



Identity And Your Self-Image

When you hear identity theft you think of someone taking your personal information and impersonating you to commit identity fraud. When I say identity theft I mean the results of life experiences and negative messages that have stolen your true identity and robbed you of a healthy, unwavering self-image.

How do you view yourself?

1 in 10 people have been victimized by identity theft, the kind that steals personal information but the **vast majority** of you have been victim to an even greater loss and you may not even realize it. You have had your perceptions of self, your soul tainted. Some of the victims of personal information theft don't learn about their fate for four or more years.

How many more of you walk around for a *lifetime* and never truly identify where you have embraced faulty messages about yourself and how your perceptions of “self” has affected your decisions, emotions, and relationships?

How did your self-image develop? How was your identity formed? From the day you were born you have received millions of messages that put labels on you and resulted in your current belief system. Your life experiences have influenced how you see yourself, and how you grew up shaped your opinions of yourself.

- Did your family model acceptance and love to you?
- Were you personally affirmed as a valuable person? or
- Was your family emotionally absent, critical, or shaming?

Most of our identities have been marred by vital needs that were left unmet, negative words that were spoken over us, and life experiences that have beaten us down. All of this information has



formed what you think of yourself. You forge your own brand of truth based on what has been spoken to you and what your experiences have confirmed.

All people have ten essential human needs¹. They are: **acceptance, affection, appreciation, approval, attention, comfort, encouragement, respect, security, and support**. These needs must be met to experience healthy, close personal relationships with yourself, others, and even God. When these needs go unmet, your perception of true identity is marred and you feel alone.

If your needs are not met in healthy ways you will find less desirable ways to meet your needs. This is how you may develop faulty coping, communication, and relationship skills. You may struggle with emotional and relational issues, suffer from depression, anxiety, anger issues, enter into abuse systems, or develop unhealthy habits - [abusing alcohol](#) or other substances or events in an attempt to meet your needs.



You are not a victim of the past. Anything that has developed within you can be remolded and transformed in your life. You can begin this process by looking at your past and your experiences. This is for identification not judgment. Understanding how your needs were met begins the process of identifying how your thinking, beliefs, identity, and life and relationship skills developed, empowering you to change whatever is hindering you.

You can evaluate how these needs have been met in your life from three major arenas: your family of origin, your community, and your peer groups. Your experiences have either met most of your needs, or have fallen short to varying levels. Identifying how well your needs have been met helps you to recognize the messages that you have received and how your identity has evolved.



There are four questions that you can ask yourself to determine how your identity was formed.

1. How many of my needs were met from my family members growing up as a child?
2. Did my community and culture send messages that I was valuable?
3. What amount of needs did I have met from my peers, friends and associates?
4. Did my experiences support me as a unique, valuable and fully acceptable person?

Remember that you look at past events only for identification and not judgment. The memories you have will reveal messages you embraced as part of your thinking, core beliefs, and identity. You need to ask yourself...

1. Were the above environments emotionally available?
2. Were there destructive patterns of alcohol, anger, affairs, divorce, mental illness present?
3. Did these environments use guilt, shame or fear to control me?

For example you may have received acceptance only when you did what was expected and performed to the “defined standards.” Now, as an adult you may view everything through this pre-programmed filter. This produces a performance based mentality which negates unconditional love and shapes your identity.

The family, community, and peer groups where you resided have affected your self-image. The culture and even the media gave you messages from the community. The people that you choose to associate with either have raised you to a higher level or pulled you down. Your desire to be accepted may have lured you into attitudes and behaviors that hinder positive growth. The beliefs and behaviors of those around you have an influence on you and you may have adopted portions of their identity as your own. You have continued to receive messages from your childhood to the present day that shaped your identity and your personal self-image.

What defines who you are as a person? The messages that you received from your environment dictated what was acceptable and valuable.



Physical Attributes

Clothing

Ethnic and Family Origin



Nice Possessions

Money

Belief Systems



Impressive Education

Accomplishments

Professional Career

These elements are not who you are, rather they are the outer shell of your identity. They are what others see and what you see in the mirror. Yet, many of you let these things define you as an



individual. The question to ask yourself is to determine if your value is the same with or without them.

Your true identity is not in these outer layers. Your perception of your core identity determines how you think, how you carry yourself in daily life, the level of joy or pain you experience, how you treat other people and expect to be treated, and how you respond to family, friends, and even God. Many of you focus on the outer layers and don't see who you really are, a person of value and great worth.

You need to *choose* to believe that you are loveable and valuable even if the messages you received by family, community, or peers does not support your worth. If your view of self is that you are significant, you believe that you are important and valuable as a unique individual, and accept yourself as lovable, worthy, and a competent member of society, then those thoughts and beliefs will change the way that you interact with the world, even in hostile environments.

However, if your identity is cloudy you will display a number of debilitating traits. You will have difficulty relating to other people, or have a revolving door on relationships. You may feel insecure, inadequate, and needy for attention. You may also struggle with negative expectations, anger, depression, and anxiety. You may be unable to give selfless attention to others because of a poor sense of identity that prevents you from reaching out fully to love and care for other people because you are always busy protecting self.

When you have a poor sense of identity you also tend to view yourself through other people's eyes. If someone praises you and gives you affirmation you feel worthwhile. If a person is critical or negative to you then feeling poorly about yourself may be your response. You may be a slave to the opinions of others, or lack freedom to be who you are because your identity is dependent on other people's acceptance and approval of you.



