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Reviewing *Identity in Action: Christian Excellence in All of Life*

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Identity in Action: Christian Excellence in All of Life. By Perry L. Glanzer. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2021. 223 pp. ISBN 13: 978-1-68426-141-3 (PAPERBACK) \$17

In an age where much is being made about the term “identity” and its varying implications, it is high time that a biblical statement be offered. That is exactly what the author of this work does. In *Identity in Action: Christian Excellence in All of Life*, Perry Glanzer provides a work that is not only theoretical but highly practical. This holistic approach attempts to encompass every aspect of college students’ lives as it relates to their living what Glanzer calls the “excellent” life. In contradistinction to the multitudes of images and words that bombard students today, this work is a welcome respite. The thesis is succinct yet profound: “God calls us to excellence in all our identities” (p. 20). Hence, the guiding principle of “identity excellence” (p. 20) is coined and used throughout the book to act as a goal for both college students and professors. For students, the book might act as a practical guide for finding their identity in living the excellent life. For professors, it might be used as a tool to stimulate their students towards such an existence.

The aforementioned identity excellence is to be sought by tapping into one’s inherent motivations, which are tied to and derive their impetus from specific core identities that all Christians possess. First and foremost, identity for a follower of Jesus is founded and identified in Christ and him alone. He is seen as the truest and finest example of one who understood and lived the excellent life. He was, is, and forever will be that life (p. 37). Thus, the book makes presuppositions that apply uniquely to Christian students and professors. The identities presupposed are discussed in the first three chapters, which comprise Part I, titled “The Primary Identities God Gives Us”:

Identity #1 = Being made in God’s image.

Identity #2 = Being a brother or sister in Christ.

Identity #3 = Being a member of Christ's body.

A healthy, scripturally based treatment is given for each of the above identities. The book does not come across as stuffy, religious, preachy, or out of touch with current students' realities. Quotations from modern and post-modern singing groups and media personalities are interspersed with regular quotations from C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton, all synthetically intertwined to support the biblical foundation from which the author's thesis and substantiating points are derived.

In Part II, titled "Specific Forms of Identity Excellence," Glanzer provides examples of identity excellence in 10 separate areas where students are challenged to live out their true, God-given identity with excellence. The author calls these areas where a student should strive for excellence as "forms."

The first two forms are a good place to start. Form #1 (chapter 4) is "Being an Excellent Neighbor" (p. 67). To live excellently within the context of this form, the student is encouraged to live with a roommate—an international student or someone on their floor with whom they might have had conflict—and practice redemptive forgiveness (p. 74). Form #2 (chapter 5) is "Being Excellent in Your Work" (p. 79). To live excellently within the context of this form, the student is encouraged to set academic goals and find a mentor (p. 85).

The next two forms might seem to be opposites. Form #3 (chapter 6) is "Being an Excellent Friend" (p. 89). To live excellently within the context of this form, the student is encouraged to make a commitment towards being a quality friend—one who practices "redemptive and restorative friendship" (pp. 98-100). Form #4 (chapter 7) is "Being an Excellent Enemy" (p. 103). To live excellently within the context of this form, Glanzer encourages students to respond to their enemies in an uncommon fashion. The author wisely states that what sets "... Christians apart is not their lack of enemies but, instead, how they respond to their enemies" (p. 105). Glanzer then offers practical steps towards achieving forgiveness and Christ-like love.

The next two chapters and forms deal with relationships between men and women. Form #5 (chapter 8) is titled "Why You Won't Find

Ladies and Gentlemen in College” (p. 115). In this chapter, students are encouraged to live with excellence by looking to the Bible’s standard for ladies and gentlemen rather than conforming to the standards set by contemporary culture. The author elucidates this by stating that “... God also made men and women to bear the image of God in unique ways” (p. 117). Form #6 (chapter 9) is “Being an Excellent Romantic, Friend, and Lover” (p. 129). To live excellently within the context of this form, Glanzer encourages students to press into agape love and faithfulness. A powerful and guiding statement is given to encourage each gender in their pursuit of excellence in regards to this form, especially as it relates to sex and agape love:

Agape love means different things for the genders with regards to sex. For men, one of the highest forms of love is to control perhaps the strongest male desire for the sake of one’s wife and also for one’s potential offspring For women, learning to practice agape love involves forsaking one’s desire to be momentarily wanted and desired by a man—doing this for the sake of one’s own self, the man and one’s future children as well. (pp. 138–136)

The next three forms discuss the topic of stewardship. Form #7 (chapter 10), “God’s Steward” explains how to live excellently by challenging students to eat, sleep, work out, and generally live healthy lives as an excellent service to their identity. A memorable statement to that effect is that it is possible to “... turn evil days into good days—days filled with fulfilling God’s purposes” (p. 152). Form #8 (chapter 11), “Stewarding God’s Gifts,” promotes responsibility within the context of one’s belongings. Students are encouraged to treat—faithfully and responsibly—the finances and possessions that God has given them. The third form on stewardship is form #9 (chapter 12): “An Excellent Steward of Your Skin Tone and Its Culture” (p. 171). To live excellently within the context of this form, the student is encouraged to “... interpret our lives’ experiences regarding race and ethnicity through the lens of God’s story in order to discover the virtues, practices, mentors, and models who can help us live out God’s vision for ultimate racial redemption” (p. 172).

Lastly, form #10 (chapter 12) is titled “What We Will Die and Compromise Ourselves for?” (p. 185). To live excellently within this form, the student is encouraged to see that regardless of one’s citizenship on this planet, his or her ultimate citizenship is in Heaven.

The conclusion, titled “Identity Prioritization” (p. 199), offers a challenge to review these forms and—within the context of a Christ-centered existence—work out a plan to live excellently in all of them. While it might be a daunting task, the author provides ample fodder to accomplish it, leaving his readers with this final encouragement: “From reading this book, I want you to begin to understand what it means to be excellent in every area of your life. Then I want you to think about how to go about redeeming these different identities as best you can” (p. 202).

REFERENCES

Glanzer, P. L. (2021). *Identity in action: Christian excellence in all of life*. Abilene Christian University Press.

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