Taking It to Our Knees Declaring Who I Am

Craig D. Lounsbrough, M.Div., LPC

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Introduction

"Who am I?" How many times have we circled back to that question? How many times has life shaken us to the point that we find ourselves wondering if we are who we thought we were? How often has our most recently fabricated identity collapsed under our latest setback and we find ourselves standing at some place in our lives asking the same question all over again? A friend confronts us. Our review went horribly bad. A spouse leaves. An investment imploded. The genius of our idea turned out to be anything but genius. And the question resurfaces. "Who am I?" How many times have we circled back to that question?

We've circled back to it because we've never gotten the answer. And we've never gotten it because the answer doesn't lay in any of the places that we've gone searching for it. We're looking for the answer to one life's biggest questions in all of the places where it will never be found.

We're seeking out an identity that will mesh well with our jobs, or please our families, or align with the culture, or comfortably fit in our social group, or grant our lagging sense of self-confidence a desperately

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needed boost. And in order to mesh, and please, and align, and fit, and grant us something that we're desperate for we're tried on a bunch of ill-fitting identities. We've pushed, and pressed, and literally pried ourselves into a ragtag collection of ill-fitting identities in this desperate effort to fit in.

And in all the tussling and struggling and forcefitting we find ourselves standing amidst piles of discarded identities that never did what we thought they would do. And now the question is louder than ever. "Who am I?" This whole misdirected effort is something akin to spending the whole of our lives in a fitting room full of clothes that never fit because we're embarrassed by the ones that do, or we're jealous of the ones that won't.

Who You Are Not

Who you are is not something that you try on. It's something that you are. It's not something that people dictate. It's something that God designed. It's not based on circumstance. It grows because of circumstance. It's not something that bows to the demands of the culture. It's something that seeks to transform the culture. Who you are is not the byproduct of some indiscriminate collection of painful deficits, dark histories, shifting cultural criteria, family dynamics, relational losses, or deflated self-esteem. Your identity is a methodically rogue, wildly ingenious, entirely purposeful, and eternally irreplaceable design whose attributes were expressly created to be unleashed into the time in history within which you have been strategically placed. Indeed, your identity is greater than all of the things that would seek to shape it, crush it, define it, describe it, control it, or somehow deter it.

Who You Are Answered

So..."Who are we?" God has already told us. Plainly. And He did so because He knew that we would fall easy prey to an indiscriminate collection of painful deficits, dark histories, shifting cultural criteria, family dynamics, relational losses, or deflated self-esteems. He knew that our jobs, our families, the culture, our social groups, and our lagging sense of self-confidence would send us running on wild errands in an effort to discover an identity that would somehow meet all of their combined demands or offset their painful messages.

And God knew that if we fell to such things as these, we would forever forfeit the genius of the one-of-akind design that will never be replicated in the life of any other human being. He knew that a life of fitting rooms would leave us with a mountain of discarded identities. And He knew that those discarded identities would do nothing other than perpetuate a question that

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would only grow louder with each identity that we tried on. "Who am I?"

Thirty-One Declarations

This devotional outlines thirty-one Biblical declarations that embody the essence of who you are. Thirty-one things that declare your true identity. Your God-given identity. Your forever identity. Thirty-one truths that stand against the messages delivered by every painful deficit, the darkness of your history, the shifting cultural criteria that threatens to sideline you, the family dynamics that have alienated you, and the deflated self-esteem that has lied to you. Thirty-one truths that stand against everything that is not standing for you.

This book was written to help you find 'you.' Not some idealized self. Not some cheap forgery or shallow compromise. Not the self-that's run after the acceptance of people who will never give it to you, or the self-that's running from those messages. But the 'you' that God declares you to be. The eternal you. The unshakable you. May the next thirty-one days introduce you to a 'you' that is more than you could have possibly imagined, deeper than you thought feasible, greater than any success or combination of successes, and exceeding all of the combined accolades of mankind.

The Structure of This Book

This book is broken into two sections. Section One address five common areas of our lives that have a negative impact on our identity. These areas tend to skew or altogether suffocate our true identity, thereby leaving us to live out a less than vibrantly authentic life. These specific areas are outlined as a means of developing a foundation that will enhance the Thirty-One day experience for the reader.

