

Confident Impact: Men, Identity, Transformation

With Guest Speaker Dr. Pete Alwinson

Genesis 37

It's good to be here. It's good to be back with you guys at Man in the Mirror. The front table always gets hammered when I stand up here. I always feel like I come home when I come to Man in the Mirror. I can mess up here and it's okay. But they stream it, so if I mess up I make Pat look bad. You know I love Pat Morley and this ministry. I am on the board, so I'd say Pat works for me, but that's not true. I work with him and the great staff at Man in the Mirror. I love this Bible Study because this is such a broad Bible Study; men of every age it seems like and all kinds of denominations all across the city. We got some non-denoms, we got some Methodists here maybe, some Baptists here, yeah we got some Baptists here. You know I love Baptists, I was raised Baptist, been a Presbyterian pastor for a long time, but I love Baptists. Baptists stick together, don't they? They even talk on a Friday morning! Baptists stick together, they always recognize each other, except in two places, you know that? Baptists always recognize each other except in two places: Hooters, and ABC Liquor.

I want to talk to you today about this whole idea of recognition. Baptists will recognize each other almost all the time, but one of the problems that we as men experience in our everyday life is that sometimes we don't recognize who we are. We don't know who we are. We forget our identity as followers of Christ, and so we don't even know who we are sometimes. Mark Driscoll who is the pastor of Mars Hill Church out in Seattle wrote a book called *Who Do You Think You Are?* In that book he talks about the struggle that we men, we Christians have with our identity. Who are we? It talks about a movie I have not seen called *Memento* and in that movie Leonard Shelby the protagonist and main character in the movie has lost his wife. A murderer has entered the house, killed his wife, and cracked him on the skull. So he's got short term amnesia; he's trying to find this murderer but he can't remember much after just a very few minutes, he forgets. One of the lines he often says is well you see, I have this condition. We have that condition! We have this condition of spiritual amnesia, identity amnesia, where we guys forget who we are as followers of Jesus Christ. So what happens is a lot of times we default to some other identity. We default to a defective identity that maybe we were given when we were young, or we default to an identity that we have tried to create.

How many of you guys in this room are performance oriented guys, raise your hand? The rest of you are liars. Every one of us is performance oriented, it was beat into our skulls as little guys that we are what we produce, that our identity is what we do. It's been a little over a year since I've been a senior pastor of a church. I was a pastor for 30 years, and now I am on staff with Key Life Network and I get to work with Steve Brown, the man whose voice sounds like God, and it's been wonderful spending time with God there. But I want you to know what I've been doing in this last year, I've been detoxing from a performance oriented mentality. I'm only as good as my last sermon, I'm only as good as my last business meeting. How easy it is for my identity to be based on what I do, on performance. I'm going to remind you of a story that many of you guys know, I'm going to read from Genesis 37. He's one of my favorite characters in the entire Bible and his name is Joseph. I know that Pat has talked on characters of

the Bible recently and probably talked on Joseph, but I want to talk to you a little bit about Joseph from Genesis 37 and the whole subject of identity.

Many of you know his story, he's a young man when this takes place, and here it is, Genesis 37:1:

Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, in the land of Canaan.

These are the generations of Jacob whose name was changed, it was changed to Israel.

Joseph, being 17 years old, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers (that was his first mistake), they hated him all the more. He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us? And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

What is Joseph's identity at 17 years of age? How does he view himself, right here, right now? If we had some time to do some interaction, I'd get your ideas, but let me suggest to you that Joseph at this time, at 17 had this self-identity that he was the favored son of his father. He was arrogant and he was certainly naïve, wasn't he? That's Joseph right now. Naïve, a little bit arrogant, and very young, and when his dad made this coat for him it was a unique situation because that helped to fuel his identity. Let me ask you this guys, who is responsible for shaping Joseph's identity? His dad. It was Jacob, it was Israel who shaped the identity of his 17 year old son. Chuck Swindoll, his book on Joseph talks about how Jacob was a passive man. I agree. He was a passive man when his oldest son Ruben had sex with one of his wives, Jacob said nothing. Jacob was passive, and as a result of his passivity, he did not develop his sons. He didn't move into a relationship with his sons, and as a result, when Joseph came along (and Joseph was the easiest to get along with), Jacob finally said now I can get along with this son!

So he elevated him to this status where he inflated his ego wrongly. What did he do? He gave him that multicolored coat. Many of you remember from your days in Sunday School remember those flannel graphs? Some of you are saying what language are you speaking, but some of you are older than dirt like me and you remember the flannel graph of Joseph with the multicolored coat. It might have been a multicolored coat that stood out, but it also might have been a coat with long sleeves and went down longer. When a guy in the middle east is wearing a coat with long sleeves that goes all the way down to his feet, what message does it send? He's not a worker, he's the boss. Jacob had elevated his 17 year old son to be the boss in a sense, or the overseer, over his brothers. Let me give you a truth, it is always the father who sets the identity of the sons, and the daughters.

