

MODULE 3: IDENTITY

MODULE OBJECTIVES:

Connect the concept of identity to God's story and explore how we are formed by God's story.

Explore what other stories and desires are shaping us.

Unpack practical steps for aligning our desires with God's story and plan for us.

Develop Identity Statements that participants feel reflect how they have been made and who they are becoming.

Seed Tools: The Purpose Storyboard (for reflection and composing an Identity Statement)

Seed Videos: "Understanding Identity"

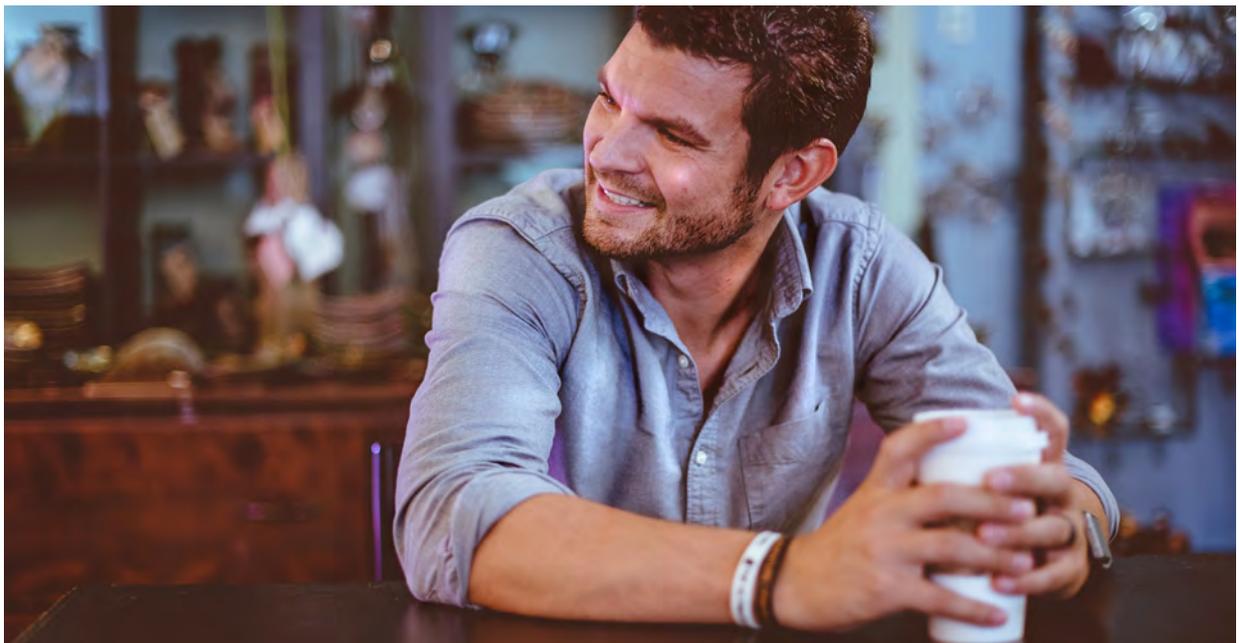
Selected Readings: Chapter 3 of *You are What you Love* by James K.A. Smith.

MODULE OVERVIEW:

Understanding our identity (who we are and who we are becoming) starts with being formed by God's story and shaped by God's grace. This module presents a process for aligning our identity with the identity that we see in Scripture. It starts with an awareness of God's story and grace, an awareness of the other stories that are forming us and then putting in place rhythms that help us to align more fully with God's story. This module digs deeply into the second part of this process.

MODULE BREAKDOWN:

- 3.1 Introduction to Identity
- 3.2 What do you love?
- 3.3 What is God like?
- 3.4 Identity Statement
- 3.5 Re-framing our desires



▶ 3.1 INTRODUCTION TO IDENTITY

 Our identity, who we are and who we are becoming is an integral component of becoming an effective changemaker. As Christians, our identity is formed by God's story and shaped by God's grace.

