



Who Am I, Really? Living Into Our True Identity in Christ

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.
For he chose us in him before the creation of the world
to be holy and blameless in his sight.
In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship
through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—
Ephesians 1:3-5

Our true self—the self we are becoming in God—
is something we receive from God.
Any other identity is of our own making and is an illusion.
David G. Benner

In today's spiritual formation landscape, the language of "old self/new self" and "true self/false self" is frequently used to help Christians understand their identity in Christ. Yet, without a clear theological foundation, such terms can lead to some confusion. Trinitarian theologian Gary Deddo offers an important corrective and clarification to these frameworks, reminding us that the New Testament presents a single, God-created human nature—not two conflicting natures battling within us.¹

Deddo explains that the "old nature" is not discarded in exchange for a brand-new substitute. Rather, what is being described metaphorically as "old" is the same nature being renewed, restored, and conformed to Christ's perfect humanity.² As Colossians 3:9–10 (NIV) puts it: "You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." Likewise, Ephesians 4:22–24 tells us to "put off your old self... and put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."³

This transformation does not imply the existence of two opposing natures. As Deddo notes, "The struggle is actually between the person (with their human nature they have in common with all other humans) and an alien party, namely, sin or the power of sin."⁴

¹ Gary Deddo, "Clarifying Our Theological Vision – Part 4," *Equipper* (July 2017), <https://equipper.gci.org/2017/07/clarifying-our-theological-vision-part-4>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

What's being resisted is not an internal, competing self, but the external influence of sin distorting God's original intent for our humanity.

From this foundation, the language of the “true self” and “false self,” when carefully defined, offers a psychologically informed and pastorally helpful lens. David G. Benner explains that our transformational journey in Christ is the way we “journey into God” and as we do this we come to discover that, “all along we have already been in God. It is the way our identity, consciousness and life become grounded in our self-in-God and God's self-in-us.”⁵ The false self, in contrast, is not a literal second nature but a construct we develop to secure approval, safety, or control—“engineered to protect and promote ourselves,” as one Christian formation colleague puts it. When understood this way, the false self is not an ontological reality but a distortion of the true self—a mask shaped by wounds, societal pressures, and the power of sin.

Benner continues, “The goal of the spiritual journey is the transformation of self...this requires knowing both our self and God. Both are necessary if we are to discover our true identity as those who are “in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17), because the self is where we meet God.”⁶ This is a deeply biblical truth: we are becoming who we already are in Christ.

Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life—
even though invisible to spectators—
is with Christ in God. He is your life.
When Christ (your real life, remember)
shows up again on this earth,
you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you.

Colossians 3:3-4, MSG

Such understanding aligns with Paul's emphasis on renewal. Romans 12:2 calls believers not to conform to the patterns of this world but to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Through union with Christ, the self is not replaced but redeemed—freed from sin's alien grip and awakened to its true, God-intended identity. Thus, dying to the false self is not about rejecting part of who we are, but about surrendering the distortions we've adopted under the influence of the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is an invitation to step into the “new self”—our true self—as those made alive in Christ.

For this reason, Ruth Haley Barton relates that the journey from the false self to the Christ-self is one of the most profound and difficult movements of spiritual transformation. She writes that, “We are slow to accept the fact that our false self permeates all the way to the core of our being.” The false self is formed early in life as a way of coping—seeking love, safety, and significance apart from God. It often masquerades as virtue, hiding beneath our success, ministry, or religious performance. Because it feels

⁵ David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1.

⁶ Ibid, 10.

so intertwined with who we think we are, recognizing it as false can be unsettling and even painful. Yet genuine spiritual growth requires this awakening. As the Holy Spirit reveals the patterns of self-reliance and illusion within us, we are invited to release our need for control and open ourselves to the deeper reality of our true self in Christ—the self-rooted in God's love, free to live from communion rather than compulsion. This ongoing process of dying to the false and awakening to the true is the heart of the deeper journey of spiritual formation.⁷

Trevor Hudson, in *Discovering Our Spiritual Identity: Practices for God's Beloved*, also speaks to the challenge we face in truly coming to know ourselves. He writes that, "Given the crucial importance of knowing who we are, it is not surprising that the identity quest threads its way throughout our lives." Although we are all invited by God to recognize and to live into the reality of who we really are--his beloved sons and daughters, we can often fall prey to lying voices that deceive us with false concepts and half-truths which cause us to, "adopt patterns of [thinking and living] that impoverish the soul, cripple relationships and block the glory of God from shining through us...and tragically, we miss the mark that God sets for our lives."⁸

Jesus, who is the Truth (John 14:6), desires that we not only know the truth about God but also the truth about ourselves. He reminds us, "*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:32). The freedom Christ offers is not merely freedom from sin's penalty, but freedom from the illusions that keep us bound to our false selves—those patterns of fear, control, and striving that obscure our belovedness. When we open ourselves to this liberating truth, we begin to live as the person God created us to be, fulfilling the unique good works "which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

Therefore if any person is [ingrafted] in Christ (the Messiah) he is a new creation
(a new creature altogether); the old [previous moral and spiritual condition]
has passed away. Behold, the fresh and new has come!