Now do we feel the chill level going up a little bit in here, in the responsibility that we have as fathers? It is true that we as fathers set the sexual identity of our male children and our female children. It is your father who set the identity in your heart. How did that work out for Joseph? It didn't work out really well did it? Jacob's identity that he set for Joseph put Joseph in harm's way, and actually threatened his very life! Wow! Now what happened to Joseph? We don't have the time to read all of Genesis, and if you don't know this story, I'm going to ruin it for you. Here's what happened to Joseph, but read it later, because it's astonishing! What happened to Joseph is his brothers didn't kill him, but they sold him to captivity, and God allowed this son Joseph to be taken not only into Egypt, away from all of his family and privileges, and all of his ego and self gratification, but he put him in prison ultimately. Then, eventually, out of that prison context, having stripped his ego, having stripped his favorite son mentality, he elevated him to the position of prime minister in Egypt. What did God do to Joseph? Hear me on this, because he loved him, he stripped him of a false identity and gave him a new one, and the new identity was this: you are my beloved son, even though you're in prison, you are my beloved son. And, I've got a job for you. What God did was he stripped Joseph of the false identity that his earthly father had given him, and gave him the identity that the heavenly father wanted him to have. Because of Jesus Christ, God has done the same thing for us. Exactly.

Because of what God has done in sending his son to the cross for us, the father has said I don't know where you got your identity, but I'll tell you this, one thing I do know is that most of you guys in here, and I'm in your company, most of us did not have an earth father that crafted a good, Godly, and strong self image that enables us to enter into the world with confidence, with moral integrity, and with the ability to be a transformative force in American culture. We generally were not given that, and most of us had to figure out our identity on our own. How much trouble did we get in when we tried to do that? Because you see we have this idea that an identity can be developed, that identity can be earned, that it is something we can perform for and eventually arrive at. If I just get enough money, then eventually I will think of myself well, I will have confidence inside, and I will be a secure man. No. If I just get to the positions that I want to get to, I will be firm and strong and be able to make a difference in the world. You never get there! Because an identity is bestowed by a father, it is not developed by a son.

So what I want you to do in the time that we have left, and I think I have three hours to teach this morning, in the short time that we have left I want you to hold two aspects of your identity in Christ in tension. I want to talk about that with you because I've been playing with this and working on it, and I want you to understand two aspects of your identity in Christ because the father is still, even with old guys like me, working on reshaping our identity, and the first aspect of your identity is that you are a dearly beloved rescued son of the most high God. The second aspect of your identity is that you are a completely expendable warrior of the righteous king whose name is Jesus. When we grasp those two identities in the tension together that God has given us, we as men experience incredible freedom, and we help to understand the totality of the New Testament teaching on that.

First of all let me talk to you about who you are as the deeply beloved son, rescued son of the most high God. We were in prison before we came to Christ, weren't we? Paul in Romans 6 talks about how before we came to Christ we were slaves of sin, we had no choice, however you articulate this, whatever your denominational background, sin killed us and we were slaves to it. We couldn't not sin, we had to sin. But Christ came along and freed us from that. So in our core and one of my favorite verses, as I meditate over and over on this, is Galatians 4 where the apostle says I mean that the heir, as long as he's a child is no different than a slave, though he's the owner of everything, but he's under guardian and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way, we also. When we were children, we were enslaved to

the elementary principles of the world, but when the fullness of time had come God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons. Because you are a son, God sent the Spirit of his son crying into your heart crying Abba father daddy father, so you are no longer a slave but a son, and not just a son, but an heir through God. A man has four core identities: he is a son, he is a leader, he is a warrior, and he is a lover, but the core identity is as a son, that never changes. When God created Adam, he made a son. Yes, you're an image bearer, that's true. Yes, you're a creature, that's true, but ultimately God is the one that wanted to be a father, and when he created Adam he created a son, and that's your core identity in Christ, that you are a son. That will never ever change, you are a deeply beloved son of the most high God, and before the foundation of the world, God came after you. This is what grounds us, that we are sons. It is not the identity that we earn, it is the identity that we are bestowed, that the greatest being in the universe looks at you and says you are mine.