From the very beginning of God's story, in Genesis 1:27 we find that we are created in God's image. "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." This image is distorted by sin, but it remains core to the identity of humans to bear God's image, and core to the calling of God's people to be God's image bearers in the world.

Then in the New Testament, God designates those who know him to be new creations (2 Cor 5:17); citizens of God's kingdom (Eph 2:19); and children of God (Gal 3:26) — these are all statements of identity. It is clear that our God-given identity is discovered, not self-determined.

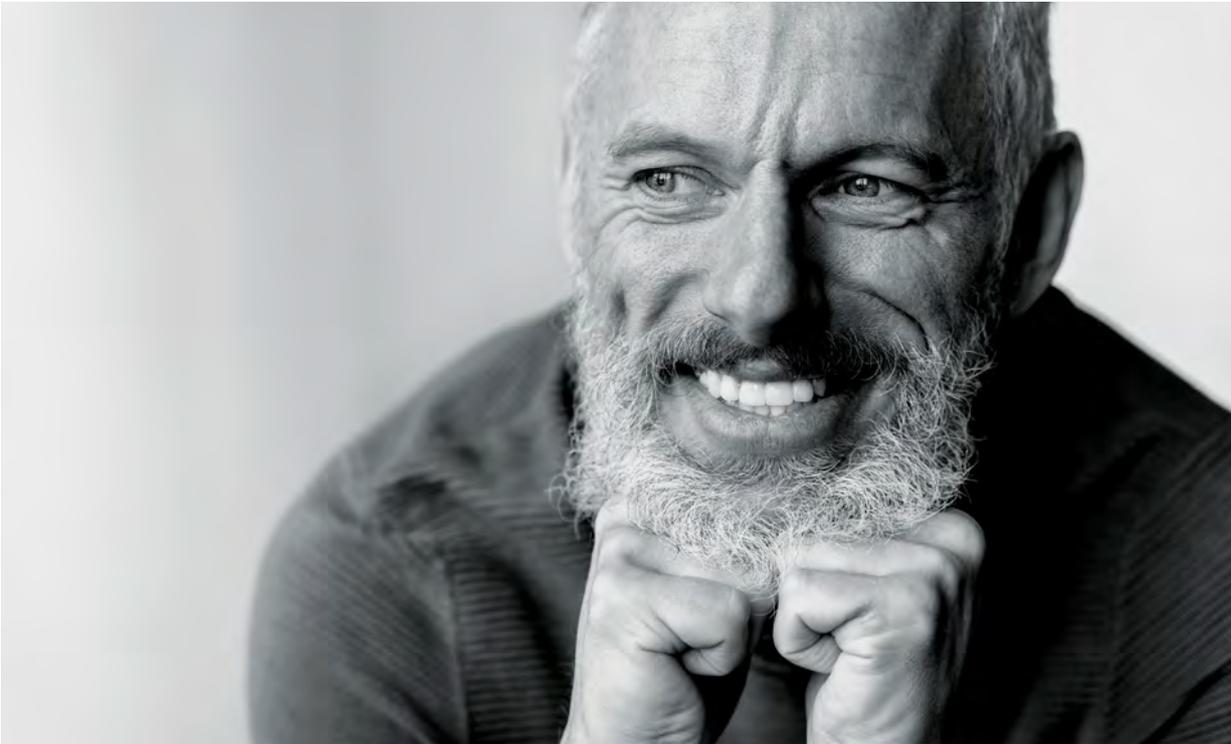
It is important to discern who God has made us to be—clarifying our identity, story and purpose within God's story and purpose rather than the other way round of trying to fit God's story into ours. Doing this fundamentally reframes the story we are often told (or tell ourselves) about who we are. We are invited to reframe our story within God's story as the primary source of our individual and collective identity.

This can be hard to do, but it is possible, with the help of God's Spirit. First, we need to be clear about God's story and about who God says we are, this is something we began unpacking in Ephesians during the last module. We also need to be conscious of the many other things apart from God's story that are already shaping us. Finally, we need to ensure that we are living by God's story, practicing the way of Jesus, and putting in place rhythms that will help us continue to allow God's story and truth to shape us.





