

**LESSON 1 – IDENTITY**  
**WHO AM I – REALLY?**

**To the Teacher:** This lesson will introduce the student to a story called, “Parable of the Acrobat.” It was originally written and presented by Bob Hamp, author of **Think Differently, Live Differently** and founder of Freedom Ministries. The story has been shortened and revised with Bob’s permission for use in this lesson. This teaching is presented in full in his book. It is also told by him, personally, in his DVD: **The Parable of the Kingdom**, which is available at [gatewaypeople.com](http://gatewaypeople.com) bookstore.

The story is used to illustrate some very important concepts in relation to discovering and establishing our true identity in Christ. It is not only important to have a strong biblical view of our identity but also the courage to begin to walk in that new identity. This simple story and the exercises that follow will help the students begin this most important journey in life.

**Concept:**  
**True Identity**

**Objectives/Goal:**

- The students will question what they have believed about their true identity.
- The students will examine who or what they have believed.
- The students will realize that God can take even the hard times in life and work them out for our good and that they contribute to our identity.
- The students will discover that they were created by design.
- The students will realize that it requires courage to walk in God’s design.

**Plan Ahead:**

- Practice reading “The Parable of the Acrobat” until you are comfortable reading it aloud; or
- Ask someone who is a gifted storyteller to prepare and read it for you.
- You will also need Bibles or copies of Ps 139:13-17 for the students.
- You may want to split this lesson and do the Psalm next week depending on the discussion of the Acrobat story.
- Be sure to work through the discussion questions yourself to prepare your heart and then prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to prepare the hearts of the students to “go deep” as they listen and learn.

## **Launch Out:**

### **Introduction:**

**Read the following condensed version of “Parable of the Acrobat.”**

Once upon a time there was a troop of acrobats touring the country. In this troop was an incredible pair of acrobats who were reported to be the best in the land. As the story goes, they fall in love, get married, and have a child. Everyone knew that this child would be the greatest acrobat ever because of his DNA – his heritage.

One night, as the troop was traveling to a new town, the child fell out of the back of their wagon. In the morning his mother went to the back to wake him up and discovered that he was missing.

Frantically she called out and the wagons stopped. Everyone in the troop began searching for the child. They began backtracking and stopping at every house along the road. They were pleading with everyone they saw, “Please, have you found our missing child?” – The child was nowhere to be found. This was absolutely inconceivable to the entire troop!

Unknown to the troop, a farmer and his wife had been on the same road earlier that night. While riding, they heard something rustling in the tall grass. Curious, they went over to look and found a little boy. They picked him up and began searching every nearby house hoping someone knew whose child this was – but not one knew. With nowhere left to turn, (obviously, this was way before cell phones, TV, or the internet) they decided that they had to care for this little boy and raise him as best they could.

Let me stop for a moment and ask, “When the child fell out of the wagon, did he still have the DNA of an acrobat? (Yes) What about when he was raised by farmers? (Yes)”

You see, neither our earthly parents nor our circumstances can alter our DNA / our heritage.

As the child grew, his inner desire to defy gravity surfaced. Daily he was climbing and swinging on things. It terrified the farmer’s wife – she was so fearful that he might get hurt. The farmer would come in from his work and punish the boy. This happened over and over again.

One day the boy was in the kitchen all alone. He climbed up on a chair and then onto the kitchen counter and suddenly - in came the farmer’s wife. Fearful, she began to scream and - in came the farmer! He was very angry and was going to take care of the matter once and for all.

At this point the young boy decided never again to try to do those things which his heart longed to do. As he grew to be a teenager, the farmer began to train him to help with the work on the farm. He actually became pretty good at farming and decided that it was easier to be the person others wanted him to be than to be the person he longed to be.

Do you think at this point the boy still had the DNA of an acrobat? Actually yes, for you see, even the choices of our heart – decisions that we make - cannot alter our DNA / our heritage.

One of the boy's jobs was to go to the feed store and pick up the things the farmer needed. But on this particular day, when he walked in, there was a big poster hanging on the wall with a picture of a man swinging on a trapeze. The acrobats were coming to town! His heart began racing and that part of him which had been buried for so long began to surface. That night he even had a dream that he was the one on the trapeze flying through the air.

Well, that is when the campaigning began. You know what I mean. He promised to do extra chores and get all the plowing done if only they could go to the acrobat show coming to town. Yes, he won his campaign, and together the family made plans to go to the show.

The day finally arrived and the young man sat on the edge of his seat – literally living each twist and turn as the acrobats flew through the air. After the performance they allowed the teenagers to come onto the floor and play on the equipment. (Obviously, this was way before liability law suits.) The young man was in his glory and the farmer and his wife watched his every move.

