you follow Jesus and care for those He cares about, you become more like Him (Matthew 20:28).

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Spend Yourself (Postcard handout)

Isaiah 58:6-11

He says to spend yourself on behalf of those in need, and then your light will rise, and your healing will quickly appear.

What does it mean to “Spend Yourself?”

Living in such a way that is so committed to God and His commands that you are willing to make sacrifices in order to glorify God and bless others. This will require giving of your time, talents, and resources.

Each week, we will have a practical object lesson and an opportunity for you to get involved in missions. This week, you can spend yourself by getting involved in 4 areas.

Learn/Experience -

- Pick one truth about who you are in Christ and memorize the corresponding verse.
- Social Media Fast - Pause all your accounts, and every time you attempt to visit these apps, remind yourself of who you are in Christ and that He sees you and is your trusted companion.

Pray - Set an alarm on your phone every day at 10:02 (Luke 10:2) and commit to praying every day for a friend who is far from Jesus.

Give - Join the Giving Raid: www.apexmissions.org/here-to-everywhere

Go - Be intentional with the friend you're praying for by using the STAR Tool.



Here To Everywhere Giving Page





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Week 2 - Discussion Questions

- 1. Defining Happiness and Success:** Reflecting on the typical definitions of happiness and success (like wealth, popularity, and possessions), how does your personal definition align or differ? How does this reflect in your daily decisions and aspirations?
- 2. The Cycle of Desire:** The constant pursuit of more leads to a never-ending cycle of desire and dissatisfaction. Can you share a personal experience where achieving a desired goal didn't bring the lasting fulfillment you expected? How did that impact your outlook on happiness and success?
- 3. Cost of Discipleship:** Discuss the idea that "Items of great value have great cost." How does this principle apply to following Jesus, according to the passage from Luke 9:23-25? In what ways are you challenged to "take up your cross" in your own life?
- 4. Contrasting Worldly Success with Spiritual Fulfillment:** Reflect on the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. What does this parable tell us about the temporal nature of worldly success versus the eternal value of spiritual fulfillment? How does this perspective challenge the way you prioritize your goals and resources?
- 5. Living for Others:** We find true happiness and purpose by following Jesus and serving others. What are some practical ways you can "spend yourself" on behalf of those in need within your community? How might these actions shift your understanding of true success and happiness?