

Chapter 3

Who Are You Without Your Résumé?

One of the first questions we ask when meeting someone is, “What do you do?” It is usually an innocent question with a practical purpose. Knowing someone’s occupation gives us an easy starting point for conversation and tells us something about how they spend a significant portion of their life. For many men, however, the answer can become more important than we realize. Somewhere along the way, what we do for a living can begin to shape how we understand ourselves.

Work matters, and Scripture does not treat it as an unfortunate interruption between weekends. There is dignity in developing skills, solving problems, providing for a family, building something worthwhile, and becoming someone others can depend on. A man should be able to look at good work and take appropriate satisfaction in having done it well.

The difficulty arises when work assumes responsibilities it was never meant to carry. A career can provide income, opportunity, influence, relationships, and a sense of accomplishment, but it cannot safely bear the weight of our identity. When it does, changes in our work no longer feel merely professional. They begin to feel personal.

For decades, that vulnerability can remain hidden because a successful career continually reinforces the identity we have built around it. People call because they need our experience. Decisions require our approval. Our calendar tells us where we are supposed to be, our title signals our responsibility to others, and our paycheck provides tangible evidence that our contribution is valued. Even the pressure of being needed can feel strangely reassuring.

Then something changes. Retirement approaches, a company restructures, ownership changes, someone younger assumes greater responsibility, or health forces an adjustment. Sometimes we reach a season when the professional climb no longer seems as important as it once did. The phone rings less often, decisions are made without our input, and responsibilities we once considered essential are reassigned to others.

At that point, a question that once sounded like casual conversation becomes more complex: Who am I when what I do is no longer my primary means of defining myself?

That is not merely a retirement question. It is an identity question, and we need to answer it before we can seriously talk about stewarding the years that remain. In the last chapter, we considered how to stop letting the past define us. Here, we need to ask whether we have asked our accomplishments to do what they cannot do.

The Résumé Nobody Sees

Most of us have had an official résumé at some point. It lists employment history, education, skills, responsibilities, and accomplishments that others might use to evaluate us. Its purpose is to present evidence that we can add value.

The more interesting résumé is the one we keep private. It may include our income, job title, professional reputation, possessions, or the size of the organization we built. It may also include less obvious measures of worth. Some men build their identities around being problem-solvers. Others need to be the provider, the strong one, the dependable one, or the person who always knows what to do. These descriptions can reflect admirable character, but they can also become ways to reassure ourselves that we matter.

Being needed feels good. So does being respected. There is satisfaction in knowing our experience has value and that people trust our judgment. The danger arises when we become dependent on those things to answer questions they cannot permanently answer. Delegation can start to feel threatening. Someone else's success may create unease we do not immediately understand. Being overlooked can make us angrier than the situation warrants, and correction can feel less like disagreement over a decision and more like an attack on our identity.

None of those reactions automatically means we have built our identity around work. Losing a job can create real financial pressure, and leaving a workplace can mean losing daily contact with the people we love. Those losses deserve honest attention. Grief over a meaningful season does not, by itself, reveal misplaced faith. Still, our reactions are worth noticing. Sometimes they show us that we were asking a position for more than income, companionship, or worthwhile work. We were asking it to tell us who we were.

Paul Had a Résumé Too

In the previous chapter, we met Paul as a man who could move forward without pretending his past had never happened. Philippians 3 also helps us understand why the accomplishments he once prized no longer defined him.

Before following Jesus, Paul had built a religious résumé that commanded respect among the people whose opinions mattered to him. He describes his heritage, his relationship to the law, his religious affiliation, and his zeal. He had distinguished himself in that world. Yet he came to regard the very things he once relied on in an entirely different light:

“But whatever things were gain to me, these things I have counted as loss because of Christ.”

— Philippians 3:7 (NASB 2020)

Paul's point goes much deeper than deciding that career success is overrated. In the verses that follow, he places knowing Christ above all else and rejects his own righteousness in favor of the righteousness that comes from God through faith (Philippians 3:8–9). His credentials could not give him what he needed most, nor could they make him right with God.

That does not mean every skill Paul had developed became useless. Learning and experience could still serve the work God gave him. But we should not confuse the usefulness of an ability with the confidence Paul once placed in his religious standing. Nor should we treat everything from his past as a strength to be repurposed; his zeal included persecuting the church. Some things needed to be confessed and forsaken, not added to a better résumé.

Knowing Christ changed the value of everything else. Paul no longer needed his credentials to establish his standing before God, a standing only Christ could grant him. That distinction brings us to the foundation of this chapter.

