

# “A New Identity”

Allan Pole on Sunday morning, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023



Theme: Our skills with the Bible, finances and people can make or break our effectiveness.

Texts: 2 Timothy 2:15, Luke 16:10-13, Mark 12:28-31

Here's a thought: Billy Graham concluded, "God is more interested in your future and your relationships than you are."

I have much room for improvement in using a hammer and a wrench. I took wood shop and mechanics in high school. I remember sitting in grade 10 typing class, looking around the room, and realizing they were all girls! Some guys would relish such a scenario, but I decided to be a man and switch to mechanics. I enjoyed the classes, even though I almost drove our wood shop teacher, Mr. Biletski, to drink. I reached the pinnacle of my carpentry career when I made a cool cassette case in the wood shop.



I have watched followers of Jesus whose lives are in order and whose ministries are fruitful. I have also watched followers of Jesus whose lives are in chaos and whose ministries struggle. There are several reasons for the differences, but one significant difference is that some have settled in with their incompetence in crucial areas. They wear this identity like a name tag on their chest. Others have decided to grow in these skills.

It is easy to conclude:

- “I don’t know the Bible very well. Ask the pastor.”
- “I am not good with money. I don’t think I will ever get ahead.”
- “I am not good with people, but I can get things done. Talk to her – she understands people.”

When we settle for these labels, we settle for excuses, and we slow or even shut down the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

It is time to wear a new identity:

## **I Am Biblically Literate**



Researcher George Barna warns (“The Scourge of Biblical Illiteracy” at <http://issuesinperspective.com/2016/02/the-scourge-of-biblical-illiteracy/>):

The Christian body in America is immersed in a crisis of biblical illiteracy. How else can you describe matters when most churchgoing adults reject the accuracy of the Bible, reject the existence of Satan, claim that Jesus sinned, see no need to evangelize, believe that good works are one of the keys to persuading God to forgive their sins, and describe their commitment to Christianity as moderate or even less firm?

Recent research revealed some disturbing facts about many Christians today. Many are confused. For example, “When Christian adults were asked to identify their most important goal for their life, not a single person said it was to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ or to make disciples of Christ.” Why do so many Christians have wrong ideas? There is a shocking lack of knowledge about the Bible. The research revealed that the most widely known “Bible verse” among both adult and teen Christians is “God helps those who help themselves.” Unfortunately, this is not in the Bible and actually conflicts with the basic message of Scripture (from “Perfect Promises” at <https://inspiration.org/daily-devotional/perfect-promises>).

Here are a couple of questions to ponder:

Who was the greatest financier in the Bible? Noah. He was floating his stock while everyone else was in liquidation.

Who was the greatest female financier in the Bible? Pharaoh’s daughter. She went down to the bank of the Nile and drew out a little prophet.

One day I was sitting in our grade 12 biology class, and we had our token half-class on Creation amid a long series on Evolution (which is a half-class more than what is taught in most public high schools today). Some of my classmates turned to me and said, “Hey, Al, you go to church. What does the Bible say about Creation?” I had to admit that I knew very little because I had not been paying close attention in church meetings or reading my Bible. I decided then and there to do something about my Biblical ignorance.

While awaiting probable execution in Rome, Paul did what he could to prepare his young protégé, Timothy, for leadership. With this in mind, Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15:

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.  
NIV

Timothy needed to be skilled in handling the Word of God to be effective as a follower of Christ and a leader. He would need to apply himself consistently in feeding upon and studying the Scriptures.

Will you settle for being Biblically illiterate, or will you decide to become a workman who does not need to be ashamed and correctly handles the word of truth?

It is time to wear a new identity:  
I Am Biblically Literate

**I Am Financially Literate**



Canada is the world’s 6<sup>th</sup> most indebted jurisdiction, owing around 3½ times GDP [Gross Domestic Product], and having increased total indebtedness by more than any other jurisdiction during the COVID-19 pandemic (“Canada’s unexploded debt bomb continues to tick” at <https://bcbc.com/reports-and-research/canadas-unexploded-debt-bomb-continues-to-tick>). Statistics Canada says Canadians owe \$1.83 in consumer debt for every dollar of income they have (“Debt-to-disposable-income ratio eases down from record 185%” at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/statscan-household-debt-1.6486665>). More than half (53%) of Canadians say they are \$200 or less from not being able to meet all of their bills and debt obligations each month. This includes three in 10 (30%) who report they are already insolvent with no money left at month-end to cover all their payments (<https://mnpdebt.ca/en/resources/mnp-debt-blog/more-than-half-53->

[percent-of-canadians-within-200-dollars-of-financial-insolvency](#)).