NOTES / COMMENTS



3.2 WHAT DO YOU LOVE?



Human beings are always being formed. Our lives (what we think, do and love) are being shaped by hundreds of stories each day, through media, advertising, family and community.

Our challenge is to identify where these stories are aligned with, or contrary to, what God says to be true of our identity and the world.

Let's start at the very core of our being, our heart, and explore what it is we love. Put another way, we want to examine what it is we long for. Proverbs 4:23 says "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." We start with the question — **what do you want?**

James K.A. Smith says,

"That's the question. It is the first, last, and most fundamental question of Christian discipleship. Jesus doesn't encounter Matthew and John – or you and me – and ask, "What do you know?" He doesn't even ask, "What do you believe?" He asks "What do you want?" This is the most incisive, piercing question Jesus can ask of us precisely because we are what we want. Our wants and longings and desires are at the core of our identity, the wellspring from which our actions and behaviour flow." (*You Are What You Love*, pp. 1-2)

Take some time to think about this question for yourself — **what do you want?**



Don't think about what it is that you think God wants you to want.

What is it that you actually want in life? What do you desire? What are you chasing after? What are the longings you have that shape the way you live your life and the choices that you make?



If you have time, also consider these follow up questions:

What is it that has shaped that desire in you? Where have these desires originated?

Where did the story about a good/happy/successful life come from?





NOTES / COMMENTS



3.3 WHAT IS GOD LIKE?



Our hope and prayer for this part of the module is that two things will happen.

First, as you take the time to dwell on who God is and what God is like, your love for God would be renewed. Second, that you would also be captivated by the calling to bear the image of this amazing God to the world around you!

Humans clearly have limitations. We are created beings. We are not God. There is a distinction between us as creatures and God as creator. Yet, humans are given a privileged place in creation, as the image bearers of God. What does that actually mean, what does it mean to bear God's image in the world?

As a starting point, if we are to image God in the world, we need to be connected in relationship to God.

Take some time now to think about and share your thoughts in response to the question – **what is God like?**

Discuss as a group and record your answers – gathering a collective picture of the group's understanding of the nature and character of God.

Discuss – **what does this mean for how I live?**

Highlight any aspects of God's nature and character that, if we were to image them in the world, would affect the way we live.