Identity Before Assignment

We are going to spend a great deal of time considering what God has entrusted to us and what He may still be calling us to do. Before we can do that well, we need to understand that our assignment cannot safely become our identity. Paul makes the order of grace and good works explicit in Ephesians:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”
— Ephesians 2:8–10 (NASB 2020)

The good works matter. Paul says we were created in Christ Jesus for them. Yet those works follow grace; they do not purchase it. We do not perform our way into an identity God will finally approve. We receive salvation through Christ and then live faithfully in response to what He has already done for us.

This order protects us from turning the entire idea of REMAINING into another performance system. A man could read a book on stewardship, create a detailed Remaining Years Plan, become more intentional in his marriage, improve his finances, mentor five younger men, exercise every morning, and volunteer at church, yet still misunderstand the gospel if he believes those accomplishments make him acceptable to God.

Grace comes first. Faithfulness follows. The difference is enormous, especially as our capacity shifts. A season of illness, exhaustion, or dependence on others does not diminish the sufficiency of Christ's work. A man who needs care is no less valuable than the man who can provide it. Our plans

must leave room for that truth, because none of us knows how much strength or independence the years ahead will hold.

The Quiet Need to Prove Ourselves

One of the questions worth asking in the second half of life is whether we are still trying to prove something to someone. For some men, the answer has a name. It may be a father whose approval always seemed just out of reach, even though that father has been gone for years. It may be a former boss, a sibling, or someone who once dismissed our potential. We may have spent decades accomplishing things, in part, in response to an audience that no longer watches.

For others, there is no specific person. Achievement itself became a way to demonstrate value. One accomplishment brought satisfaction for a while, but eventually another was needed. The promotion felt significant until the next position came into view. An income goal was reached and quietly replaced by a larger one. The house or vehicle that once represented success eventually became ordinary, and another marker took its place. This is one of the problems with building identity around achievement: the finish line keeps moving.

The need to prove ourselves can hide beneath good motives. A man may sincerely want to provide for his family, pursue excellence, serve customers, or build a strong organization. At the same time, he may rely on those accomplishments to quiet an older fear of inadequacy or unimportance. Recognizing that mixture does not require us to dismiss everything we have done. It gives us something honest to bring before the Lord.

We can thank Him for meaningful work while acknowledging that we have sometimes demanded more from it than it can deliver. We can find encouragement in others without making their approval the foundation of our lives. Learning to live that way may take time. The return of an old insecurity does not make the gospel's truth any less reliable; it offers us another opportunity to trust it.

Every Title Has an Expiration Date

Sooner or later, every professional title ends. Sometimes the transition is celebrated with a retirement dinner, photographs, and kind words about years of service. Sometimes it happens because of a decision we did not make. However it comes, a change in responsibility can reveal how closely we have tied our identity to the position.

There is humility in recognizing that the world can continue without our supervision. There can also be freedom in that recognition. Experience accumulated over a career may become especially

valuable when we intentionally invest it in others. The man who no longer needs the next promotion may finally be free to help someone else earn it.

An assignment concerns what we are called to do in a particular season. Our identity in Christ answers the deeper question of whose we are. A man may lead an organization for twenty years and later mentor the person who takes the helm. He may spend decades providing financially for his children, only to discover that his adult children need wisdom, encouragement, and presence more than financial support. He may move from being the person with answers to being the one who asks good questions and helps someone younger develop his own judgment.

Those changes need not be demotions. They may offer new ways to be faithful. Yet we need not find an impressive replacement assignment before we accept the end of the previous one. There may be a period of uncertainty, grief, rest, or learning to accept help. We belong to Christ in those seasons as well.

The Towel and the Title

John 13 presents a striking picture of authority expressed through service. On the evening before the crucifixion, Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands, that He had come from God, and that He was returning to God. He rose from the table, laid aside His outer garments, took a towel, poured water into a basin, and began washing the disciples' feet (John 13:1–5).

The person in the room with unquestionable authority performed the work of a servant. Afterward, Jesus affirmed that He was their Teacher and Lord and told them to follow His example by serving one another (John 13:12–17). Taking up the towel did not diminish His identity. Instead, it showed His disciples how their Lord called them to live.

This helps us understand our governing order.

Jesus > Others > Self

When self occupies the first position, status becomes something we need to protect. We become concerned about whether a task is appropriate for our level, whether our contribution is recognized, or whether someone else is receiving credit we believe belongs to us. When Jesus occupies the first position, we can ask a different question: How can what God has entrusted to me serve someone else?

