

Who Am I?

Discovering My True Identity



Who Am I?

Leader: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (all make the Sign of the Cross).

All respond: In the divine image, Lord, You created him; male and female You created them.

Reader 1: God, You made us good, both body and soul.

Response: In the divine image, Lord, You created him; male and female You created them.

Reader 2: God, You saw that it was not good for us to be alone, so You gave us one another for loving relationships.

Response: In the divine image, Lord, You created him; male and female You created them.

Reader 3: God, You are love, and You made us for love.

Response: In the divine image, Lord, You created him; male and female You created them.

Reader 4: God, You made us without anything to hide from You.

Response: In the divine image, Lord, You created him; male and female You created them.

Reader 5: God, You made us to be happy with You forever.

Response: In the divine image, Lord, You created him; male and female You created them.

Leader: Jesus, You taught us to address Your Father as You did, and so in the Holy Spirit we pray...

All: Our Father...

STORY STARTER

You Can't Take It With You

At age eight, I decided to run away from home so I could drink orange juice whenever I wanted.

In my family, orange juice was a special treat reserved for birthdays and holidays. I had four younger siblings, and between us we could gulp down three gallons of juice a day, which got to be pretty expensive. So my mom had stopped buying orange juice as an everyday beverage. Our choices became limited to milk or water.

If I ran away, I would be able to buy my own juice and drink it all day long, if that's what I felt like doing. And maybe I would buy some Cocoa Puffs and

Fruit Loops to replace Mom's standard menu of Cheerios and bananas. I couldn't wait to be on my own!

My friend Paul agreed to join me. Neither of us had any serious problems at home; we just wanted to be free. So we met up one morning after my mom had left the house to run errands. With plastic grocery bags in hand, we went through the house to gather up what we thought we would need for our journey and new life. Clothes, of course, but no church clothes, that was for sure. And medicine, but just the yummy grape chewable pills, not that nasty red syrup.

As we got ready to leave, Paul suggested bringing a few "survival" books to help us figure out which plants we could eat. We settled on the set of encyclopedias my grandfather had recently given my siblings and me. There were almost thirty volumes, but Paul and I put about two-thirds of the set into plastic bags and headed out the door.

At first, we were too excited to notice how heavy our bags were. We talked about where we would set up camp and how to start a fire with two sticks like they did on TV. Soon, the summer sun reached its full intensity. We started sweating bullets as we dragged the bags along the road. Man, they were heavy! Had they been this heavy when we left the house?

Neither of us wanted to admit it, but we realized that we had made a mistake. Did we really need all these books? Maybe we should go put some of them back. In fact, maybe running away wasn't worth the trouble. Things were pretty good at home. Our great plot ended with Paul going back home and me climbing into my bunk bed that night.

We experienced the desire to be free and make our own choices, but we obviously had no idea what to do with our freedom. We knew we needed something to guide us, but we packed all the wrong things and didn't even make it out of the neighborhood. We thought we had it all figured out, but we were really clueless about how to take care of ourselves in the wild.

An entire set of encyclopedias was what we needed? Encyclopedias! Every pioneer who ever lived would have laughed to the point of tears.

It would still be years before either of us could set out on our own. First, we needed to know what a human person actually needs to survive and thrive.

— Aimee MacIver

IF YOU ASK ME ...

1. If I had to leave home tonight and could take only one thing with me, I would take _____.
2. When I was eight years old, my idea of freedom was _____.



In Your Faith

"What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them little less than a god, crowned them with glory and honor."

— Psalm 8:5-6

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that we as human persons are the only creatures that God made just to love and be loved. Everything else God made—animals, plants, and even angels—was made to do a job or accomplish some task for Him or for humanity. This is why the Catechism reminds us that from our beginning we are made for eternal happiness with God (see CCC 1703).

3. I think a human person needs _____ to survive.

4. I think a human person needs _____ to thrive.

BRIDGING THE GAP

You know those "Hello, my name is..." name tags?

If you walked into a room full of strangers and had to identify yourself without writing your actual name, what would your name tag say?

Would you describe your relationships? "I am Henry's granddaughter." "I am Sarah's brother." Would you give some details of your personality? "I am shy." "I am outgoing." You could explain what you do: "I am a soccer player." "I am a dancer." You could share your likes: "I like pizza." "I like riding horses." Or maybe you would just state the obvious: "I am a boy." "I am a girl."

All of these things would certainly describe parts of your identity. Even if your likes or hobbies changed, you would still exist, so really, deep down, the question remains: Who are you as a human person?

You actually began trying to define your identity when you were a toddler. You learned how many years "old" you were and proudly counted out three fingers to anyone who would listen. You learned how to spell your name and then wrote it on everything. You and your friends spent hours pretending to be different characters: firefighters, ballerinas, football stars, chefs, veterinarians. Remember as a little kid playing house or "army" inside a homemade fort?

But why did you, like most kids, play games about being someone older? You don't see first graders running around the playground at recess saying, "Let's pretend to be first graders at recess." Even at an early age, we are motivated to develop into more than what we are now.

IF YOU ASK ME ...

