



Rooted

Cody Williams - 02/08/2026

Good morning, my name is Cody Williams. I am the Youth Director here at The Downtown Church, and I get to hang out with all these amazing young people on a weekly basis. I am so thankful to be a part of a church that pours so much into our youth and children.

This morning we are bringing together two powerful questions and one powerful image. The two questions are: Who am I? Who am I to God?

Are they the same answer, or do they differ for you and why?

The image is a tree—but not the part of a tree we see every day - so Not the trunk, the branches or its leaves—but the part hidden below the surface—roots reaching deep into the soil and stretching even wider than the branches above.

WHO AM I?

The truth is, this is a very real question that several people struggle with: Am I what people say about me? Am I my mistakes? My successes? My reputation? My social media image? My past?

Or am I something deeper?

The scripture for today provides us with an image that helps our understanding of this: a tree—whose life depends not on what you see above ground, but what exists beneath the surface.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 says,

Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord... They will be like a tree who is planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. They do not fear when heat comes; Their leaves are always green. They have no worries in a season of drought and they never fail to bear fruit.

Notice something important. The promise is not that heat won't come. Not that drought won't happen. Not that storms won't hit. The promise is that roots make survival possible.

And this connects directly to the question: Who am I ... Who am I when seasons change?

I tend to believe that trees understand seasons better than we do. They don't panic when winter comes. They don't cling to leaves in fall. They don't rush spring growth. They simply remain rooted.

Just as the seasons we experience throughout a year - we also experience seasons just alike throughout life: There are spring seasons—new beginnings, renewed faith, new opportunities. There are summer seasons—we are feeling strong, confident, fruitful. There are fall seasons—change, transition, a season of letting go. And winter seasons—a time of loss, grief, confusion, silence, feeling dormant.

The thing is: A tree in the winter, even though not full of life and looking dead is still very much alive. And God often is doing His deepest work in seasons that feel the hardest.

Who am I?

I'd go out on a limb here (see what I did there) and say many answer that question based on circumstances or opinions. If life is going well, we feel

successful, happy and full. If life is hard, we feel empty, questioning if we are failures, thinking we must be doing something wrong?

Just as a tree is weakened if its roots are shallow, identity tied to circumstances is unstable. Unfortunately, society often builds identity on perception instead of foundation.

I am a fan of the show *Parks and Recreation*, also someone who enjoys Disney's Epcot ride *Guardians of the Galaxy* (even more after watching the movies), and I sure hoped *Jurassic World* could live up to that unforgettable original *Jurassic Park*. I remember when Chris Pratt earned the MTV Generation Award in 2018 for the roles he played in these films and tv show—an honor marking a major milestone in his career.

But what people that watched remember most from that night wasn't just the award. It was his acceptance speech. Chris Pratt shared what he referred to as "The 9 Rules of Chris Pratt - Generation Award Winner."

The speech was funny at times, including some bathroom etiquette humor that is better suited for a youth audience than a Sunday morning church service, however, other parts struck a deeper chord—lessons that truly resonated with people.

These "rules" were not just him giving advice and trying to make people laugh. He was speaking about our identity and what we are rooted in.

I am going to be sharing several of these "rules" this morning. Not specifically in the order he provided them in the speech but directly quoted from his speech.

Rule #1:

God is real. God loves you. God wants the best for you.

That's not just motivational talk—It's foundational truth. Before moving forward, I want you to hear this once more: God is real, and God does love you, and He loves you completely. And your identity starts there.

Not with success. Not with popularity. Not with perception. It starts with God and His Love!

Growing up in the '90s and early 2000s, Friday nights meant one thing: TGIF on ABC. If you are unaware of what this was, the TV network ABC had a family-friendly lineup of shows such as *Full House*, *Family Matters*, *Step By Step*, and others through the years that aired during a specific programming block titled *TGIF* (Thank Goodness It's Funny) on Friday evenings.

My favorite show—and honestly, one that still holds up today—was *Boy Meets World*. The series follows three friends from middle school through high school and even into their college years. And somehow, their teacher, Mr. Feeny, keeps showing up at every stage of life, continuing to guide them and offer wisdom.

And that's what made the show special. Mr. Feeny wasn't just teaching lessons to the characters on screen—he was teaching life lessons to all of us watching at home, too. We are going to watch a clip of Mr. Feeny sharing a life lesson with the main character Cory.

We see in this clip—Mr. Feeny shares a very insightful lesson about perception with Cory: that when you build your identity on what others think of you, you limit your growth. But when you stop living for approval, you begin becoming who you're truly meant to be.

And that lesson hits even harder through our journey as Christ followers: Because people see different versions of you whether you like it or not. Some only remember your worst day. Some only see your strengths. Some misunderstand you. Some are quick to jump to judge. Through life, people's perception of you will change. But the foundation you have built, the roots you have grown will not.

1 Samuel 16:7 says:

People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

People see leaves. But... God sees your roots.