NOTES / COMMENTS



3.4 IDENTITY STATEMENT

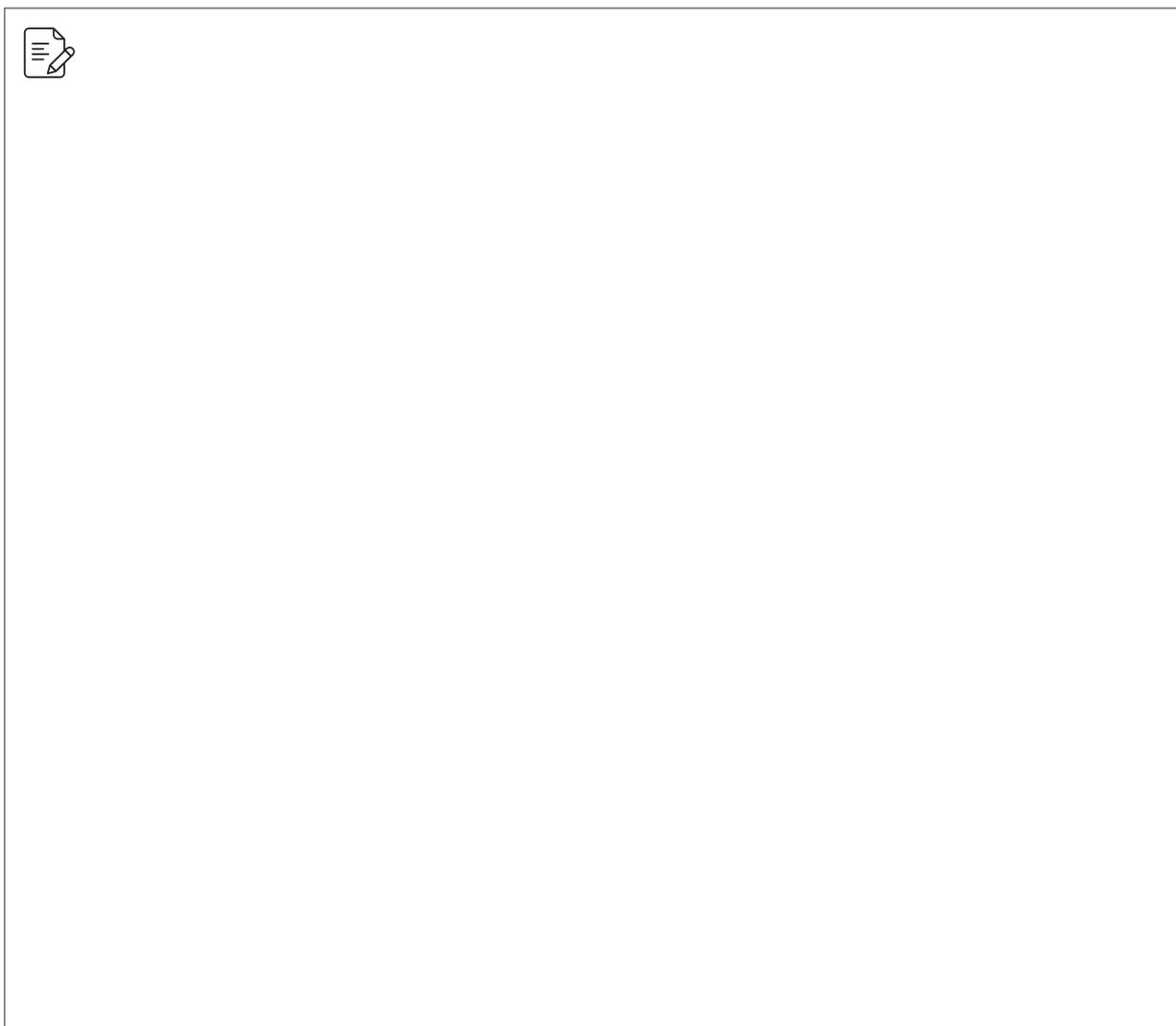
An identity statement is a helpful way to reflect on how God has made you as His workmanship (Eph 2:10). Life with Jesus is far more than a to-do list of aligned actions, which is why an identity statement can be helpful for capturing a fuller image of the person you are becoming in Christ.

As you reflect on your Purpose Storyboard you will start to get a sense of the particular ways that God has shaped you and the ways God has been at work in your life. Your identity statement is a metaphor (picture or

image) that captures who you are in the roles and relationships you hold in the world. It is something more core to your identity than a list of goals or a position description.

Ask God to give you an image that might describe more of who you are, what your identity in God's story is.

Then try completing this statement: **I am like...** (try drawing your identity statement)





NOTES / COMMENTS



3.5 RE-FRAMING OUR DESIRES

The foundation for being a changemaker is to be a disciple of Jesus. In following Jesus, in pursuing him, we find ourselves being shaped by him.

Our goal is to learn to follow well. We don't just want to learn more information about Jesus, we want to develop rhythms and practises in our lives that enable us to continually be formed and re-formed by Jesus and his ways.

However, we will only faithfully follow Jesus if life with Jesus is our heart's desire, that which we long for.

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

*(Augustine's Confessions
Lib 1,1-2,2.5,5: CSEL 33, 1-5)*

How do we develop our longing for Jesus and his ways?

Note that we will engage more with this question in later modules, but in-between now and our next session, reflect on one way that you could develop your longings for Jesus and his ways.



BEFORE NEXT TIME

- **Reflect** on the questions ***what do I love*** and ***how can I develop my longing for Jesus and his ways.***
- **Return** to your identity statement, how is the metaphor sitting with you? Iterate over the expression of your identity, share it with someone who knows you well and invite their reflections.