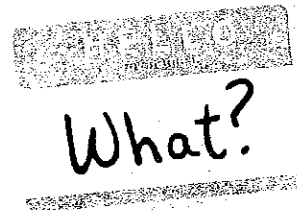
1. Three relationships that helped make me who I am today:

2. What I think makes humans different from animals is:



In Your Faith

When it comes to the big question of what it means to be human, our Catholic faith gives us some profound answers. The first section of the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that human beings are the only creatures that God made for their own sakes. This means that God made us just because He loves us. He wasn't lonely or bored. He doesn't need us. He just loves and wants to share His life with us. That's really good news! (see CCC 1 & 355)



TO THE CORE

From the moment we are born, **human persons** have a deep desire to grow up, be independent, and find happiness. In many ways, this is a good thing, because otherwise we would never make any progress. Can you imagine what the world would be like if everyone refused to be potty trained?

At this point in your life, you are probably starting to feel the urge to have more freedom, to make more of your own choices, to experience life more like an adult. Sometimes you might feel restless or annoyed when parents or teachers tell you what to do, simply because you want to do your own thing, not theirs. This desire is natural and necessary to help you discover who you are and who you want to become.

Having independence and finding happiness become more complicated as we grow up. You want to make your own choices, but sometimes you don't know what to choose. You want to find happiness, but sometimes you are not sure where to look for it. As a kid, choices were pretty simple: Should you choose chocolate or vanilla ice cream? Now your decisions matter more: If you speak up in class, will you look stupid? Should you hang out with your friends and risk failing tomorrow's test, or should you study diligently but miss the fun?

Happiness was also easier to pinpoint in childhood. Some candy and new toys pretty much did it. You spent all day playing, and your biggest responsibility was washing your hands before dinner. Now you spend all day at school, and you are expected to make good grades, practice hard, complete your chores, and maybe even watch your younger siblings.

So it's a sort of trade-off. The more freedom you have, the more your happiness depends on your own choices.

Even your friendships change as you grow up. In kindergarten, your friends didn't care about your clothes or if you had a boyfriend or girlfriend. If you wanted to impress them, you jumped on your bed or blew bubbles in your milk. Boys hung out with other boys and thought girls were good for nothing but chasing around the playground. Girls cared for their dolls and played dress-up. The two groups were more often separated than together.

Now, it's different. Your group of friends is changing. You may find out you don't share much in common anymore with old friends from elementary school. You may want to spend more time with the opposite gender. You may feel more concerned with your looks and more confused about how to be accepted. The changes can be pretty overwhelming. What should you wear? What should you say? Will people like you?

This is exactly when knowing who you really are as a human person matters most.

notes



Notes and Nuggets:

This chapter's application is in an expanded "If You Ask Me..." in the student workbook. Students should silently fill in the "If You Ask Me..." and then discuss how their desires changed as they got older. Be sure to tell them that God wants to fulfill their truest desires and that their purest longings were actually placed in their hearts by God Himself. Ultimately, we all seek love. If this reality does not naturally surface in their answers, you can pose the following question to start a group discussion: "Do you think it is fair to say that what we are all really after is love?"

IF YOU ASK ME ...

1. When I was five, all I wanted was _____.
2. When I was six, I wanted to be a _____ when I grew up.
3. When I was seven, I would have watched _____ all day if my mom let me.
4. When I was eight, my favorite subject in school was _____.
5. When I was nine, I was afraid of _____, but not now.
6. Right now, I want _____ more than anything.
7. When I'm sixteen, I hope I can _____.
8. When I get to college, I'm going to _____.
9. When I'm old, I hope I'll be able to say that I _____.
10. My biggest goal is to be a _____ person.
11. In the end, I think all anyone really wants is _____.

You can't make such decisions until you know who you are. It is like trying to find a place you have never been to before without having a map or a GPS. Imagine you want to visit the beach. To get there, you hop in the car, back out of your driveway, and start turning down random roads, hoping one will take you to the ocean. If you tried to travel this way, most of your turns would be dead ends; they would lead you anywhere but where you wanted to go. You would be no closer to your goal, and maybe even farther away than when you started. And you would have lost precious time that you could have been spending in the sand.

IF YOU ASK ME ...

Even though _____ is invisible, I know it is real because _____. (Give an example of something that you are sure is real even though it is invisible. Then explain how you can be sure of this.) _____

Looking for the Beach

Unfortunately, just when you really need examples of what it means to be a free, happy person, it is harder than ever to find them. What do you see teenagers doing on TV and in movies? They are drinking alcohol at parties. They are getting into really intense dating relationships. They are often doing pretty much what they want without rules. And they usually seem cool and



sophisticated. According to these images, freedom means doing whatever you want; happiness is having fun and avoiding complications.

In real life, some adults may not give very good examples either. Many adults seem to live by the idea that one's identity comes from one's career. Happiness means you have a nice house and a new car every three years. Yet you may have noticed that this way of life doesn't really guarantee anything at all. How many adults have you seen who do nothing but work, complain, and remain frustrated? You may even have seen supposedly "successful" adults who treat each other unkindly, or who seem incapable of good relationships.