Section Two draws directly from the Thirty-One "I Am" statements found in the Bible. These represent God's indisputable declaration of who you are. Each day elaborates on a particular "I Am" statement. This allows the reader to immerse themselves in each individual statement in order to maximize the impact of each statement on their lives, their relationships, their hopes, their dreams, and their futures.

Welcome to you!

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Section One

Chapter One

Defined by Our Deficits

"Any deficit that you have can never stand against the asset that that deficit is waiting to become."

~ Craig D. Lounsbrough

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We come to define ourselves more by what we lack than by what we possess. We define ourselves by the successes that we haven't had, the relationships that didn't work, the careers that never happened, and the dreams that never got off the ground because they never made it to the runway.

All of these things tell us everything that we are not. The assets that we don't have. The confidence that we lack. The intelligence that is never intelligent enough. The talents that we don't possess, and the determination that is never sufficiently determined. We see ourselves as a sad compilation of everything that we are not.

These deficits result in shattered relationships. Shuttered opportunities. Job losses. Financial failures. Addictions. Upended careers. Friendships that went up in flames and the charred remains of families that fell to the same fate. Every failure. Every disappointment. Every loss. The shame and embarrassment mocks us, telling us that we are everything that is wrong with everything that went wrong.

Surrounded by so many failures that evidence both the depth and number of our deficits, we become defined by those deficits. We feel that there is nothing else that we can define ourselves by. The overwhelming preponderance of our failures, and disappointments, and losses, and failed dreams

obliterates anything other than the deficits to which all of these things speak. We can see nothing else, so we come to believe that there is nothing else. We are lulled (or sometimes thrust) into the belief that we are the sum total of our failures. And soon, believing becomes becoming.

The Power of Thought

Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he..." That's both incredibly powerful, but wildly dangerous. We become what we think. Our thinking possesses the power to shape our humanity, whether that shaping is accurate or not. We think ourselves into who we are.

Therefore, we can think ourselves into the deficits that we think about. We can let those things define us until we ourselves are convinced of that definition. Broken relationships. Job losses. Financial failures. Addictions. Dreams that die. Upended careers. Friendships and families that went up in flames. These become the essence of 'us,' and we become the reality of them. They singlehandedly define who we are.

The Question...

The question then becomes, "Who are we really?" Are we defined by our deficits? Is that our lot in life? Is there no escaping the things that we've screwed up?

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Do they leave an indelible mark of defeat and incompetence?

Our Greatest Assets in Disguise

Or, are our deficits are greatest assets in disguise? Is it possible that we are defined far more by the potential that rests in the deficit than the deficit itself? Do the roots of something great lie deep in our worst failures?

Our lives are assets in the making. We are always standing on the verge of becoming something better. Something greater. The 'better' in our lives is always just one step away. One decision away. One choice away. On attitude shift away. The 'better' is always that close and never any farther away despite the deficits that seem intent on cannibalizing any asset that we might have.

The asset that any one of our deficits can become will always be far greater than the deficit from which it arose. Assets birthed of our deficits become the greatest parts of who we are. Taking what we believe to be defeat, seeing the rudimentary elements of victory embedded in that defeat, and turning that defeat into decisive victory is the stuff of true victory. Life-altering victory. Liberating victory. Transformational victory. But most importantly, achievable victory.

It's All Backwards

God turns life on its head. He reverses the order of things. What is dead dies to death and becomes alive. Water surrenders its fluidity to feet that tread on it. Blindness becomes blinded by light. Legs that limp become legs that leap. Food for thousands from food for one. Millions from pennies. It's all backwards. Gloriously backwards.

Sin destroys. It sets everything back. That's its single mission and sole agenda. God not only shuts sin down, He throw it in reverse. He works it against itself. As Joseph said to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good..." It's all reversed. God walks us back from death to life. From hopelessness to hope. From fear to faith. From lives engulfed in deficits to lives empowered by assets.

WeDon't Think That Way

The problem is, we don't think that way. Any belief that things might actually work this way is beaten out of us by the messages that our failures have beaten into us. We might visualize stopping something bad in our lives, or at least slowing it down. Maybe we can reign it in or temper it a bit. We might be able to draw some energy out of it so it's not quite as destructive, or maybe we can take some wind out of its sails.