My friend Curt Moore sent me a picture of a young man that he had seen in a park, and on this man's t-shirt it said "Without Jesus I Suck." How's that for spiritual? I don't think he wore it to church, but this young man gets it. That what Jesus Christ has done is that he has totally transformed him from the inside out starting with his identity, and without Jesus he's nothing. You were very generous Lucas in saying one of the newest Grandpa's in this room. I am, my son Joel and his wife gave birth actually Ally gave birth to the baby last Saturday morning. Little Maggie Lynn Alwinson is born and she is precious and she's just this incredible gorgeous little girl. You know what my son is doing now at the end of the day when he gets done from work? I know you say he's changing diapers, but you know what he's doing, he's sitting on the couch with this little package. And what is he doing with little Maggie? He's doing what I did when I was holding her in the hospital room, he is gazing into her eyes and in that little face. Do you remember, fathers? Do you remember when you did that, when they handed you the package? He's sitting there, sometimes he just falls asleep with her on his lap, and Ally will take a picture and send it over to me. What is he doing? He's bonding! He's looking at this incredible miracle that God has given him and he's saying to Maggie I love you. You are mine, you have been given to me. It reminds me of when they handed me Joel, and I'm looking at him. Then they handed me John a couple of years later, and then several years later here at Winter Park Hospital they handed me Jessie. And I'm looking into those little faces and I'm saying you are mine! I love you, I am your father. I will live for you, I will die for you, I will sacrifice for you. You are mine! And as they get older, what does the father do? He continues to drive all that stuff home. You're mine! I brought you into this world, I can take you out of it too! I love you, I'm here for you, I'm going to give myself to you. In so doing, the very best fathers build an identity in their children that leaves them unshakable when they move out into the world. Oh, there's trials! There is difficulty, but there's this deep seated confidence that they have that they are God's and their father's.

Let me ask you this, do you think that an earthly father can love a child more than the heavenly Father can love a child? Theologically you know the answer is no, but we don't believe that God looks at us when we were born and bonds with us. It's not even manly to talk about it, they'll probably have to bleep this out of the message, but when you came into this world it was as if the Father was holding you in his arms and he said finally you're here. I've known you son before the foundation of the world, and I've loved you, and I'm here for you. You're mine. I don't care what your earthly father says about you, but I love you. I will live for you, I will die for you, in fact I have died for you, I sent my son for you. Don't you ever for a minute believe that I don't love you. Guys, what I want you to understand is that the core energizing principle of a man's life is that he understands that because of Christ you are the deeply loved and rescued son of the most high God. But I want you to understand your flipside because once you understand your core identity, it then releases us in freedom to our core mission. At the same time, you

are the completely expendable warrior of the risen savior Jesus Christ. You and I are completely expendable in him, and I have struggled to understand the New Testament mentality of the apostle Paul. He knew he was loved, would you agree with that? Did John the apostle understand that he was loved by God? Yeah, read 1 John! Then why is it that every one of these disciples were able to live their life in such a way that they felt and acted expendable in the mission of the king? Precisely because they understood their core identity, they were able to move into their core mission and act as expendable men. We're expendable.

There's a movie that came out, black and white, when I was a kid, and some of you will remember it. Cliff Robertson was in it, it was about the PT boats, PT 109, about JF Kennedy. Remember that movie? *They Were Expendable* and ever since I've been a kid and I see these guys going into battle, there's something that resonates deeply in the masculine soul with a warrior who gives himself fully to the cause. You can never be expendable until you know that you are absolutely loved and the mission you are on is absolutely crucial. How many of you have seen *Act of Valor* with the real navy seals in it? I've seen it about 10 times. The thing about that movie, and if you haven't seen it you ought to get it, but the thing about that movie is not necessarily how incredibly powerful are these navy seal warriors, it's the end of the movie when they show the credits. They show you that these men that we have spent millions of dollars training are the most expendable of our military, and since 9/11 more of them have died than any branch of service. Navy seals, they are expendable, but they are highly valuable, and I love that! That's the way Jesus felt, that's the way Jesus acted, that's the way Paul acted, that's the way we can act, and that's what changes the world when a man understands that he is deeply loved by the most high God but he is also expendable in the service of his righteous king Jesus Christ. Hold those two identities in tension; reflect on that, think about that, because we need in the church of Jesus Christ men who understand both, in tension.