No wonder young people today seem so confused about who they are, what will give them true happiness, and what maturity means. Some guys might think they are supposed to hook up with as many girls as they can to prove they are men. Some girls might think they have to show off their bodies or flirt all the time to attract a boyfriend.

The world is not all bad, but it certainly is confused about what makes a person matter—and it is even more confused about what makes a person happy. It is sometimes easy to get the idea that you are worth nothing more than how good you look, how well you perform, and how much you own.

But God loved us too much to leave us confused! At the **Incarnation**, God the Son actually became one of us and opened a way for us to end up even better off than Adam and Eve started. And God did not stop helping humanity after the time of Jesus. He gives us exactly what we need for the time we live in.

One of God's main ways of helping humanity is to inspire holy men and women with wisdom that they can share with others. We know these people as the saints. God inspired Blessed John Paul II, although he is not yet a canonized **saint**, with answers to those questions you have about identity and happiness. John Paul II was a man who truly loved youth. He understood how difficult it can be to find the truth when TV, movies, music, magazines, and society surround you with mistaken ideas. So John Paul II spoke about the true meaning of who you are in a collection of talks called the **Theology of the Body**. The Theology of the Body asks and answers two big questions: *Who am I? How should I live?* This teaching is like a map that reveals how our visible bodies can express the truth about our invisible souls. It reveals many things about our relationships with God and others, such as:

- You have the freedom to choose how you will live your life.
- You have been created for loving relationships with God and others.
- These truths about our own relationships help us understand the relationship of the Holy Trinity: the One God is Three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—who love each other eternally.



In Your Faith

Jesus not only gave us a map; He is also the guide! Check out what He says in John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

"And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." – John 1:14

"The Word became flesh" refers to the Incarnation, when God the Son assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it (CCC 461). God became one of us to save us!

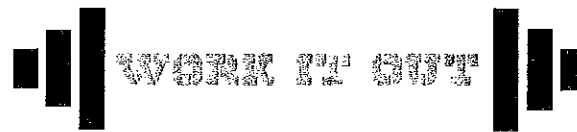
This workbook will help you to learn more about what God inspired this great pope to share with us.

So there is hope—a lot of hope! You can start high school confident and happy about who you are and what kind of person you will become. You can have good relationships with your friends and with those of the opposite gender. God offers you a destination better than anything like popularity, money, or power could offer. And, more importantly, God offers you a map; even more importantly than that, He gave us Jesus to be our guide along the way.

Are you ready to go?

IF YOU ASK ME ...

I think _____ is a good role model.



A. Getting to Know Me

Create a symbolic collage or self-portrait (drawn by you or from an image search) to represent your uniqueness. Put the images together in a Power Point presentation, a collage, or some other artistic piece. Include some of the following elements:

- a personality trait that makes people laugh
- a personality trait your friends value most about you
- a secret talent or weird ability
- something good you have done for someone else
- a favorite “something” (but be original—no people, songs, movies, foods, animals, or colors!)
- three blessings God has given you
- quotations from three different family members, friends, and teachers describing something they love, appreciate, or admire about you. (Don't quote the same person twice!)

B. Media Mash Up

Create a collection of songs (on CD) or video clips (on DVD) that you believe show the challenging process of growing up. Explain your choices in a brief written paragraph or present your collection to the group or class.

*Let us thank God for the
Good News we have heard in
this chapter as we pray:*

The LORD is my shepherd; I
shall not want.

He guides me in right paths
for His name's sake.

Even though I walk in the
dark valley I fear no evil.

You are at my side with Your
rod and Your staff that give
me courage.

Glory be to the Father and to
the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is
now, and ever shall be, world
without end. Amen.

— From Psalm 23

GOT IT?

1. Holy men and women inspired by God to share their wisdom with others are called _____.
2. Pope John Paul II spoke about the true meaning of who you are in a collection of talks called the _____.
3. The more freedom you have, the more your _____ depends on your own choices.

VOCABULARY

HUMAN PERSON:

God created us with both a body and a soul. We are the only creatures God made in His image and likeness, made to love and be loved. All other earthly creatures were made for our benefit. Every human person is unique and unrepeatable. This fact flows from being created in God's image and likeness, which is uniquely true about humans.

INCARNATION:

The Incarnation refers to the reality that Jesus, who is fully God, became man. God the Son became man so He could die and rise, saving humanity from the destruction caused by sin so that we can really become sons and daughters of God, possessing divine life.

SAINT:

A saint is someone who has lived a holy life, practiced virtue to a heroic degree, and chosen to love God above all things. Saints come from around the world and from different backgrounds. Some are priests and nuns, others are married, and some are even children. The Catholic Church canonizes, or gives the title of saint, to those holy men and women to give us examples of how we should live too. We are all called to become saints.

THEOLOGY OF THE BODY:

On Wednesdays from 1979 to 1984, Pope John Paul II gave talks about how the body reveals that human persons are created in the image of God, as male and female, with freedom for loving relationships. The Theology of the Body asks and answers two big questions: *Who am I? How should I live?*