

WHAT DO
YOU ALLOW TO
DEFINE YOU?

OVERCOMER

BIBLE STUDY

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Stephen Kendrick is a speaker, a film producer, and an author with a ministry passion for prayer and discipleship. He's a cowriter and the producer of the movies *Overcomer*, *War Room*, and *Fireproof* and a cowriter of the *New York Times* best sellers *The Resolution for Men* and *The Love Dare*. An ordained minister, Stephen attended seminary, received a communications degree from Kennesaw State University, and serves on the board of the Fatherhood CoMission. Stephen and his family live in Albany, Georgia, where they're members of Sherwood Church. Most important, as affirmed by this Bible study, he's a child of God whose citizenship is in heaven.



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ABOUT THE MOVIE

OVERCOMER



MEET JOHN.

When circumstances beyond his control unravel the name he has built for himself, John Harrison “becomes the least likely coach helping the least likely runner attempt the impossible in the biggest race of the year.”¹

MEET HANNAH.

She’s on a journey of discovery. Like most adolescents, she wants to know where she came from, what she’s good at, what it means to be part of a family, and where real value is found in life. Those are questions about identity.



Overcomer is a story about discovering and basing one’s truest identity on the only foundation that will never falter or fail, the only foundation that has the right to define a person. The movie highlights the initial discovery of identity in Christ and also illustrates what happens when a follower of Christ builds an identity on something other than Him. What happens when that identity unravels? How does a person start over?

No matter how a person feels or what culture claims, God alone, as the sole Creator, has the authority to define and determine the identities of the people He created. No matter how far people veer off course, God can orchestrate circumstances by His own providence to help them return to their true identities. Only when identity is rooted in Christ can people be who they were created to be.

OVERCOMERMOVIE.COM

1. Jeannie Law, “New Kendrick Bros. Movie ‘Overcomer’ Based on Finding One’s Identity in God, Stars Priscilla Shirer,” *The Christian Post*, August 3, 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/kendrick-bros-movie-overcomer-based-on-finding-identity-in-god-stars-priscilla-shirer-226556/>.

INTRODUCTION

“Who are you really?” It’s a fundamental question we all have to answer. Our first instinct may be to respond with a name. After that we tend to share a résumé of what we do or whom we’re related to. Should we define ourselves by the members of our family or even by what other people say about us? Maybe who we are is something deeper.

Identity is what people believe to be most true about themselves. It’s their source of value and worth. Tim Keller has written, “Our need for worth is so powerful that whatever we base our identity and value on we essentially ‘deify.’ We will look to it with all the passion and intensity of worship and devotion, even if we think ourselves as highly irreligious.”¹

If people deify or idolize whatever they base their identity on, what happens when that source of meaning fails us or is taken away? It doesn’t just alter a worldview. It crushes the soul.

Enter *Overcomer*. Regardless of the intention with which you approach this study, the goal is a definitive answer to the basic question “Who are you?”

This Bible study, featuring group discussions, film clips, and personal studies, is designed to help you firmly establish your value and worth in Christ. You’ll encounter a variety of Old and New Testament giants who either demonstrated an identity firmly rooted in God’s truth or warn you of the danger of choosing alternative identities. Along the way you’ll have opportunities to determine whether your identity may be ill-defined and to be drawn back to the only source of meaning in life, ever closer to Christ.

1. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 164.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Overcomer Bible Study provides five lessons that can be used for group or personal Bible study. Each lesson contains four elements: “Start,” “Watch,” “Engage,” and three days of personal study. Allow forty-five to sixty minutes for the group sessions.

Start. Each study begins with an introduction to the lesson to come. This section is designed for use in a group setting but can also be adapted for personal study. Read this section and answer the introductory questions together if you’re in a group.

Watch. The Bible-study DVD contains clips from the film *Overcomer* to accompany each session. Each clip is two to four minutes in length and is supported by a summary of the clip and discussion questions based on the truths illustrated.

Engage. This section is the primary focus of each week. Leaders should spend the majority of the group session teaching while using the verses and questions provided in this section.

Personal study. After attending the group session, members should complete the three days of personal study at home before the next group session. Through this personal study, group members will explore biblical content and application that support the concepts introduced in the movie clips and group discussion.

A LETTER TO LEADERS

Thank you for agreeing to lead a small group. As this study was being prepared, you were being prayed for.

What does it mean to be created in the image of God? It means the Creator, not the creation, gives us identity and purpose, determining who and what we are in the world. What does it mean to bear God's likeness in the world? It means we proclaim the praise of the One who made us, called us, and desires to use us. It means we live out a powerful declaration of who Jesus is and what it means to experience the life and salvation He alone gives.