Standing next to the farmer and his wife was another couple – actually, they were part of the troop. The acrobat stepped over to the farmer and said, “Is that young, excited boy out there your son?” The farmer replied, “Well, kind of.” Then he began to tell the acrobat the story.

At this point the acrobat's wife could no longer stay quiet. She asked, “How long ago did you find him? What was the little boy wearing?” The farmer's wife gave them the date and described the clothing. Tears began streaming down the faces of the acrobats as reality hit them – this was their child! Then they began to share their story.

As the young boy returned, he found all four of them crying and asked, “What's up, Dad?”

Together the four began to tell him the truth. As the story unfolded, the teenager realized that he had a choice to make. Was he going to continue living as a farm boy, with the people and things he knew – or was he going to choose to embrace the truth and live life as who he now discovered he was created to be?

Think about it. What choice would you make?

The young man decided to grab hold of his true heritage, reach out and leave his comfort zone. That night he went home and packed to begin his new life.

The truth is, while he was terribly excited, even after much practice he stunk at being an acrobat. The other teenagers in the troop made fun of him and were very cruel to him. He was certain that he was totally unacceptable in this new role and often thought of just going back to the farm.

One day he was hiding outside the kitchen window during practice. The window was open and he began to hear his mom and dad talking about how excited they were to have him back. He heard them saying that it didn't matter at all to them that he was an awkward acrobat – they loved him anyway. They talked about how glad they were that the son they had lost was home.

Overwhelmed by what he heard, he burst into the house yelling, “How can you possibly love me when I stink as an acrobat? And if it doesn’t matter to you, why do you keep telling me to go to practice?”

His father responded, “Son, we love you because you are our son, not because of the way you perform. I ask you to go to practice because there are things hidden in your heart that you will never discover unless you push yourself.”

Later that evening the teenager went to the practice tent; no one else was there. He began to simply enjoy playing, swinging, and climbing – trying new things he had never done before. He was free to be himself – sure of his father’s love. He had an amazing time!

Fast forward one year. The tent is filled with excitement as everyone watches a young man – the acrobat’s son – blindfolded – flying through the air doing a triple flip – catching the bar of the trapeze as it swishes toward him. The crowd roars! The young acrobat has become a world changer.

Dreams of all kinds were rekindled in the hearts of the people watching, for they saw what it looked like to have the courage to discover their true identity and embrace their dream.

### **Looking Forward:**

**Teacher introduces whole group discussion and elicits student responses:**

1. What part of the Acrobat story did you relate to?
2. Did what the young boy believed about himself ever change who he truly was created to be? Please explain.
3. Because of the way the other kids treated him, what was he thinking about doing?
4. Has something like that ever happened to you?
5. How did what the boy believed about himself change the way he acted or the things he was able to do?
6. Do you think that what you believe about yourself makes a difference in the way you act? Please explain.
7. Is it possible for God to take bad things and work them out for good? How did this happen to the boy?
8. Can think of any time where that has happened in your life or to a family member or a friend?
9. How did the Acrobats feel when they found their son?
10. How do you think God feels when we receive Him as our Heavenly Father?

**Teacher introduces main scripture:** Let’s discover the truth about what God says about us. Ps 139:13-17 *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works*

*are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them.*

### **Break Out:**

#### **Teacher introduces small group activities:**

1. What does this scripture say to you about who you are?
2. Is it possible that God made a mistake?
3. How is knowing that God carefully planned you going to change the way you look at yourself?
4. Come back together and discuss what you personally discovered.

#### **Take Away:**

That no matter what our earthly circumstances are, nothing can take away God's design for us unless we let it. What we believe is true about ourselves changes the way we live – even if it is a lie. It is important to see ourselves through God's eyes and speak the truth as He speaks it.

### **Going Forward:**

(Activation) Do you realize that Jesus wants to be and is with you always? He calls you His friend. When you go home, in your mind create a favorite place to meet with Jesus. Where are you? What are you doing? Where is Jesus? Ask Him how He sees you. Share what you experienced next week in class.

### **Teacher's Summary:**

Today we have discovered that what we think about ourselves has a big impact on what we accomplish in life. We must believe that God designed each of us in a special way and that we do not need to allow our earthly circumstances or the opinions of others to hold us back. When we ask God to help us see ourselves through His eyes amazing things can happen in and through us.

**Teacher ends with prayer:** “Let us end this lesson with a prayer.”

**Prayer:** Lord, we confess that we have allowed the failures, the opinions of others, and the circumstances of our lives to guide our decisions and the things we believe about ourselves more than the truth of your promises. Forgive us. Lord Jesus, will you show us who you've made us to be? Jesus, speak your truth to us. Thank you for saying, “I planned you, I love you, and I don't need you to perform. I'm just glad that you have come home.” I want to start seeing myself through your eyes. Thank you, Jesus. Amen