Think about how many times in your life you have heard someone say, "Oh the fall leaves are just beautiful." Leaves are what everyone sees. Your job.Your achievements.Your failures.Your personality.Your reputation.

But *roots* determine survival. Roots anchor.Roots nourish.Roots sustain life. And being rooted in Christ means that our worth doesn't rise and fall with opinions.Our identity isn't shaken by criticism.Our value isn't erased by mistakes. Because our lives are anchored in something deeper.

Rule #2 of Chris Pratt's speech:

Don't be a turd. If you're strong, be a protector. And if you're smart, be a humble influencer. Strength and intelligence can be weapons and do not wield them against the weak. That makes you a bully. Be bigger than that!

As Christians, we are often labeled by how we use our gifts—for good or even for harm. Our actions shape perception. "If you're strong, be a protector. If you're smart, be a humble influencer." That's fruit growing from healthy roots. He also said: "Don't be a turd." Yes, I smirk because he said turd—but in all seriousness, it speaks to integrity and kindness. Again, healthy roots produce good fruit.

Trees in a forest often grow their roots together and are intertwined so they are all strengthened by each other. We need community and should be building each other up rather than tearing each other down.

Jesus showed love to everyone—why do we get to make exceptions? WE DON'T!

Growing our roots deeper and together we gain an understanding that God's love is for ALL! We have been shown how Jesus loved and should be extending that love to everyone!

Rule #3

Nobody is perfect. People are going to tell you, 'You're perfect just the way you are.' You're Not! You are imperfect. You always will be. But, there is a powerful force that designed you that way. And if you're willing to accept that, you will have grace. And Grace is a gift.

Simply put "Nobody is perfect... grace is a gift." God gives us grace! And this is crucial. We are loved while imperfect! God loves you for you and has freely given us grace because we are not perfect.

And Grace means: You are not defined by your worst day. You are not trapped by your past. You are loved while still growing. Trees lose leaves every year. But the tree is still alive. Loss is not the end. Failure is not the end. A "Winter" season is not the end. Growth continues underground, God is always working in our lives strengthening our foundation.

Who are you? What defines you?

To others, you might be: A success. A disappointment. Strong. Weak. Popular. Forgotten.

But to God, you are: Created intentionally—His masterpiece. His child. Loved completely. Forgiven fully. Called with purpose. And when we understand who we are to God, we stop chasing approval and start living from identity, and our identity in God will not be shaken by the storms of life.

Rains will come, winds will blow, and that storm may be rolling in. But storms don't create weakness. They reveal it. If you are rooted in approval, criticism

will crush you. If you are rooted in success, failure will break you. If you are rooted in comfort, hardship will undo you. But if you are rooted in Christ, storms may bend you, but they will not destroy you.

You have created a firm foundation to stand on and God won't fail you!

The two final rules worth sharing:

Rule #4

Breathe. If you don't, you'll suffocate.

Seems obvious, something we do without thinking.

But how often do we rush through life without slowing down?

How often do we forget to notice God's presence around us daily, forgetting to just take a moment and say a quick prayer of gratitude - thanking Him for something as easy as the breath we breathe.

Which leads into the final rule from Chris Pratt's speech:

Learn to pray. It's easy, and it's good for your soul.

Martin Luther wrote extensively about prayer, repeatedly teaching that prayer is as essential to the Christian life as breathing is to the body.

Prayer is a nutrient we need for when those difficult seasons hit. The roots continue to grow and become stronger even with the outer most visible part of a tree bare and dormant. It may seem silent, you may feel empty, but you are here, your roots are growing and God Loves You!

In closing, I want to share a bit about our youth group session last week. I shared a lesson based on this sermon—possibly a trial run—but also because I truly feel it is important. And one of the students said this sounds familiar, we have talked about this before. A few times. And she isn't wrong. Could be because she is one of our youth that has been around since the start of our youth group at The Downtown Church.

But mostly because it is and has been my hope and prayer that our youth will know Who they are to God, and that God loves them for who they are and then they can then take and show the Love of God to others - without judgement, without conditions - just acceptance and love for all just as Jesus loved!

You see this sign up here: This sign has been hanging in our youth room for over a year and several of our students have written their name on it. When they walk into our youth room and see this and see their name, it signifies Who they are...not to the world, but to God. It is a reminder that they are His.

You see, our two questions, "Who am I?" and "Who am I to God?" really lead us to the same answer, and the answer is this: I am His.

We are His creation, His masterpiece. We are created intentionally, called with purpose, fully forgiven, covered in grace, and loved unconditionally.

And when we combine that truth with the image of a deeply rooted tree—us being rooted firmly in Christ—we understand that our identity is not defined by the world. Our identity is found in God creating a firm foundation where our roots are grounded in Him. And just like the song we sang—where everything may be shaking around us I've never been more glad that my faith is in Jesus, cause He's never let me down, why would he now—He won't!