This summer we did what we like to do every summer and that is hike fourteeners in Colorado. There are 54 mountains over 14,000 feet and I got 11 of them. I don't know how many of them I'm going to get before Jesus brings me home, but we did Long's Peak this summer. These little medallions are the benchmark. My friend sent me this one from one that we've done, it shows you how high. This one is Quandary Peak, 14,265. I'm from Florida, and the air up there is very thin! So we did Long's Peak, and as we were climbing up the grand daddy of them all, the furthest most fourteener where you have wind all the way around the mountain to get to the top and it's one of the most treacherous. We started off at 4:30 hiking in the dark. We got above the tree line, already seeing several people turn around and come back down. We got up to the boulder field, to the key hole, scrambling up those rocks, sucking wind, thinking why in the world I wanted to do this! We get through the key hole, we go through the transverse, and everything on this mountain is named because everything on this mountain is scary. We get through the transverse, we transversed over to the trough. The trough is straight up, took me 2.5 hours just to go up a couple of miles, not even that, a mile maybe straight up. Got up there, got up to the boulder block and thought how am I going to get around this? There was a guy he was old and he said you want a hand? I go are you kidding, of course! So he pulls me up. I come around the boulder, and get to this place called the narrows, and it's straight down on a granite cliff and you've got a foot to walk across and my legs start shaking. I'm 58 not 21. The day before a guy had died on that mountain. His body was still down there, and they were coming that day to get the body, and this is where he fell. On the way back! He summited! He got across it the first time, so I was going to get across it the first time. So I got across it, got up to the home stretch to the peak, turned around, came back down. After a short period of time, there was no celebration on this fourteener, because I knew I was going to have to go back through the narrows again, and just as we were headed back down the helicopter came. The rangers had repelled down the mountain and hooked up the body, and when the helicopter took off, it

was absolutely sobering to know that where I was about ready to cross is where that guy had fallen the day before. Young man, you fall you die, right there. When I got across it I was so glad I was alive! When I got down the mountain, I called my daughter who loves to do fourteeners too, said I'm never bringing you here; we're never doing this one together. I'm never coming back to this mountain again!

I want you to know something guys, every day men are falling off mountains and dying, because of their identity. They don't know who they are. They're building identities that are killing them. I want to call you to understand that you are the deeply beloved son of the most high God, but you're also an expendable servant, a warrior of the righteous king. We need you! I'm talking to the choir in a sense because you guys are already committed to reaching men. Look at this, this is so cool! Every Friday morning, you get three free sins just for being here! But you are absolutely needed to reach men. You say I'm broken. I know, I'm broken too, but I'm going to keep reaching out to men because some of them are just this much more broken than me. It takes a man to reach a man and we need you, we need you to be a warrior, to expend yourselves. The books, the literature that's out there, everyone understands in our culture that men are the under gender in our culture today. Everybody understands this. The books are these: *The End of Men*, *The Rise of Women*, *Manning Up*. What's that book about? It's about the fact that women have so far surpassed men in so many of the metrics out there that they don't know who they can marry. That men are boys. Another book, *Saving the Males*. Now is that depreciating or what? Condescending! Save the Males? The males need saving? I hate it!

One of the other books, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, *Why Boys Fail: Saving Our Sons from the Educational System that is Leaving Them Behind*. Scholars are telling our men to look inside for their feminine side! Still! That's in the ascendancy, that's in our education, at every level. I've looked inside; I can't find a chick inside me anywhere! I want you to know, I do not have a feminine side, but I have a female by my side and her name is Caron. We need men who are willing to look at other guys and say you need a guy in your life. We need men who are willing to be expendable, to reach out. Guys like Lyle Nelson right there.

I was at church Sunday, and this guy I hadn't seen in a long time, Dick Dossier, Jr. Dick how you doing? We got to talking because Greg, his son and I are good friends and he said Lyle Nelson lead me to Christ, lead my father to Christ. What? We need guys like Lyle Nelson who would be willing to go in there and put his big old hairy paw on a guy's shoulder and say I want to get to know you. Can we get a coffee together? My friend Mike who spends time with a guy who just got out of prison, Lucas doing a prison ministry! Awesome! You're going in there! I did the same thing once. You get locked in the cell with those guys and they're all looking at you. It's a Christian cell supposedly, they don't look like Christians, and they look like they could eat me for lunch! But when I started talking to them, when you start talking to them, they're so glad you're there! Because they need a man to teach them what a man is like!

Jonny, my son hadn't been in the mountains much hiking. So we were doing that hiking and I hear this noise in back of me and Jonny's my 6'3" big old son, and there was a pile of rocks called cairns and they mark the trail. I look back and Jonny's kicking those suckers over. I'm going Jonny what are you doing? They need that to get across the boulder field. He goes tear down the idols! I loved it! I said good, you got! But put that back together because somebody will lose their way! Guys, what we need are men who understand that they are so loved that they can tear down the idols that are keeping them, keeping me, from reaching other guys. We need you. I want you to hold that in tension. Deeply loved, completely expendable; that brothers is freedom. That's freedom! Take it to heart, and so will I. Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Father, thank you for reshaping our identity in Christ. Jesus, thank you for all that you did to make it possible. Spirit of the living God, energize us to understand and hold on to who we are and unleash us. Be with my brothers today as they go out into a world that desperately needs them. We thank you that we are your sons, and all because of Jesus, in whose name we pray. And all God's men said, amen! Have a great day, thank you!