If you have a faulty perspective of your identity you will struggle with negative expectations. You will walk through life expecting to be rejected. When you anticipate the worst you often develop self defeating behaviors that bring about the lack of acceptance that you expect but do not want.



You do not have to sabotage your life this way, you can begin to renew your mind and opinions and it begins with understanding how these thoughts and beliefs have developed.

There are varying perspectives of how you as an individual are viewed.
Here are four mirrors that direct your identity.

- **The mirror on the wall** is where you view your reflection which summarizes who you are as a person. It is your own personal perception.
- **The mirror of other people's opinion** is what reflects back to you how other people see you. It is how they perceive you from the outside.
- **The blackened mirror** is like a black hole that you peer into and what is hidden within is not visible. It contains the wounds and messages that have defined your identity. They are hidden inside of you where no one else can see, yet it drives your view of self.
- **The mirror on the ceiling** is God's perspective reflected back to you. It shows you your true identity and the perfect design in you.



When you look at **the mirror on the wall** you see yourself based on your appearance, personal history, accomplishments, failures and your style. You see yourself through your private world of thoughts and core beliefs that developed from the messages you received and embraced from your childhood through your present life experiences. No one else may see you as you see yourself.



When you view yourself through **the mirror of other people's opinion** you choose to accept their perspective of who you are and how they define you as an individual. It comes from their own filter of who you are based on their own opinions and programming, or what they think you should be. It may include things you don't see about yourself both positive and negative.

A negative example is when someone may think you are stuck up and unfriendly when in actuality you are merely shy. The question is do you receive or reject faulty messages about self. A positive example would be that even though you may feel like a failure from your past experiences, other people view you as competent and talented. When others communicate what they see in you they may help to remove the mental stronghold.

You must choose to reject the faulty core beliefs based on messages from the past and reshape your thinking about self.

The blackened mirror consists of forgotten memories, experiences and messages that have shaped your identity and behaviors. They may be the wounds and deep hurts, rejection, and hidden motives that you have subconsciously locked away. They form a stronghold wall that may keep you locked



in shame, self contempt, limiting thoughts and beliefs, as well as sabotaging behavior patterns that you may repeat because of your buried expectations.



The mirror on the ceiling is how God views you. Unfortunately your view of God may have been tainted by family, friends, your community or even your church. Too many people have a faulty view of God's character, intentions and personality. You may have had an earthly father who was punishing, critical, judgmental, or you may view your father as apathetic and uninvolved. This will hinder your ability to see God for who He is - **someone for you and not against you**; a God who is not waiting with a lightning bolt, but waiting for an invitation to give you a hand up and to love you unconditionally. If you can see Him accurately it can transform how you see yourself and your infinite value.

The portrait that you paint of yourself is often tainted.

The development of your identity may have been blocked or limited by many of life's circumstances. Life's lessons either teach you that the world and relationships are positive, or they may promote a negative expectation. This may not be in your conscious agreement, but rather in the knee jerk reactions that are revealed through situations and experiences. If you have experienced many unhealthy relationships, the message is that your worth is not valued very highly. If you were abused and suffered trauma your outlook on yourself and others is badly affected. If you were treated well and everything you put your hand to succeeded, you will have a different outlook all together.



The messages you received must be sifted and replaced.

People with confused identities see themselves as victims in a hostile world and endure what comes their way instead of challenging it or attempting to change it. Instead of challenging faulty beliefs you may feel stuck and embrace them. You may believe you are getting what you deserve and the consequences then support the faulty beliefs in your mind, choices, and behaviors.

Your identity is at the core of how you see yourself in every area.

If you see yourself as a failure it will point the direction of your thoughts and actions. But if you see yourself as having unlimited potential you can face life's challenges. When you embrace a message it becomes a foundational belief that you act upon both consciously and unconsciously. Each experience that you have is layered upon the original message. This is what forms a mental stronghold or core belief.

When you believe something to be true, your mind sifts all sources of information that you receive daily and everything is sent through this filter into a perception. You hold fast to messages that agree with that belief, and reject messages that do not. The belief then becomes more and more embedded in how you perceive yourself. Day after day, and year after year, you develop the original message into a massive cognitive distortion or mental stronghold. At the center of that message is a core belief that must be identified and torn down so you do not respond in agreement to it daily.



All of us can transform the defective portraits of our identity in some area.



Many of you have distorted self-images that developed from childhood. Your agreement with your life experiences may have colored your inner self portrait. The inaccurate picture you inherited from negative influences in your life can be changed. Although your identity may be deeply rooted in your subconscious mind, you can have a hope to receive a new, true identity.

The good news is that you are capable of change.

You do not have to remain stuck in old thought patterns and faulty core beliefs that drive you. Until now life didn't come with an instruction manual and too many of you have run around the same hamster wheel of personal challenges. At Life Renewal Inc. we give you a road map designed to empower you to begin the journey of adding tools to your tool box to change your life for the better one thought at a time. Don't allow your life, relationships, emotions, or accomplishments to be less than your wildest dreams.



Dr. Michele is a Clinical Christian Counselor, Speaker and Author. She is the founder and director of Life Renewal Inc. where she actively counsels and teaches. You can follow her on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) & [Facebook](#)

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1. "The Great Commandment Principle," by David Ferguson