Leadership then becomes less about being recognized as the person in charge and more about developing people. Experience becomes less about demonstrating what we know and more about helping others grow. Influence becomes something we use for another person's good rather than something we have to defend. The towel becomes more important than the title.

This does not mean leadership, authority, or organizational structure is wrong. Jesus exercised authority throughout His ministry. The lesson is that authority is to be used in service, and following Him sometimes means doing work that brings no recognition. Love for Jesus gives us a reason to serve that does not depend on whether anyone notices.

From Proving to Becoming

Imagine reaching a point when the professional résumé no longer matters much. The titles are gone, the awards are in a box somewhere, and someone else occupies the office. What would still matter?

The answer is not that nothing in your career matters. Good work can have lasting consequences. Businesses provide livelihoods. Teachers influence generations. Physicians care for people in vulnerable moments. Salespeople help customers solve problems. Leaders shape cultures, and craftsmen create things that outlast them. Work matters because people matter and because faithful work can serve them.

But the things that remain most significant may not be the accomplishments that took up the most space on our résumés. How we treated people will matter. The character we demonstrated when no one was watching will matter. The people who saw something of Christ in how we handled success, failure, conflict, money, and disappointment will matter. That realization does not require us to regret working hard. It invites us to consider who we are becoming as we work.

A man can become more professionally accomplished while growing less patient. He can become wealthier while growing less generous. He can become more influential while growing less teachable. He can gain greater public respect while growing increasingly distant from the people who know him privately. These are terrible trade-offs.

The character of Jesus offers us a different measure. Are we learning to listen before defending ourselves? Are we becoming quicker to forgive and more willing to admit when we are wrong? Are we loving the people closest to us more sacrificially and using our influence to help others grow? These questions concern the life that flows from belonging to Christ. They are not a second set of credentials by which we earn that relationship.

Nor is this change something we manufacture. Paul describes believers as “being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18, NASB 2020). The patience, kindness, and self-control we hope to cultivate are what he elsewhere calls the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). We cooperate with that work through obedience, repentance, and the ordinary practices of the Christian life. Its source is God’s Spirit at work in us, which gives us reason for hope when our own resolve runs thin.

Paul wrote:

“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” — Colossians 3:3 (NASB 2020)

There is tremendous security in those words. For the believer, the deepest truth about his life cannot be altered by an organizational chart. In the same chapter, Paul calls believers to compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, and love (Colossians 3:12–14). Security in Christ provides a foundation for growth, not a reason to stop growing.

To belong to Christ is more than adopting a new label. We are joined to the One who died and rose for us, and our life rests in Him. That is why our standing is secure in Him and why growth means learning to live from what He has already given us (Romans 6:4–11).

When my identity does not hinge on being the smartest in the room, I can admit that someone else knows more. When another person’s success does not threaten my standing, I can celebrate it. When I no longer need all the credit, I can share it freely. And when I fail, I can acknowledge what happened, accept correction, and learn without treating failure as the final verdict on my life.

A Different Kind of Ambition

I do not want anything in this chapter to suggest that ambition is inherently wrong. There is a false humility that makes Christians suspicious of excellence, leadership, or achievement. Scripture does not require us to be passive, mediocre, or uninterested in doing difficult things well. The issue is what our accomplishments are for and what they are doing to us.

A man can build a business that employs people, serves customers, and provides resources that can be used generously. He can seek greater responsibility because he believes he can serve people well through leadership. There is nothing inherently self-centered about wanting to accomplish something meaningful. The danger arises when accomplishment becomes necessary to our identity. Success then becomes something we need from the world to reassure us that we matter.

Philippians 2:3–8 calls us away from selfish ambition and toward Christ’s humility. The One who existed in the form of God took the form of a servant and humbled Himself in obedience to the point of death on a cross. His self-giving love reshapes our understanding of significance and how we use the responsibility we have received.

Becoming more like Jesus may make a man increasingly ambitious about things the world rarely measures. He may become ambitious to love his wife well, to encourage a friend, to help a younger man succeed, to be generous, to know Scripture, to serve quietly, or to finish his career with integrity. Those ambitions may never earn applause, yet they may still be among the most significant pursuits he ever makes.

This is where Jesus > Others > Self becomes more than a phrase. It gives us a way to examine our ambitions. Does what I am pursuing honor Jesus? How will it serve the people affected by my decisions? Am I willing for someone else to receive recognition if God receives the glory and people are helped? These questions deserve honest answers, especially when the work itself looks admirable.