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But we don't think in terms of reversals. Radical, impossible, improbable, ingenious, and wildly liberating reversals. Sin says that we can't do that. God says that we're supposed to do that. We're not bold enough to think that way, but God naturally functions that way.

The Purpose of Deficits

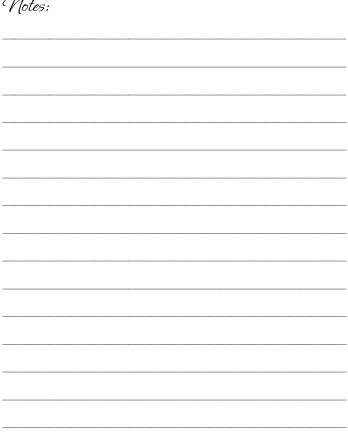
Our deficits were meant to be reversed. Entirely. That's what we have them for. And in the reversal they become the assets that we never visualized them becoming. Deficits are the perfect seedbed for the birth and cultivation of stunning abilities. Hidden within our failures there lays all of the composite parts that set the stage for our greatest successes. The worst of us contains the lessons that teach us how to be the best of us.

Therefore, our deficits do not define who we are. Rather, they tell us who we can become. They are the worst of us waiting to become the best of us. They are the things that God is waiting to throw into reverse.

You Are More...

The deficits that define you are the ones that you've allowed to define you. God says that you are more than any deficit or combination of deficits. And that 'more' is boldly and unashamedly outlined in the thirty-one days of prayer that follow. That 'more' is laid out for

you to embrace, ingest, and incorporate into your life in wildly wonderful and transformational ways. Your 'more' is waiting for you in the pages that follow.



Notes:

Day 1

I Am Adopted into God's Family

"...to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir." ~ Galatians 4:5-7

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Abandonment is commitment thrown into reverse. It's a promise repealed. A vow cancelled. A partnership revoked. It runs entirely against everything that makes us human. It is the recklessness of greed on a selfserving rampage.

Such actions render the idea of committed relationships as the stuff of disappointed fiction. Forever promises become the mirage of gullible heart's misled by the idealistic promises of love. We feel ourselves to be the fool exposed. Our value is obliterated. And we are left abandoned as castaways on some deserted island of tortured humanity, wondering if it would be wiser to simply remain in this barren place rather than risk leaving it only to have abandonment exile us here yet again.

Yet God's commitment know no reverse. His promises are never repealed. His vows hold tight for eternity. His partnership is unfailing. God knows no islands. With a steeled intent He said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Out of that very promise God fashioned a commitment woven of a bond that is irreparable, invulnerable, and entirely invincible. His commitment is fashioned of things eternal and untouchable. God wishes to adopt you. To make you His own. To claim you outright. To put His indelible stamp on you and call you His forever child. And His adoption of us renders abandonment forever abandoned.

"The need to belong runs a course directly through the apex of our soul. To know with irrefutable certainty that others deem us as possessing a value so indisputable that they would set the whole of themselves aside in order to protect the whole of ourselves. Without this to rest in there is no rest." $\sim Craig D. Lounsbrough$

Morning Prayer

Dear God:

I come to you alone this morning, when being alone is the last thing that I want to feel and the last place that I want to be. I feel like I'm a prisoner of the choices made by someone else. I feel as if I have been exiled to some horrible place where people are left alone and isolated to deal with a pain that is so deep that they can't think their way out of it.

I don't believe that relationships were meant to be betrayed by abandonment. I don't believe that You designed it that way. But it happens anyway. And while I'd like to believe that these kinds of things always happen to someone else, it happened to me. And so here I sit, alone, isolated, and wishing that this were all a dream.

Dear God, You have adopted me. You have made me Your own. You have claimed me outright. You have put Your indelible stamp on me and You call me Your forever child. A thousand people can abandon me, but all of these truths remain untouched. I embrace Your

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adoption of me. I am Your own, and You are mine. Today and forever.