2 Corinthians 5:17, AMPC



⁷ Adapted from Ruth Haley Barton, "The Deeper Journey: From False Self to Christ-Self," *Transforming Center*, July 5, 2016, <https://transformingcenter.org/2016/07/deeper-journey-false-self-christ-self/>.

⁸ Trevor Hudson, *Discovering Our Spiritual Identity: Practices for God's Beloved* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 23.

A Helpful Discernment Tool & Reflection

This journey of discovering and living from our true identity requires both divine revelation and honest self-reflection. God's Spirit often uses various means of self-discovery to awaken our awareness of how we are uniquely formed to love and serve Him. A very helpful instrument that helps us in this regard is the Enneagram,⁹ a widely used and spiritually insightful tool—one that helps individuals recognize both their God-given motivations and the unconscious patterns that shape how they relate to the world. Rooted in ancient spiritual wisdom and refined through contemporary psychology, the Enneagram provides a framework of nine core personality types, each reflecting distinct ways of seeing and responding to life. It is not about labeling or limiting ourselves, but about uncovering and exploring the false strategies we often use even subconsciously for experiencing love and belonging—so that we may return to our truest identity in God. When approached prayerfully and through the lens of grace, it can help us discern where the false self is still at work and how the Spirit is inviting us toward freedom, humility, and love.

To assist you in exploring your Enneagram type, here are some suggested assessments:

- The Enneagram Institute RHETI® – The most widely recognized and research-based paid version of the Enneagram, offering a comprehensive paid assessment and detailed profile. (<https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/>)
- Truity Enneagram Personality Test – A well-constructed paid assessment that provides a clear and practical overview of your type, including patterns of growth and stress. (<https://www.truity.com/test/enneagram-personality-test>)
- Cloverleaf Enneagram Test – A completely free version that offers full results after a brief signup; a good starting point for reflection and discussion. (<https://cloverleaf.me/assessments/enneagram/>)

As you take a few quiet moments to pause, consider how God might be speaking to you through what you've just read. This journey of uncovering your true identity isn't meant to be rushed or analyzed merely with the mind—it's a sacred invitation to listen with the heart. The Holy Spirit gently reveals truth as we make space to reflect, to notice, and to respond in love.

The reflection questions below are offered as a way to deepen that listening. You may wish to read them prayerfully, journaling your responses or simply sitting with the one that stirs your spirit the most. Let this be a time of honest self-discovery and divine encounter.

⁹ Today, the Enneagram is used in a wide range of settings—from corporate leadership development and team-building to counseling, coaching, and spiritual direction. Within the Christian community, many pastors, retreat leaders, and spiritual directors have found it to be an effective companion for personal introspection and growth in Christlikeness.

Reflection Questions

- What part of this article most resonates with my spiritual journey right now?
- In what ways have I seen remnants of the “false self” shaping my decisions or relationships?
- How do fear, shame, or control show up in my daily life as part of the false self?
- What spiritual practices are or might be helpful for me to stay rooted in my “true self” in Christ?

Give me a candle of the Spirit, O God, as I go down into the deep of my own being. Show me the hidden things. Take me down to the spring of my life and tell me my nature and name. Give me freedom to grow so that I may become the self, the seed of which you did plant in me at my making. Out of the deep I cry unto You, O Lord.

George Appleton

Conclusion

As you reflect and explore this very important topic of your True Identity, remember that Jesus’ desire for you is freedom—the freedom that comes from knowing the truth about who you are in Him. He invites you to live no longer from old patterns of fear or striving, but from the deep assurance that you are already loved, already chosen, and already enough in His eyes.

When we courageously face the parts of ourselves shaped by the false self and surrender them to God’s transforming grace, we begin to live from the true self—our unique reflection of Christ’s image within us. This is the journey of becoming who we were always meant to be, so that we might join Him in the good works He has prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10).

May we all continue this spiritual formation journey of *Living into Our True Identity*, and may we receive the truth of who we are in Christ with open hearts—allowing the Spirit to renew our minds, heal our distortions, and empower us to live as God’s beloved, fully alive in His purpose and presence.

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother’s womb.
Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.
You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.
You saw me before I was born.
Every day of my life was recorded in your book.
Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed.

Psalm 139: 13-16, NLT