The world around us offers insane perversions of identity. People are choosing who they want to be by living out their own misguided notions of truth. This Bible study doesn't attack those individuals. Instead, it offers a foundation that a meaningful identity can be built on, consisting of core biblical truths. We're created by God, but we're sinners. We're offered salvation that starts with repentance and leads to a life that seeks and declares Jesus as the only way to truly know and live out who we are.

Perhaps you're offering this study as part of a larger churchwide campaign anticipating the release of the *Overcomer* film. Perhaps your group has already seen the movie and is engaging in this study as a follow-up. Regardless of the timing of your study or the format of your group, this resource has enormous potential to lead people in your church and your community to understand and live out their core identities in Christ.

You may be experiencing anxiety or fear about leading this study. You've likely wrestled with your own identity and what it means to bear the image of God in your life. God hasn't called you to lead this study because you're a perfect disciple of Jesus. You're leading this study because God equips His people to do His work. Our prayer for you is that as you facilitate this study, you'll see God working in your life in mighty ways, and you'll sense the Holy Spirit's power sustaining you and leading you. The best way to be prepared each week is to simply complete the study yourself. Plan to be open and transparent with your group and honest about the areas in which you struggle. Pray that God will direct your conversation and strengthen you to lead well. If Jesus is your Lord, you too are an overcomer (see 1 John 5:5). Thank you for leading!

SESSION 1

WHO
ARE
YOU?

The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said:

"The LORD is with you, valiant warrior."

JUDGES 6:12

START

Welcome to *Overcomer Bible Study*. If this is a newly formed group, this opening activity will help you build community and get to know one another. Even a fairly familiar group will benefit from engaging in this icebreaker.

Begin by jotting down ten things that describe who you are. They could be titles you bear, marks of personal interest, or character traits. (For example, I'm a husband. I'm a technician. I'm a student. I'm an artist. I'm a dreamer.) Use the space below to complete your list.

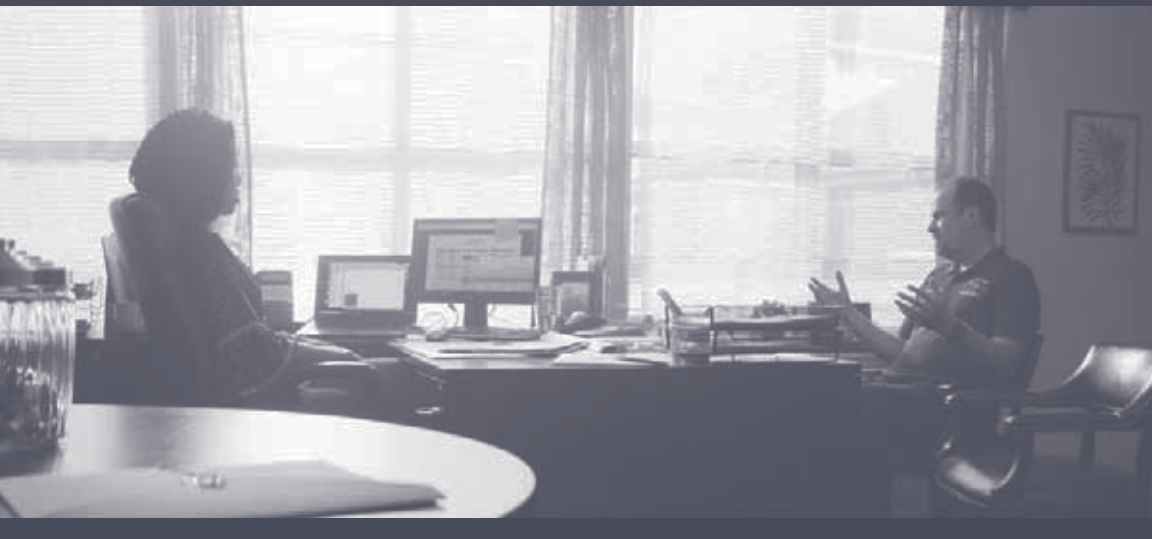
Go around the group and allow members to name a single item on their lists. Follow that pattern again, allowing members to read the second item on their lists. Repeat the process until each person has read aloud each of his or her items.

The identifiers from the lists composed and shared are likely positive attributes or roles. Some may even reflect God's calling, making our simple descriptions of who and what we are acts of obedience. In those cases, bravo! There's a balance between following God's will and choosing our own adventure. Yet most of what we identify about ourselves tends to be self-defined and self-designated.