I pray all of this in Jesus's Name. Amen

A Thought to Carry with Me Today

"I may find myself discarded as rubbish along this road that we call life, having been left there by people who deemed my life as deficient and my humanity as expendable. But laying along that roadside awash in my own tears, I must remember that man's rubbish will never cease to be God's treasure." ~ Craig D. Lounsbrough

Before this day, I release to God... Evening Prayer

Dear God:

As this day closes, I go to bed alone...but not. You are here with a fullness and intensity that surpasses any

person or group of people I could be with right now. Your presence is all-encompassing. You are around me and within me. You sit right next to me while inhabiting the furthest corners of my mind all at the same time. You hold my every emotion in Your hands. You tend to my soul, healing it when it needs healing and calming it when it becomes anxious. You walk before me and behind me, never leaving your post even for the briefest second.

You have adopted every part of my being. Everything that I am is Yours, and You are everything that I need. Thank you for such a wonderful and enduring relationship.

I pray all of this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

CA Thought to Prepare for Tomorrow

"God is already in the tomorrow that you are yet to show up for." ~ Craig D. Lounsbrough

From this day, I release to God...

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Day Z

I Am a Child to the King of Kings

"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—." ~ John 1:12 We want to be someone's child. To know where we came from. To know that those people and that place holds us with an impassioned and unbreakable love, even once we've moved on with our own lives or they have moved on with theirs. To know that this long lineage of people have funneled the essence of their existence into ours.

We want to belong to a lineage that is bigger than us and that grounds us in something beyond the limitations of our own finite existence. Where we've come from grants us a desperately needed identity. It enhances our sense of where we've going, how to better get there, and that we're not alone in the 'getting.' It tells us that we're part of a larger story and that we have been granted the immense privilege of enriching and perpetuating that story. It makes sense of the living and the dying that too often becomes the confining measures by which we define the whole of our lives and the extent of this existence.

We want to be someone's child. To be owned by the connection of blood, genetics, shared experiences, and the relationships drawn tight by those experiences. To share a joint lineage of generations past and a shared vision for the generations that are coming. Such a need is deeply engrained and eternally woven within the core of our humanity.

Paul said, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." There is no greater affirmation. No greater declaration of Whose we are. Our earthly parents may have given us the whole of themselves, or they may have abandoned the whole of

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us in pursuit of themselves. Whatever our history, we want to be someone's child. To know where we came from. God is both and answers both.

"How astonishingly improbable that we Could actually be children of the God of all creation. But should such improbability actually be reality, how could we ever look in the mirror again without seeing something so utterly marvelous that we would be forced to spend the rest of our lives celebrating it?" ~ Craig D. Lounsbrough

Morning Prayer

Dear God:

I know that I will never outgrow the need to be someone's child. The days of childhood might pass, but the need to be a child never does. The farther that I venture out into the world, the more that I need the grounding of knowing that I am a part of someone else and that they are a part of me. In a world that alienates so many, knowing that this connection exists is priceless and entirely indispensable.

There are those who have those connections and are blessed because they do.

Then there are those who've found those connections severed, somehow fractured, or never having existed at all.

Yet, God we are all Your children. All of us. That is a connection impossible to sever, immune to fracture, and always having existed despite our frequent ignorance of it. I want to rest in that fact. I am Your child. I am Your sacred treasure. I am Your delight. I am loved with an intensity that I can't grasp. Today I call You "Abba Father."

I pray all of this in Jesus's Name. Amen

A Thought to Carry with Me Today

"I am descended from many things. Choices that I have made. Mistakes that still run hot on my heals. Marriages lost. Dreams abandoned. Friendships that failed. Children lost. And while I might be descended from these things, none of them birthed me." ~ Craig D. Lounsbrough

Before this day, I release to God...

Evening Prayer

Dear God:

Tonight, I ask you to tuck me in. Not in the sense of sheets and blankets. But tuck in my heart. My soul. My

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mind. Tuck me in in such a way that I might sleep well tonight. But more than that, tuck me in in a manner that I might awaken with fear gone, anxiety eliminated, depression replaced with peace, anxiety with calm, and a sense that Your presence is everywhere.

