

SPECIAL FEATURE FOR TEENS

Identity



Mi!

Turns out that answering the question “Who am I?” yields very different responses than the question “What am I?” What starts to get at the substance of our identity—the qualities we express or our spiritual make-up. That’s why we asked four authors (three here and one online) to tackle the “what” from their own experiences wrestling with what defines them. Have something more to share on the topic of identity? Email us at teenconnect@csps.com.

—Jenny Sawyer



Hair care

By Deborah Huebsch

I’d asked a friend to trim the split ends from my waist-length hair. She ended up cutting off four inches. I came unglued—yes, there were tears! When I became coherent again, I recognized that my strong reaction was because I identified myself with the length of my hair. Losing four inches was a threat to the “me” I thought I was.

Huge learning curve here. I began to see that my identity wasn’t about my hair, how my jeans looked on me, my grades, the friends I hung out with. My true identity is as a child of God.

What does that mean? This slightly modified Bible passage helped me get clarity: You are the daughter of the King and are all glorious within and without (see Psalms 45:13). I saw that I was created by God and therefore was loved and worthy because of my spiritual identity. This became my “go to” fact every time I needed to remember what defined me: God—not my hair.

Gradually, my thought about my identity shifted and I was free. I even cut my hair short!●

'I am a what?'

By Molly Johnson

Over the summer, I worked as a counselor-in-training at a camp for Christian Scientists. During the first session, it seemed like there was a stomach bug going around—and I was one of the people who got it.

Besides not feeling well, I was very concerned I wouldn't be able to be with my campers on their three-day camping trip.

The Christian Science practitioner at camp was praying for me. One day, as we were sitting together talking, he said, "You are a duck."

My first thought was: I am a *what*?

He went on to tell me that this was an analogy, because ducks have an oil on their feathers that allows the feathers to repel water. He explained that in a similar way, my spiritual identity "repels" anything ungodlike. The fact that I am spiritual means nothing can touch or harm me.

We also looked at the definition of *oil* in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy: "Consecration; charity; gentleness; prayer; heavenly inspiration" (p. 592). I could see how qualities like charity and gentleness are part of my spiritual nature and are my defense against suggestions of illness.

With that recognition, I was soon completely well, and later that day I was able to rejoin my program and participate in the three-day hike with no problems. Since then, whenever I need to remember the way God made me, I always think with a smile: "I am a duck."•

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CHRISTIAN SCIENCE
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The way I really am

By John Biggs

In sixth grade, I got excited about playing football, but didn't know how I could do it. For much of my childhood, I hadn't been able to participate in sports, because I was hampered by a physical problem. Though my parents had checked in with a doctor about it at one point, there wasn't a guaranteed medical solution. So our family opted to persist in prayer with the help of a Christian Science practitioner. I had grown accustomed to thinking of this as "my problem" and referred to it this way frequently.

So when the idea came to play football, I was surprised by a quiet thought that arrived on the heels of it: that if everything I was learning in the Christian Science Sunday School was true, why wouldn't I be able to participate? This didn't need to be some human process of effort, but rather could be the natural, graceful effect of Truth revealing the truth of my being as whole and free. With the support of my parents and teachers, I started doing sports for the first time. I also made a consistent effort to stop identifying this challenge as my personal problem but, instead, to more consistently identify myself as spiritual—limitless. Within a year and a half, I never experienced this issue again.

Later, when I was a freshman wrestler, my coach noticed that I wasn't

engaging normally in our exercises. Since I'd missed all those years of sports and recess, I'd never learned how to move athletically and didn't even know how to jump rope. He told me he'd heard about the healing I'd had, and encouraged me to consider that not only was I free from that problem, but I was also free from the label of being athletically delayed. That was a Friday, and on Monday, after praying about this fuller, spiritual sense of identity, I was able to jump rope flawlessly and even double rope jump. My athletic performance progressed normally from that point on.

In my study of Christian Science, I came across this wonderful statement by Mary Baker Eddy that struck me as a great description of what happened: "We must look where we would walk, and we must act as possessing all power from Him in whom we have our being" (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, p. 264). I had stopped identifying myself as a sick, delayed person, and instead I was walking with the conviction that the truth about me and my freedom really was true. I wasn't "faking it till I made it." I had come to understand that what God knew about me as perfect and unlimited was more valid than any other testimony about my identity. And this brought freedom. ●

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