MOVIE CLIP

View the first film clip. This clip not only introduces key characters but also presents the fundamental question that fuels the entire narrative. Following the clip, discuss the theme, using the steps provided.



SUMMARY

Basketball coach John Harrison enters Principal Olivia Brooks's office and learns that the football program has been terminated. The main factory in town has closed its doors, eliminating more than five thousand jobs. This closure is shrinking the town and crushing high-school enrollment. Without enough players, athletic programs are being cut. Olivia sees an opportunity to salvage the cross-country team by having John take over. In his mind cross country isn't even a real sport. But John is given the responsibility, and it begins to unravel his identity.

DISCUSS

1. What bad news does John receive in this segment?
2. Do you feel that John's reaction is to be expected and normal or too severe, considering the situation?
3. What's John forced to give up, and what's he asked to assume responsibility for?

ENGAGE

Read aloud Exodus 2:10-22. Brainstorm all of the titles and character traits that could apply to Moses.

Read aloud Exodus 3:1-6,9-14. What do these verses reveal about Moses' identity?

What changed about Moses' nature between chapters 2 and 3?

Moses lived a life of luxury as a prince in Egypt, having been rescued and raised by the daughter of Pharaoh. Consider his boldness to both the Egyptian caught in abusing a Hebrew kinsman and the Hebrew whose behavior he addressed. That's hardly the reluctant leader we encounter in chapter 3, in which we learn that Moses had become a shepherd and an everyday husband, father, and son-in-law. Moses was living a simple life under the radar until God revealed His plan to use Moses to deliver the Israelites from slavery. Moses offered a series of reasons he couldn't serve God and lead Israel. Why? The presuppositions Moses believed about himself and the opinions others would undoubtedly perceive about him outweighed who the Creator made Moses to be. He was living out an identity of his own making.

Read aloud Judges 6:6-16. What are the similarities and differences you see between Gideon and Moses?

Israel's tribe of Manasseh, named for Joseph's elder son, came in sixth of the twelve tribes in the number of fighting-age men (see Num. 26)—hardly the smallest tribe. When combined with Joseph's younger son, Ephraim, they surpassed any of Jacob's sons. However, when Israel was oppressed by Midian, Gideon claimed to be among the weakest clan in his tribe and the weakest man in his family. Yet God described Gideon as a mighty warrior.

Has God, through His Word or His Spirit, ever called you to be more than you thought possible? How did you respond?

Has the identity you built or claimed for yourself ever hindered your willingness to become who God intended you to be? How?

Who you are starts with where you came from, includes where you've been, and indicates where you're going. If your identity is scripted by Almighty God and is consistent with His Word, you're living in the truth of who He made you to be. Discovering and living that identity, as defined by God, affects everything about life. This endeavor is always worth the effort.

DAY 1

WHO YOU ARE STARTS WITH WHERE YOU COME FROM

Create a list of people and priorities in your life that are important to you. Be as specific as you like, but in some cases a category will suffice. For example, you can record “My family” instead of listing each individual member.

Take inventory to make sure your list is complete, including items of even nominal importance.

Now the exercise becomes more challenging. Start marking entries off your list in order, from least to greatest importance. Which ones can you live without? Narrow your list to only two or three of your top priorities. Those indicate not only what’s of great worth to you but also what’s absolutely vital in making you who you are.

The old expression “You are what you eat” reminds you to make wise choices about healthful eating, but it holds little weight in creating an identity. A truer phrase is “You are what’s important to you.”

You define yourself by your values. The problem with that truth is the word *your*, which implies your own sovereignty despite your vast limitations as a mortal. Who are you to determine who you are? Even if you have that authority, where was it derived from? Scripture has the answer.

Read Genesis 1:26.

God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.”

GENESIS 1:26

What description of humanity's inherent nature and position did God offer in this verse?

God didn't wait to confer with the man to determine what his nature should or shouldn't include and what his calling or direction in life should be. God also created you to bear His image. Right from the beginning, before any of us were formed, God had a plan. For the couple in the garden, that included a definitive purpose.

Read Ephesians 2:10 and rewrite it in your own words.

These words by Paul follow a powerful description of salvation (see vv. 8-9). God has miraculously and graciously saved us to accomplish the purpose He intended.

How does knowing and being reminded of where you come from and why you were created shape your identity?

Revisit your lists for the week, both the one you created in the group session and the one you recorded at the beginning of this personal study. Which descriptions of you and values you hold are consistent with the image of God in you and the good work God planned for you?