The Identity Audit

Before we take inventory of what God has entrusted to us, we need to consider the steward. Otherwise, marriage, health, finances, relationships, and even service can become new categories in which we try to prove ourselves. The Remaining Years Plan is not meant to become another résumé. It is meant to help us grow increasingly faithful with what God has already placed in our hands.

Take time to consider the following questions. You can jot brief notes in a notebook before writing the statement at the end of this chapter. Be honest about your current struggles without assuming they cancel out what God has said.

What have I allowed to define me? Consider your profession, income, authority, education, reputation, or problem-solving ability. Which would be hardest to lose, and why? Distinguish the practical consequences of losing it from what you fear it would say about you as a person.

Whose approval am I still chasing? Is there someone you have spent years trying to impress, to prove wrong, or to finally satisfy? What decisions might change if that person's opinion no longer held so much weight?

What happens when I am overlooked? Think of a recent time when your advice was ignored or someone else received recognition. What did your response reveal? There may have been a legitimate concern to address, but was there also a need to be seen as indispensable?

Where do I see Jesus changing me? Perhaps you are learning to listen, becoming more generous, or apologizing sooner. Name a real example, however small. Then identify an area where you still need His help. Gratitude for growth and honesty about weakness can both be part of the same answer.

These questions are intended to help you recognize what has been directing your life. You do not need to resolve every struggle before moving forward. You do need a foundation more dependable than your most recent success or disappointment.

One Thing

Find a quiet place and write one paragraph in response to this question: **Who am I if everything on my résumé disappears?** This paragraph will become your My Identity Statement for your Remaining Years Plan. You are writing one statement, not completing two separate assignments.

Begin with Jesus and what it means to belong to Him. Ephesians 2:8–10 and Colossians 3:3 provide a foundation that does not depend on how productive or confident you feel today. Then describe how you want to live in response to His grace. Distinguish what Christ has done for you from the growth you are asking Him to produce in you.

You might write something like this:

I belong to Jesus Christ by His grace, not by my accomplishments. My work, abilities, and experience are gifts to be used faithfully, not the basis for my acceptance before God. I want my love for Jesus to shape how I care for people and how I use what He has entrusted to me. I am still learning to listen without defending myself and to serve without seeking recognition. As my responsibilities and strength change, I want to continue trusting Him and responding faithfully to what He entrusts to me.

Use your own words to identify the area of growth that is true in your life. You do not need to sound impressive. If you are unsure whether you have trusted Christ, begin there honestly. Writing a statement cannot create the relationship it describes. Return to the summary of the gospel in the Introduction: Christ died for our sins and was raised, and He calls us to repent and believe. You can turn to Him today in your own words. Then talk with a pastor or a mature Christian who can help you understand what you have done and take your next steps.

Your Remaining Years Plan

My Identity Statement

In Chapter 1, you began My Time Horizon. In Chapter 2, you considered What I’m Leaving Behind and What I’m Carrying Forward. This chapter introduces My Identity Statement, the foundation you can return to as the decisions ahead become more practical.

Write your paragraph below or keep it with the other parts of your plan. If you have already written it in a notebook, you do not need to rewrite it. Include what you are trusting Christ for and how you intend to respond to His grace. Avoid turning your statement into a promise of flawless performance.

My Identity Statement:

The Scripture passage I will return to when I need this reminder:

One situation in which I want this truth to shape my response:

This might be an upcoming conversation, a change in responsibility, or an opportunity to let someone else receive credit. It can connect to an action you have already chosen in a previous chapter. You do not need to create a new project.

My plan review date: _____

Use the same review date you selected earlier. When you return to your plan, consider where you have been tempted to prove your worth and how the truth of belonging to Christ has helped you respond. You may refine the wording as your understanding grows, but the foundation is not your progress. It is His grace.

From Identity to Stewardship

We are ready for an important turn in this book. The first three chapters have examined the time before us, the history behind us, and the identity from which we move forward. Now we need to look at what God has placed around us and entrusted to our care.

If our time is limited, if our past need not control our future, and if our identity is secure in Christ rather than in our accomplishments, we can ask a new question with honesty and hope: What has God placed in our hands?

That question extends beyond career and money. It encompasses relationships, abilities, physical capacity, opportunities, experience, wisdom, influence, and the privilege of knowing and following Jesus Christ. Some of these have received careful attention, while others have been neglected, and some we may never have considered as stewardship.

We can take inventory without proving our worth. We belong to Jesus before we accomplish anything for Him. That puts the work ahead in its proper order and frees us to examine what has been entrusted to us with gratitude, humility, and a willingness to grow.

In the next chapter, we will begin the inventory.