

OAKS *of* RIGHTEOUSNESS

PART ONE: WHO AM I?

by Dave Halse

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Introduction



In his mid 40's, he still has no idea of who he is or what his purpose is. Jack is fearful. He avoids asking the 'Who am I?' question because of what he feels deep inside – pain and failure. He has given up on himself. He dulls the pain with alcohol.

Jack, a regular guy

Jack is a guy you might work with or play softball with. He's a regular guy. What you don't know is that Jack is fighting a losing battle. He and his wife struggle with serious marriage problems. Their fighting creates a toxic emotional home environment which is destroying his marriage and damaging the lives of his teenage daughter and son.

He's trapped in alcohol and drug abuse. He has trouble keeping a job. His self concept is shattered. He sees himself as a victim. Like every man, he craved approval from his father but was too often put down by his dad's hurtful criticism. He could never measure up to his father's standards. He never felt accepted. His heart is engraved with the message, *"I'm a failure."*

In his mid 40's, he still has no idea of who he is or what his purpose is. Jack is afraid. He avoids asking the 'Who am I?' question because of what he feels deep inside – pain and failure.

He has given up on himself. He dulls the pain with alcohol. He relies on what others think he should do with his life, yet he blames others for his troubles. He still longs for the approval he has never received from his dad. In all this tragedy Jack still identifies himself as a Christian.

He grew up in a Christian home. His dad is a retired church leader. Jack's Bible says God loves him. His embedded thinking says the opposite. He is plagued by disappointment, frustration, and addiction. His personal and relationship breakdowns are rooted in self condemnation. He has the classic 'victim' mentality. Is there any hope for this Christian man?

Discuss …

1.Jack lacks a sense of his identity or purpose. Why?

2. Would his life and relationships change if he knew his true identity in Christ? How?

3. Do you know any men like Jack? Is there anything about Jack that you identify with?

Jack is a good man, he wants God, but he is broken. His heart needs healing. A man is at his best when he knows who he is. Jack doesn't. Every man's deepest question is this: *"Who am I?"*

"Who am I?" Why does the question matter? It matters because our identity shapes our life. Men carry wounds deep in their heart. Most men avoid their inner pain. They ignore this *"Who am I?"* question because their inner wounds wall up their heart. But left unhealed, damaged emotions impact our life and our intimate relationships. A man whose heart is hurting will unconsciously hurt those close to him. Sadly, Jack's deep emotional pain impacts his marriage and family.

Your story may not be as extreme as Jack's, but every man needs to explore and find peace with the *"Who am I?"* question. How I am down deep inside affects my marriage, my children, my relationships, and my life. God wants every man to find healing and wholeness in Christ.

Do I know who I am in my relationship with



God? Who am I God, really? Do You really know me, love me, the real me? Let's be honest, do you even know who you are, really know?

Do I sometimes feel lost, alone? Do I know who I am?

Oaks of Righteousness – the Course

There are many good books and programs for men, but this OAKS course is different. OAKS is designed to help men explore and discover who they really are in their inner man. With the truth of God's word, the power of His Spirit, and the support of other men, a man can grow in faith, in Christ-like confidence, freedom, joy, and inner strength, … an Oak of Righteousness!

Our OAKS Bible theme is this wonderful promise from God's Spirit through Isaiah to us today.

Isaiah 61: 1 – 3 (NIV)
The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the
broken-hearted, to proclaim
freedom for the captives,
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn, and
provide for those who grieve in Zion -
to bestow on them
a crown of beauty instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and
a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.
Then they will be called ***oaks of righteousness****,*
a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour.

From the first line, *"the Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me"* through this powerful description of healing and transformation in our lives, to the inspiring promise, *"Then they will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour"* God shows us His plan for our Spirit-led identity, our mission, and purpose as His men, His Oaks of righteousness.

This OAKS journey will give hope and encouragement to regular men like you and me. In the Spirit of the Sovereign LORD, we discover and experience the life we are looking for!

Men - Message, Mission, Meaning

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me" Isaiah was a prophet living in Jerusalem 700 years before Christ. Isaiah was declaring to his people that God was showing him what He would do to cleanse and make His people righteous. Isaiah is the most 'Christological' of all the Old Testament prophets.

Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry seven hundred years later, would read from this Isaiah 61 passage in the synagogue in His hometown, Nazareth. He proclaimed then and there that He Himself was the fulfillment of the Isaiah 61 prophesy. See Luke 4:16-21.

Now let's think this through. Since Jesus says He is the fulfillment of the Isaiah mission, and since Jesus lives in all true believers, it follows that the prophesy of Isaiah, fulfilled in the ministry of Christ, is alive in Christ in you and me as Christian men today.

This is life changing! What I'm saying is the message and mission of Isaiah 61:1-3 are meant

for you and me today! As His men this mission of Isaiah through Jesus extends all the way to you and me. Let's not ignore this because we think we're not good enough or holy enough. Don't turn away saying, *"This passage can't be about me. I'm no Isaiah or Jesus; I'm just an average guy."* The disciples were average guys too but chosen and empowered by the same Spirit.

Isaiah wrote, *"The Spirit of the sovereign LORD is on **me.**"* So, who is the Spirit *"on"* today, and for what purpose? Since the Spirit is alive in you and me why wouldn't this message be for us? Is this who we really are? If the Spirit of the sovereign LORD is on me my question might be *"Why me?"* Who am I? Why would the Spirit of the sovereign LORD be on a guy like me?

