

WHAT SHAPES OUR IDENTITY?

By Ashley Jameson

OUTLINE

- Where do your students look for their identity?
 - Allow students to shout out answers
- How do their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors contribute to their spiritual and sexual health?
 - Thoughts
 - What are the lies students hear about themselves (body, character, spirituality)?
 - What makes students' lies louder?
 - What makes students' lies quieter?
 - Identify false beliefs and "Who I am in Christ."
 - Behaviors
 - Three Circles Exercise
 - Feelings
 - How do feelings show up in my body?
- Discussion Questions

TALKING POINTS

Start with this scripture:

*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.*

PSALM 139:13-14 (NIV)

Give a personal example from your life. Story is a powerful tool for teens. Here's an example from my life:

I would hear this in church but continued to struggle with insecurities and doing anything just to be liked. I heard these promises from my youth pastors but didn't know *how* to believe them or change my behaviors.

Ask your students this question:

Do you believe in their heads and hearts that you are fearfully and wonderfully made?

Then ask this question:

WHERE DO YOU LOOK FOR YOUR IDENTITY?

Allow students to shout out their answers. Here are a few examples:

- Family
- Friends
- Environment
- Social Media
- Traumatic experiences
- **Church**

Dr. Caroline Leaf writes:

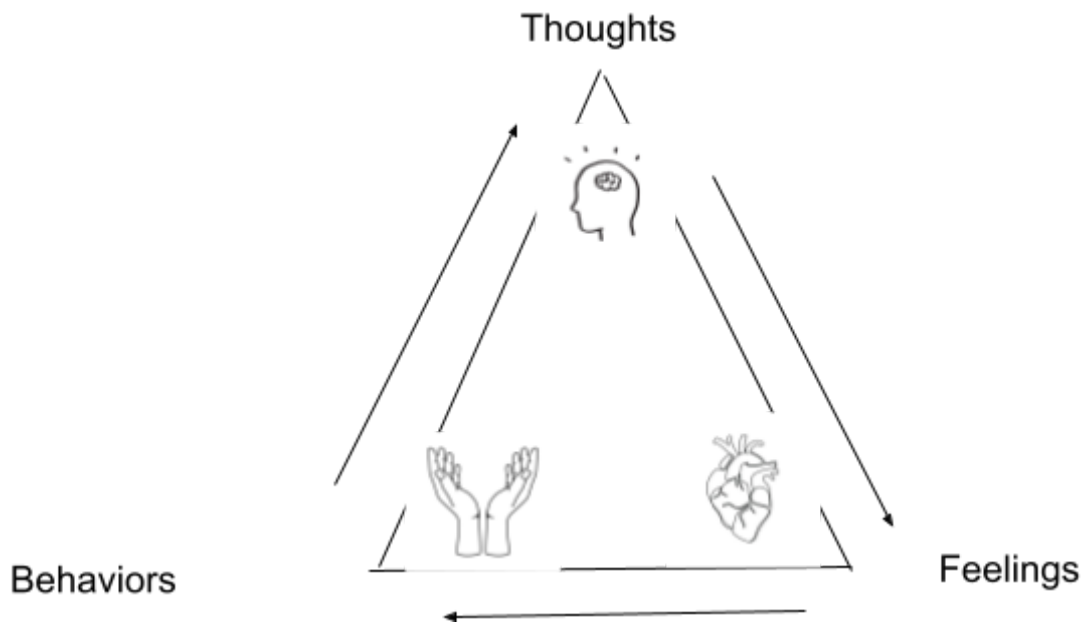
“ Thoughts are real, physical things that occupy mental real estate. Moment by moment, every day, you are changing the structure of your brain through your thinking. When we hope, it is an activity of the mind that changes the structure of our brain in a positive way and normal direction.
Caroline Leaf, *Switch On Your Brain*

Explain what this means. Here's an example:

We may tell students how loved they are and what God thinks about them, but if they have core beliefs they are living in, there will continue to be a disconnect. Our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are connected and contribute to one another. It's not enough to just have the "thought" that God loves us. It's also not enough to just work on behaviors with no internal heart change.

We can help students work on all aspects of walking out God's truth with their heads (thoughts), hearts (feelings), and hands (behaviors). When this happens, they will begin to confidently live out the promise of Psalm 139:13-14.

It will be helpful to describe this image. Remind students that their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are connected and fuel each other, resulting in either a positive or negative outcome.