For some individuals and families, a funeral, house fire, wedding, unplanned pregnancy, or severe health complications would devastate them.

Many people have no budget or financial plan and cannot manage a credit card. They take on financial risks without realizing it. They have no retirement plan. Compound interest confuses them. Choosing a suitable investment is more stressful than going to the dentist, so they decide to live with little or no thought about the future.

Most people do not seek out financial information. For those who do, it's a website they came across or a pamphlet they picked up at the bank or received with their junk mail.

Jesus spoke often and seriously about money. One such instance is in Luke 16:10-13:

10 Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.  
11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? 13 No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. NIV

The Lord would never let His followers simply say, "Oh, it's just money." On the contrary, He watches how we handle money in weighing whether or not He can trust us with *true* riches. He knows that our attitude toward money impacts our relationship with Him.

Is your financial house in order? What if the Lord asked you to give a significant sum away today – are you free to share, or are you a prisoner to debt?

It is time to wear a new identity:

I Am Biblically Literate

I Am Financially Literate

**I Am Relationally Literate**



I would be a perfect pastor if it were not for people. ☺

We cannot overstate the value of people skills in the workplace. Zig Ziglar wrote in “Top Performance: How to Develop Excellence in Yourself and Others”:

According to Cavett Robert, “fifteen percent of the reason [people] get a job, keep that job and move ahead in that job, is determined by [their] technical skill and knowledge regardless of their profession.” What about the other 85 percent? Robert quotes Stanford Research Institute, Harvard University, and the Carnegie Foundation as having proved that 85 percent of the reason people get a job, keep that job, and move ahead in that job has to do with [their] people skills and people knowledge.”

From [www.bible-sermons.org/](http://www.bible-sermons.org/):

In the first century there were two types of rabbis. There were the typical rabbis who could only teach traditionally accepted teaching. They had memorized the Torah, the first five books of the Bible.

There were also those rabbis who had s'mikah, or in our translation, “authority.” These teachers could add new teaching. They had to know the entire Tenach (Old Testament) by memory. It is so rare that in 100 years there were only 12. When they taught, most people were quite intimidated because, after all, the teacher with s'mikah knew the text he was teaching from word for word. He knew the cross-references word for word. We have the handicap of the various translations and versions, but they had it memorized in the original Hebrew, which many Jews could not even speak.

You can know the Bible from cover to cover and handle finances wisely, but the benefits will be limited if you do not know how to relate to God and people. Jesus often ruffled the feathers of the “men of the book,” but one of them seemed to understand in Mark 12:28-31:

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” 29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” NIV

The religious leaders during Jesus' time had 613 laws that served as a commentary on the Law of Moses. Much of the Law of Moses was a commentary on the Ten Commandments. We can divide the Ten Commandments into those that speak to our relationship with God and others. As a teacher with s'mikah or authority, Jesus took all of the commentaries and distilled them into two overarching principles: love God and love others. God

is love, and He invites us to become lovers as well – not in words only but in practical, tangible ways. The one who loves is the one who fulfills the law.

The importance of proper relationships is so central in Scripture that righteousness is not only a legal status but a relational concept since it refers to good, just, and loving associations with God and others. Righteousness is “right relationships” because it means relating rightly to God and others.

Have you concluded that you are “just not good with people,” or have you decided to really and personally get to know God and the people around you so you can love them?

Billy Graham concluded, “God is more interested in your future and your relationships than you are.”

A young man named David lived about a thousand years before Christ. He served his father faithfully by tending to the family’s sheep in the pastures around Bethlehem. While doing this, however, he sharpened his skills as a musician and warrior. He fine-tuned his skills with a slingshot and hand-to-hand combat, killing a lion and a bear who tried to eat his sheep. He also spent countless hours singing and playing the harp in praise to God.

David could have decided not to grow, settling into the comfortable role of shepherd. Instead, he prepared himself diligently so that when the time came, God could use him at strategic times. He went on to slay the giant Goliath, lead the nation to a military victory over the Philistines, sing to King Saul when an evil spirit tormented him, lead a nation, establish an anointed music and worship ministry and prepare for the construction of the temple.

Will you settle for the identity you have assumed, or will you prepare yourself by developing the skills needed for God to use you?

So many people and resources could help us become skilled in these areas. If you need some help finding them, just ask me.

Fortunately, I know some excellent carpenters and mechanics. However, I cannot hire someone to study God’s Word, manage my day-to-day saving, spending and giving, or establish and feed my relationships for me. We cannot afford to ignore or delegate these areas to others.

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