Tuck me in as Your child. Tuck me in so that I wake to resentment dissipated, anger washed away, bitterness swept from my heart, and confidence restored. As Your child I come to You tonight asking You to be the Father that I know that You long to be. Heal Your child. Restore Your child. Love on Your child and teach this child to love on You.

I pray all of this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

A Thought to Prepare for Tomorrow

"God knows the day ahead, and what the day will be once it becomes the day behind. And He wants each one to great on both ends." ~ Craig Lounsbrough

From this day, I release to God...

Day 3

I Am Passionately Loved

"You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book." ~ Psalm 56:8

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To be loved is to say that my humanity is valuable enough to be cherished by someone else. It is to say that in the busyness of a demanding world, I have a value this is not only recognized by someone else, but also significant enough that another person is actually compelled to act on that value. To be loved is to say that my existence as a single human being is worth being celebrated and cultivated by someone else who may get nothing out of that investment.

To be loved is to say that someone else sees enough value in me to take the limited resources that they have at their disposal and to direct those away from themselves and direct them into me. It is an incredibly endearing declaration. A deeply affirming acknowledgement. A confirmation that my existence matters.

Too often the world has forgotten to love. It's bent on chasing lesser things that enflame primitive passions and offer up short-term indulgences. The world is on mad rant of self-gratification where love has been redefined as some gluttonous endeavor. As such, love is often hard to find and even harder to give.

"For God so loved the world...." Yes, God loved the world...you and me. But in what way? In a way that moved God to sacrifice His Son so that we might be salvaged by that sacrifice. That's the kind of trade that love prompts, giving up the greater good of oneself for the greater good of another. To give us what we have no way of giving ourselves. To embrace the gloriously radical belief that any sacrifice that we might make is

far better spent on another than on ourselves. And that is what God did...and does for you. Welcome to God's love!

"He said that the blood was not his own, but that of a comrade a few feet away who had been blown apart by an enemy grenade. And after having left the rice paddies of Vietnam, he eventually took up residence in the pew of a small mid-western church. For he said that he had been covered by the blood of one friend in combat and by blood of another on a cross in another sort of combat. And such was his love for both that he committed to forget neither." $\sim Craig D. Lounsbrough$

Morning Prayer

Dear God:

Sometimes I'm afraid to be loved. I'm afraid to be loved and then find out that it wasn't love at all. Or to be loved and then to have that love taken away for reasons that had nothing to do with love. Or to be loved for what I could give to someone else, instead of being loved for the potential that I had to give to the world. It's risky to be loved.

But God, help me to let You love me. I mean a love beyond what I even understand or am capable of understanding on my own. Let me be loved by the kind of love that prompted You to send Your Son to His

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death for my life. That's a mind-boggling kind of love that I want to understand. I want to hold in my hands. I want to shelter in my heart. That's the kind of love that I want to wake up to and go to bed with every night.

The fact that You offer me that kind of love helps me to understand just how incredibly valuable I am to You. I want to rest in that, immerse myself in it, and live out every minute of my life absorbed in and by that kind of love.

I pray all of this in Jesus's Name. Amen

CA Thought to Carry with Me Today

"How could we not be romantic, for the God Who created us has never fallen out of love with us despite all the many ways that we have fallen out of love with Him." ~ Craig D. Lounsbrough

Before this day, I release to God...

Evening Prayer

Dear God:

Love me to sleep tonight. Love me to sleep. That as I lay down my head I feel the warmth of Your love throughout the entirety of my being. Overwhelm me with Your love to the point that there is no shred of my life that is untouched by it. No shred. I cannot imagine a better way to sleep than to feel the power of that kind of love.

And when I awaken in the morning, awaken me with a sense of Your love to the degree that I am able to carry that throughout the day. No matter the difficulties. No matter how much stress I might face or how many problems might ram themselves into me. No matter how much misfortune life may throw at me, let me feel Your love. Thank you for seeing in me all of the things that would cause You to love me so much! I love you too.

I pray all of this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

A Thought to Prepare for Tomorrow

"The greatest gift in any gift is that there was someone who loved us so much that they simply could not keep themselves from giving the gift to us. And by far, the best example of that 'someone' is God. And the thing that He couldn't keep Himself from giving us was Himself." ~ Craig D. Lounsbrough

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From this day, I release to God...