THOUGHTS

Help your students begin to identify the connection between thoughts and feelings, and challenge unhealthy thoughts.

I FELT...	...BECAUSE I THOUGHT
Rejected	...I will never be accepted or part of the popular crowd after a group of girls told me I wasn't invited to the party.
Shame	...I am a bad Christian and a disappointment to God and my family because I crossed sexual lines with my girlfriend.
Insecure	...All of the girls on social media have perfect bodies.
Stupid	...My dad thinks I am dumb because anytime I mess up, he asks me, "What's wrong with you?" and "What were you thinking?"

Ask your students this question and allow them to answer. Here are some examples.

WHAT ARE THE LIES YOU HEAR ABOUT YOURSELF (YOUR BODY, CHARACTER, SPIRITUALITY)?

- I have to be perfect and do things right the first time.
- I'm not smart enough.
- Nobody cares what I have to say.
- If I mess up sexually, I've ruined my purity.
- I'm unwanted.
- I'm not accepted.
- I'm not hot enough.
- My mistakes disqualify me.
- I might not be saved if I'm still struggling.
- I'm not a good Christian.
- _____

Then, ask this question and allow them to answer. Here are some examples:

WHAT MAKES YOUR LIES LOUDER?

- Being around a big group of kids at school.
- Scrolling social media.
- Not being chosen for a team, event, or social gathering.
- Being made fun of.
- Doing poorly in sports.
- Crossing sexual boundaries.
- Not being liked.
- People being mad at me.
- _____

Then, ask this question and allow them to answer. Here are some examples:

WHAT MAKES YOUR LIES QUIETER?

- Being around other Christians who are real with their imperfections.
- Filling my mind with encouraging and positive things.
- Limiting my time on social media and being intentional with the content I view.
- Getting good sleep.
- Getting outside.
- Sharing my thoughts and feelings with safe people.
- Engaging in hobbies and serving opportunities I enjoy.
- _____

Who I Am In Christ

The Word of God says:

1. I am God's child for I am born again of the incorruptible seed of the Word of God that lives and abides forever. (1 Peter 1:23)
2. I am forgiven of all my sins and washed in the blood. (Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:14; Colossians 1:14; 1 John 2:12; 1 John 1:9)
3. I am a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17)
4. I am a temple where the Holy Spirit lives. (1 Corinthians 6:19)
5. I am delivered from the power of darkness; Christ brings me into God's kingdom. (Colossians 1:13)
6. I am redeemed from the curse of the law. (1 Peter 1:18-19)
7. I am holy and without blame before God. (Ephesians 1:4)
8. I am established to the end. (1 Corinthians 1:8)
9. I am close to God—brought closer through the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:13)
10. I am victorious. (Revelation 21:7)
11. I am set free. (John 8:31-32)
12. I am strong in the Lord. (Ephesians 6:10)
13. I am dead to sin. (Romans 6:2 & 11; 1 Peter 2:24)
14. I am more than a conqueror. (Romans 8:37)
15. I am a co-heir with Christ. (Romans 8:16-17)
16. I am sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. (Ephesians 1:13)
17. I am in Christ Jesus by His doing. (1 Corinthians 1:30)
18. I am accepted in Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:5-6)
19. I am complete in Him. (Colossians 2:10)
20. I am crucified with Christ. (Galatians 2:20)
21. I am alive with Christ. (Ephesians 2:4-5)
22. I am free from condemnation. (Romans 8:1)
23. I am reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:18)
24. I am qualified to share in His inheritance. (Colossians 1:12)
25. I am firmly rooted, established in my faith, and overflowing with gratefulness and thankfulness. (Colossians 2:7)
26. I am called by God. (2 Timothy 1:9)
27. I am chosen. (1 Thessalonians 1:4; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 2:9)
28. I am an ambassador of Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:20)
29. I am God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. (Ephesians 2:10)
30. I am the apple of my Father's eye. (Deuteronomy 32:10; Psalm 17:8)