Which ones might you need to reevaluate? End today's study by asking God to show you the priorities and pursuits you need to eliminate and the ones you need to embrace in order to define yourself by His purpose for you.

DAY 2

WHO YOU ARE INCLUDES WHERE YOU'VE BEEN

An important exercise for any Christ follower is to compose a gospel testimony. A basic formula is to answer the following three questions. Take time to answer these if you haven't done so lately.

What was your life like before Christ?

How did you encounter and begin to trust Christ?

What's life like now as a follower of Christ?

A well-formed Christian identity comes from an understanding of the distinct truth that God Almighty created us to bear His image and to follow His purpose. It also includes a keen, ready recognition of where we've been. All of us began by living a life of sin and rebellion. Only when we trust Christ does He begin to redefine our identity.

Along the way Israel suffered many consequences for its frequent refusal to live according to God's plans. That disobedience was sin. Why did people who had tasted God's goodness drift and adopt an identity apart from God's design?

Examine Genesis 3:1-6. In this early snapshot of human history, the first man and woman chose to believe a lie. Why did they do that? Based on what you read, specifically in verse 6, why did the couple succumb to the serpent's temptation?

Are there patterns of sin in your life that formed because you've believed lies? Explain.

Are there patterns of sin in your life that formed because you chose your own pleasure and what you perceived to be good? Explain.

Read Daniel 1:1-7.

It wasn't enough to take over a nation in Nebuchadnezzar's day. To ensure long-lasting dominance, the culture of the ransacked nation had to be replaced by that of Babylon. It was an effective leadership strategy. Nebuchadnezzar selected leaders from the displaced people group and set out to influence them first.

What were the criteria for Nebuchadnezzar's chosen influencers among the Israelites?

The elements of the royal table in Babylon would have been prohibited by Jewish dietary laws. Later in the chapter Daniel and a few friends requested permission to avoid the rich diet. The implicit fact is that many of Israel's elite gave in. Was it the lust of the eyes, the lies of the enemy, or the overwhelming pressure from their new surroundings that caused the unnamed young men to give in?

All of us have been in a place where something or someone has lured us away from God's plan. Although that's an awful place to remain, it's not a bad place to recall. Knowing where you've been points you to forgiveness and gives God an opportunity to display the attributes of His character that you need most.

If your sinful state has been repented of and forgiven, recalling the darkness of that place provides good motivation never to return. An identity characterized by forgiveness makes the best foundation for your life today.

Pray about any patterns of sin you identified today. Confess and ask God to forgive you and to show you changes you can make to align your life with His plan. If you've already received God's forgiveness for ways you've departed from His purpose, thank Him in prayer today.

DAY 3

WHO YOU ARE ULTIMATELY INDICATES WHERE YOU'RE HEADED

In the group session you described who you are with declarative titles. Perhaps you identified yourself by your family role, such as a parent, or by a professional role, such as a teacher. Maybe you opted for more personal characterizations or hobbies, like a dreamer or a reader.

How does the way you describe yourself shape the direction of your life?

When a person operates in an identity other than the one God intended, how does that identity affect the direction his or her life takes?

Recall your study of Moses and Gideon from the group session. Both Old Testament heroes were blessed by a relationship with God. He defined who they were and determined where they went.

Read Exodus 3:12-14. What promise did God make to Moses?

What did knowing God's name provide for Moses?

Read Judges 6:16-22. What similar promise did God make to Gideon?

How did God illustrate who He was to Gideon?

In what ways has God promised you His presence and revealed His identity to you?

Review your list of priorities in day 1. How do God's presence and identity script your priorities?

When identity is rooted in God's truth, Christ followers don't just know who they're meant to be. They more clearly see who God is and the path He lays out for them to take. In Psalm 32 David's summary of his life and connection to God's plan could easily describe both Moses and Gideon. It's a good description of our lives too.

Close this week by carefully reading Psalm 32. What qualities did David mention that you'd like to be true of your identity?

Moses and Gideon were more than forgiven. They were called. They abandoned misunderstanding and followed God's instruction. In God they were deemed righteous.

Psalm 32:7 wonderfully applies to both Moses and Gideon. For God to be a protective hiding place, He must be near. God called Moses and Gideon not only to be people they didn't think they could be but also to go to places they didn't think they could go and to accomplish tasks they felt ill-equipped to accomplish. In addition, He promised to be with them along the way.

Who does God want you to be? What does He want you to do? How confident are you to move ahead, knowing He's with you? If you're unclear about the answers to these questions, simply ask God to speak. Ask Him to give you ears to hear, a heart to obey, and a willingness to take risks in order to go where He leads.