Is God telling me that in Christ I'm more than an 'average guy'? Is this about the purpose of my life, to live out the mission of Jesus? Is the Spirit anointing me, like Isaiah, to *"preach good news to the poor"* and *"bind up the broken-hearted"*? Is my life purpose connected to accepting the mission described in these ancient writings of a prophet, and then of Jesus Himself?

A man's first responsibility is to provide for his family's physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. But is that all there is? Is there more in a man's heart than supplying everyday needs? Is our manhood satisfied, or is there still an empty space in our hearts? Are we spiritually satisfied?

Could this be the answer? *"The Spirit of the sovereign LORD is **on me?**"* We need to pay attention, to think about this, take it seriously. What if we turn away from this question? Will we miss our greater purpose for living, the fulfilling life for which we were created? Is God calling a man to a life purpose more significant than we thought? Are we part of a larger story?

My own story.
In the past, when this Isaiah 61 passage was read in church it frightened me. It was too holy, overpowering, sacred. It made me feel unworthy. Yet these words have stayed special in me. This OAKS story is my story, and I believe it's for every man.

"The Spirit of the sovereign LORD is on me."
Men have a deep desire for more in life. They ask *"Who am I?"* I know who God is. I know He is almighty and sovereign, but me, who am I? What is my identity? What's in my heart? What is my design? What is my purpose? Do I have a purpose? What will my life mean to the world anyway? What is my life worth? Do I have value?

These were our questions. Am I significant? Do I matter? What do I really want? What does God want with me? Is there a greater life for me? Does He know my name? Does He even know me? Why am I here? I know who God is, but I don't really know who I am. How do I understand this distance I feel between the sovereign LORD and who I am? Can I really know myself?

These are man-size questions and they're all about our hardest question – *"Who am I?"*

4. The Bible says the Spirit is IN me, but this verse says, *"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is ON me."* What's the difference between *"in me"* and *"on me"*?

5. What is your honest response to the nine words in question 4? Is God's Spirit *on you*?

6. Can God use this OAKS book to help you discover who you are? Are you part of a larger story? Your thoughts?

Our OAKS Journey

I said this Isaiah 61 passage made me feel unworthy, not good enough. But on my long OAKS journey God has shown me that it is His love, His holiness, His goodness, not mine, that allows me to now embrace this message. Now, I hear God calling me into it. I feel the sweet burden of the Spirit *"on me."* Men, as our relationship matures in Jesus, He shows us who we truly are.

In the power of His love and grace every man can embrace Isaiah's message. God gives a special mission, a purpose to every man in Christ. His will and purpose are found in knowing who we truly are when we allow His sovereign Spirit to lead us. In daily submission to the Lord Jesus, we become His will, and we grow in manhood. One day we will be called, *"oaks of righteousness."*

"The Spirit of the sovereign LORD is on me." It's the word *"me"* that is the core of our quest. You know who God is, but who are you? Do you have what it takes? The answer is *"No,"* but He does. Please hear this: the more you know who you are, the more you know who He is. The more you know your heart, the more you know God's heart for you. You are loved by God.

Who am I? In the power of His love, I am *"more than a conqueror."* See Romans 8:37. Do you know who you are? We offer this OAKS course to guide you as you explore your core identity so that you will know and embrace our Father's unconditional love and purpose for you.

Isaiah describes the ministries God purposes to do through me when the Spirit of the sovereign LORD is on me. In point form, these are the ministries God anointed Isaiah and Jesus for, and by the Spirit's transforming work He purposes to do through every believing man.

2700 years ago, Isaiah wrote, *"the Spirit of the sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to …"*

- preach the good news to the poor
- bind up the broken-hearted
- proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners
- proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God
- comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in Zion

- bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

Nothing has changed.
These ministries of the Spirit are still operating in and through God's people today. The Spirit is still on you and me to touch lives for God in His mighty power. We in the church and people in our world need God's transformation in our lives and relationships.

Is this why a man seeks for more in his life? Can you believe in your mind and heart that you are as a Christian anointed by the Spirit to fulfill a mission and purpose that is part of His larger purpose for you? Has He anointed you and me to live out the message and mission of Christ, to do the work of His kingdom in our lives and in our world?

I am convinced that the Spirit ordains average men to take this *"oaks of righteousness"* journey.

What is my **significance?** What is my **identity?** What is my **core?** What is my **design?** What is my **purpose?** These are five questions that guide us into deeper ***"Who am I?"*** territory. Our Oaks journey opens the door to these five essentials of knowing who each man is in Jesus.

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me because the Lord has anointed me …" What does this mean for each of us? What does *"because the Lord has anointed me"* mean for you?

To embrace my life purpose, I need to do the work of learning who I really am. This is the inner work of truly and deeply knowing my own heart. To know my true heart is to know the truth of God's unconditional and intimate love for me. When I know my heart, I know my Father.



We're not created to be alone.
God did not create us to be 'lone wolves.' We are designed for connection with like-minded men, a band of brothers. Led by God's Spirit, we care for each other. In a fellowship of men, we discover who we are. We walk in the joy of knowing our purpose. We do life together. We learn to live in freedom, being the men we are made to be.

A group of men can learn to open their hearts and encourage one another in finding answers to their core life questions. This is **OAKS of RIGHTEOUSNESS**. Will you join us!

7. Study Isaiah 61: 1–3. How will lives be changed if the Spirit of the sovereign Lord is *on me*?

8. Do you see the benefits in taking this OAKS journey? What will you gain when you know your true heart? Are you ready to move ahead in your journey with a band of brothers?

Reflections: What are my takeaways from these beginning pages?