- 31.** I am healed by the stripes of Jesus. (1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:6)
- 32.** I am being changed into His image. (2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 1:6)
- 33.** I am raised up with Christ and seated in heavenly places. (Ephesians 2:6)
- 34.** I am God's beloved child. (Colossians 3:12; Romans 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 1:4)
- 35.** I am sound of mind—with the mind of Christ. (Philippians 2:5; 1 Corinthians 2:16)
- 36.** I am His heir and have obtained an inheritance. (Ephesians 1:11)
- 37.** I am an overcomer because He has overcome the world. (1 John 5:4)
- 38.** I am not condemned because I have everlasting life. (John 5:24; John 6:47)
- 39.** I am covered with the peace of God that transcends all understanding.
(Philippians 4:7)
- 40.** I am powerful—the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling me; power to lay hands on the sick and see them recover; power to cast out demons; power over all the power of the enemy; nothing shall by any means hurt me. (Mark 16:17-18; Luke 10:17-19)
- 41.** I am indwelt by the Great One in me, because greater is He who is in me than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)
- 42.** I am always triumphant in Christ. (2 Corinthians 2:14)
- 43.** I am hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:3)

HELP YOUR STUDENTS WITH PRACTICAL WAYS TO CHANGE THEIR BEHAVIORS.

Walk students through identifying their false beliefs. Use the “Who I am in Christ” list to help them find God’s truth and combat false beliefs head-on.

FALSE BELIEF	WHO I REALLY AM
When I’m feeling...	God says...
When I’m thinking...	God says...
When I’m afraid...	God says...
When _____...	God says...
When _____...	God says...
When _____...	God says...
When _____...	God says...

BEHAVIORS

THREE CIRCLES EXERCISE

This tool and further explanation can be found in the **TOOLS** section of the Youth Leader Library.

- Use the Three Circles to identify behaviors and thoughts that are not helpful: inner circle.
- Use the Three Circles to identify behaviors and thoughts that lead you to the inner circle: middle circle.
- Use the Three Circles to identify behaviors and thoughts that lead you away from these harmful things and toward living a life that brings you joy and God glory: outer circle.

FEELINGS

Helping students understand what they're feeling and where it comes from can be challenging. Here's an example:

It was really hard for me to honestly know what I was feeling because I had always stuffed feelings down and never had a safe place to share them. My thoughts and behaviors were so "loud" that it was difficult for me to truly know what I was feeling, not what I thought I should feel. It was helpful to start identifying feelings by recognizing when my body was giving me little "alarms." I definitely knew if my gut was upset, my heart picked up pace, I felt flushed with embarrassment, and so on. I could start there and then think about what just happened before my body started feeling that way. After I connected the feeling in my body with the behavior I was engaged in or the thought I just had, I could circle back around and use the Feeling Wheel¹ to figure out the true underlying feeling.

We can help our students work on their thoughts and behaviors and encourage them to be gracious with themselves as their feelings catch up. We want to teach them it's okay to be the same person in church as they are outside of church. You are a safe person for them to come to with *any* of life's challenges. All of us have something to work on. We never "arrive." Be a safe and real person for your students to come to.

¹ The Feeling Wheel is a free tool that can be found at <https://puredesire.org/tools/>.

We can't help them if we don't know what they are navigating. Reducing shame and encouraging transparency in a safe environment is something significant you can offer even if you don't have all of the answers.

Encourage students to recognize when they might be experiencing strong feelings. Noticing a change in the body can often be a great starting point to identify that something is happening. Have them list out how feelings show up in their body and write out what happened before they felt that way to guide them in starting to connect their feelings with their thoughts and behaviors. Go back and use the tools already introduced to work through the newly identified thoughts or behaviors in a helpful way. Remind them to use those body signals as an indicator to pause and ask themselves what thought and behavior is behind that feeling.

HOW FEELINGS SHOW UP IN MY BODY	WHAT JUST HAPPENED?
Turning stomach	My boyfriend pushing sexual boundaries.
Flush-hot face	Discovered porn on my parent's iPad.
Trouble catching my breath	A private image of me was shared with my class.
Tight chest-racing heart	I was caught cheating on a test.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use this time to let students share their answers from the above tables and tools.

01. Where do you look for your identity? Explain.
02. Share some of the things you've felt and thought this week.
03. What are the lies you hear about yourself?
04. What makes the lies louder? What makes the lies quieter?
05. How do feelings show up in your body?
06. Share some of your false beliefs and what God says about those false beliefs.
07. Share your Three Circles Exercise.

WRAP UP

Wrap up by reminding them of what Psalm 139 says:

*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.*

PSALM 139:13-14 (NIV)

Students need to be reminded of God's love for them. And they need to hear it over and over again.

Here's an example:

God only created ONE of you. God did not mess up when He created you.

You are loved—You belong—Always.