

What Determines Who You Are

I haven't been myself lately. Maybe you can relate.

For me, my health is the issue. I'm used to being very active, working out at One-on-One Fitness two or three times a week, visiting with friends over dinner, working and writing in my office, and traveling a lot to meet needs through speaking. Other than some time spent in my office, I've done none of these for the past six weeks.

I don't like not feeling like myself. I'm not used to sitting around and not being able to just get up and go. I've had to work at being still and obedient to my doctors' orders. I have to work to keep an underlying stress at bay all because I don't feel like me.

I've been teaching something relevant to my current reality for years. Maybe you've heard me, or you've read it in one of my books. Identity controls behavior. I'm experiencing this truth in significant ways. Our identity – who we think we are – is a key to our behavior.

The only way I can behave differently is if I get in touch with who I really am now. I'm sick. After surgery in about two weeks and my recovery, I will again be well. But, the reality is that I'm not well now. I have to own that. Respect that. Not live in denial. Otherwise, I'd be getting worse as I ignored the order to rest.

Is any of this relevant to you in anyway? I think so.

We need to have an accurate understanding of who we are because identity is so powerful. If you know you're creative, you'll look for ways of serving with that talent. If you know you need lots of sleep to function well and tomorrow is an especially big day, you'll leave a party earlier than others might. If you know what's challenging for you, you'll avoid

certain circumstances and possibly ask for help during others.

When you or your children seem stressed and unsure of yourselves, ask whether there's been a change in identity that needs to be realized. It may be temporary, like my situation, but you still need to recognize it and make adjustments. This may be especially true when children move from "I can't do this" to "I can do this." For example, you don't want them behaving like math facts are still hard for them when they've actually memorized them and are quite quick. Right? This is among the reasons I teach parents and teachers to be very specific when affirming children.

In a related issue, if your children go through a time where attitudes and actions are inconsistent, and you don't know what to expect from them, it almost always indicates an identity change is taking place. They're trying to decide where to land – do they want to stay the way they've been or are the new attitudes and actions comfortable? Watch them and talk with them. Work to direct them toward the identity you believe is truest to who they currently are and will be healthiest for them.

Guard against the new identity seemingly making all others irrelevant. In my case, I must remember that I am more than sick. I'm still a writer. I'm still creative. I'm still a friend who can reach out in different ways. The only way this happens is if I don't think about and talk only about my health.

Related to that idea, we also must not exaggerate any of our identities. I am sick, but I'm not dying. I can still go to my office. I just have to stay for shorter amounts of time and have lowered expectations for what I'll accomplish. If I only sit around and become acutely aware of every pain, I'll think I'm sicker than I am.

One more important idea. Because what people say to us and how

they react to us influences our identity, key people in our lives should know about these types of changes we're going through. This is true whether we're going through them willingly or not.

For example, many people in my church know about my health. Some have more details than others, but many have seen my Facebook prayer requests. Others don't know anything. That's fine. It's "key people" who benefit from knowing – for their good and ours. Yesterday, I was most comfortable interacting with those who know I'm not well. They didn't expect me to be my normal chipper self. Their expressions of care and concern lifted my spirits.

If you or your children are experiencing growth and change, make sure to let key people know so they can support what's happening. Grandparents, for instance, can ask different questions and choose different reactions to behavior. This can help the growth continue and feel natural.

Identity controls behavior. Who we think we are is who we will be.

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